

1963

A critical study of the writing of Mary Ellen Chase

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/29099>

"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WRITING OF MARY ELLEN CHASE

by

Evelyn Caldwell Dodge
(B.S. in Ed., State Teachers College at Salem, 1942;
A.M., Boston University, 1948)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
1963

PhD
1923
do

APPROVED by

First Reader W. H. Dargatzis
Professor of English

Second Reader Gerald W. Brooke
Professor of English

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My work on this dissertation would not be complete without an expression of thanks to those who have helped me most. Professor Edward Wagenknecht, my advisor through all the years of my graduate study, has given me good counsel, friendly understanding, and some faith in my own talents. Professor Gerald Warner Brace has been patient and kind in his guidance. Both Professors Donald Winslow and Morton Berman have, as department chairmen, been considerate and helpful. To Professor Elmer W. Salenius, chairman of the English department at the State College at Framingham, I owe special gratitude for his sympathetic encouragement and for permission for a leave of absence during the first semester of 1962-1963. I also wish to thank President D. Justin McCarthy for making official arrangements for that leave.

CONTENTS

Introduction: <u>His Birthday</u>	1
I. Books for Girls	7
II. Early Regionalism	36
III. Early Essays	75
IV. The Seafaring Novels	105
V. Two Autobiographies	161
VI. England	202
VII. Regionalism and Beyond	241
VIII. Two Biographies	275
IX. The Bible	312
X. Later Essays and <u>The White Gate</u>	338
XI. Return to Regionalism	361
XII. A Series	388
Epilogue	422
Bibliography	429

INTRODUCTION

HIS BIRTHDAY

Mary Ellen Chase has been a teacher for many years and has at the same time written her way gaily, thoughtfully, and optimistically through a score and a half of books and any number of stories and articles which vary from the almost trivial to the almost profound. Her first book, His Birthday, was less than fifty slight pages long. It appeared in 1915, and in 1963 is almost impossible to find.¹ Both the Pilgrim Press of Boston, which published it, and the adjacent Congregational Library lack copies. Its name has never been included in any of those lists of previous writings which customarily face the title pages of the author's later books. If His Birthday were read in 1963, it is likely that however quaint in subject matter, stiff in style, two-dimensional in development, and sentimental in meaning it might appear to some, others, the imaginative child among them, would accept it for its vigor, its drama, and its charm. It is indeed regrettable that the little book seems to be lost in both fact and memory,² and not just for its own sake. There is much, although far from all, in this small tale of the events of the sixth birthday of Jesus, never so named in the text of the story, which

¹The copy read for this study was borrowed from the Library of Congress.

²Since this was written Professor Edward Wagenknecht has made plans to reprint His Birthday in anthology, probably to be titled Stories of Christ and Christmas and to be published by the David MacKay Company in 1963.

augurs Miss Chase's accomplishment in the nearly fifty years of authorship to follow. A pattern of selection of materials, her ways of using these materials, and their emergent meanings all have a portion of their incipency in His Birthday.

The story of His Birthday is an imaginative creation in which the author uses much Biblical material but does not hesitate to add ideas and details of her own invention. The first of its three brief chapters, "The Boy Jesus in Nazareth," pictures the village of Nazareth at twilight. The child has gone with his mother to the public fountain for water. From the top of a nearby hill they view the Galilean countryside and then return home. On the way the boy stands up to a group of Roman soldiers and recovers a ball they have taken away from a crippled boy named Joel and have broken in two in their rough play. The boy comforts his friend and takes the ball home to be mended by his father, who is a carpenter.

In the second chapter the mother and boy reach home to find the father just finishing a cedar box which is to be the boy's birthday gift. His mother takes out a bundle of keepsakes, his "treasures," which he plans to stow in his box when it is ready for him. Then she gives him her own gift. Unexpectedly there appears at the door a stranger recognized by the child's parents as Simeon who had blessed the boy as a baby when they had taken him to the temple after his birth. The boy shows he is growing up by washing and anointing the traveler's feet. Simeon will not stay the night, but he eats some food and blesses the boy and his mother and father before he leaves.

In the last chapter, "Stories of Jesus' First Birthday Retold,"

the mother tells the boy the stories she has promised for his birthday. These are about the night of his birth and about his treasures, which he now puts in his new box. These include the gifts which all readers would know had been given to Jesus at his birth. An added treasure is a dried seed-ball which a shepherd boy had given him, to his delight, when he was "little more than a year old" (p. 41). After the stories the mother sings her child to sleep.

The beginnings to be found in this first book are many. Miss Chase was to write often both for and about children. A long series of wise and enduring women begins with her interpretation of the personality of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her love of nature, its beauties and realities, its peculiarities which allow it to individualize a place are all strongly intimated here. Her understanding of the value of things, natural and man-made, to the thoughts and emotions of many people, gives this story one of its strongest motivations. The Bible, with its stories, its invitation to allusion, its New England moral applications, its romantic sounding names, and later its literary study, threads through everything she writes. In His Birthday the Bible supplies both a present and a past as well as a stepping stone to imaginative creation. A love of language for its many meanings is represented by the auditory appeal of the story. Its rhythms, though somewhat formal and accentuated, have the lilt of oral story telling.

Even New England, which is later to serve her so largely, contributes to His Birthday not as subject matter, but as possible audience. For it is not difficult to think that she had the New England child of her own time in mind when she worked into the neat, simple drama of the

story enough explanation of the way of life in Nazareth to make it seem real to an unfamiliar listener. She probably also thought of the New England listener when she treated with delicacy and care the question of the existence of angels. This New England consciousness, which exists almost impalpably in a book such as His Birthday, informs most of Miss Chase's writing in one way or another. Within the books where New England predominates it is the strengths of that identity which are emphasized, but the weaknesses are there as well. These weaknesses have come from a harsh geography, from religious fervors gone wrong, from the inevitable waxing and waning of noble traditions, or from the human follies which exist everywhere but take on individual local colorings. The more positive manifestations of New England which result from Miss Chase's special but not unique consciousness are too numerous in form and essence to be easily categorized. They are of a geographical, an historical, a social, a psychological, and even a spiritual New England which is changeless and ever-changing. They are those tangibles and intangibles which Miss Chase believes should be cherished in their changelessness and relinquished in their changeability.

In a review of Miss Chase's recent book The Lovely Ambition, David Philips says, ". . . readers . . . have come to expect Miss Chase to provide stunning evocations of time and place, particularly of nineteenth-century rural Maine."³ In its own way the evocation of time and place is as stunning (if that is the word for it) in her first book as in this recent one, although the reader's expectation of it has developed

³New York Times Book Review, June 19, 1960, p. 4.

with the years. Place and time would be incomplete without the people they surround, without the people whose awareness makes time and place real and meaningful. If there is a single significance which draws together all of Miss Chase's imaginative children, and sturdy women, and sensitive men, it is that recurring emphasis on the great variety of pasts, often nesting one within another, which tells men, women, and children what human life can mean. Usually inseparable from place and time, these suggestions of the past spell for the reader and for the most aware of Miss Chase's characters a richness of existence and some kind of a goal ahead which is in itself partly composed of the past.

In His Birthday, the deepest past which enriches the existence of the six-year-old Jesus is the Old Testament past which has been brought to him through his mother's reiteration and linking to present life. Mary's birthday gift to him is "a little coat of blue and red wool, the colors curiously intermingled" (p. 23). It reminds the child of Joseph's bright coat and the mother likens it to the one Hannah made for Samuel. When the mother sings the child to sleep, his choice of a song is "the shepherd song of our fathers," or the 23rd Psalm. A closer and more important past to the child is the unremembered night of his birth, about which he shows a normal childlike longing: "'I wish I could remember it all,' he said wistfully. 'Thou has told me so often it seems as though I do remember'" (p. 41). Like children of all time he has insisted on a familiar beginning to the story of that night, which his mother as a birthday indulgence is about to retell for him: "'Thou forgettest the beginning, mother, 'Long years ago, on the very day thou wast born--'" Both this story and its concrete remembrances in the form of

the treasures which the child stores in the new cedar box, his father's birthday gift, show the boy's own past accompanying his growth in years and understanding. This same past is seen simultaneously from the mother's point of view, and indirectly from Joseph's as well. To them it is a past of the memory. An especially poignant evocation of it in the experience of the mother is the visit of the traveller who repeats his blessing of six years before and whom Mary knows as Simeon from the temple in Jerusalem. Here the author makes use of the familiar words from the second chapter of Luke. These, of course, she was counting on to stir the many individual memories of the story's listeners. In fact, throughout the story, she depends on a fine blend of the familiar elements and her own imaginative additions to the familiar to carry the whole experience to a small artistic achievement. This same blending marks the future results of the experiences of the story. From familiarity with the Bible story the reader knows what these will be, but from the experiences of the story he can see their promise not in the desires of the boy or his parents, but in the boy's actions, in his feeling ahead to the time of the cure of his lame friend Joel, of whom he is so protective, or in his courteous act in washing the feet of the traveller, which is prophetic not only of a single Biblical incident but of a whole attitude towards the needs of others.

His Birthday shows that from the beginning Miss Chase carries on traditions of both style and subject matter rather than inventing new ways. She realizes that the past is eternally new to new people. In her use of history for background she usually cherishes most such high points as Hebrew conscience, Greek democracy, American sailing years.

CHAPTER I

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

Mary Ellen Chase's books specifically for children have come early and late. Her recent contributions to the current "North Star" series, Sailing the Seven Seas (1958), Donald McKay (1959), and The Fishing Fleets of New England (1960), in contrast to The Girl from the Big Horn Country (1916) and its sequel Virginia of Elk Creek Valley (1917), show not only a maturity of the author's writing capabilities but also a rather great change in the fashion of juvenile literature. Significant to this change is the fact that the later group are non-fiction and the early pair fiction. The Girl from the Big Horn Country and particularly Virginia of Elk Creek Valley compare well with the many fictional series of books for children, especially for girls, which fed the imaginations and emotions of twentieth-century young people before the days of television, comic books, radio, or easy access to the movies.

Miss Chase's reference in A Goodly Fellowship to the sale of what was probably the first of the two indicates that she was very glad to earn the money. But these juveniles were more than potboilers, for in them the author was practicing her writing skills. She describes this early experience in A Goodly Fellowship:

I began to write that winter, sometimes imitating styles and diction which I liked, sometimes striking out for myself in simpler fields. I had dreams of writing a novel based on one of a dozen new ideas which I gained from my reading; but the consciousness of my own immaturity held me back . . . I began, therefore, to write a story for girls of fourteen or thereabouts and continued with it for two hours daily throughout the winter. When in April

it was accepted by a Boston firm and I received a check for one hundred and fifty dollars, I sincerely believed that the world of literary achievement and success lay at my feet.

Although she is laughing at herself in this last statement, her presentiment has been answered in later years at least by a large measure of popular success.

The story of The Girl from the Big Horn Country deals with the events of Virginia Hunter's year at a New England boarding school, and Virginia of Elk Creek Valley tells of the visit of her New England friends to her home on a Wyoming ranch in the following summer.

These two books, to take a weakness of the series first, are the only places in all her writing where she overtly denies her New England heritage. Although in most of her later novels she reveals her New England shortcomings, she does so in all honesty. In these girls' books she portrays a rather artificial stuffiness which belongs more to the stereotyped conception of those outside of New England than to one born and bred within it. It is true that at the time of writing she was herself making the acquaintance of the Western territory which was Virginia Hunter's home and the setting of the second of the two books. It is ironic that this second book is more convincing and more appealing in its Western setting and even in its events than the first, which is set largely in Miss Chase's native New England.

Her betrayal of New England comes not in any inaccuracies of setting and only slightly in any faults of characterization, although the characters are often superficial. The stiff coldness in the manners of

¹Mary Ellen Chase, A Goodly Fellowship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 179.

Virginia's New England grandmother are a far cry from the real inner coldness in the heart of Sarah Craig in Uplands. In Standish Carver's inadequacies of character there is more stereotype than anything else. Miss Chase's primary disloyalty comes in what she allows to be said or implied about New England in both books. There is a vast difference in the hardness of the New Englanders Miss Chase portrays in her later books and the conception voiced by Virginia Hunter's father:

"Virginia," he said at last, "your mother's people are not like us away out here. They are of New England stock and know nothing of our life here, and it naturally seems rough to them."²

Mrs. Webster's insistence on the impropriety of a morning call seems a rather overdrawn touch of formality for a small Vermont town.³ Certainly the emphasis of the following bit of conversation from Virginia of Elk Creek Valley is limited in its representativeness of New England attitudes and has but small application to the truer New Englanders Miss Chase later presents in both fact and fiction. In the story Donald Keith of Wyoming has observed:

"You New England folk are strong on crests and mottoes and that sort of thing, aren't you?"

"No more than we should be," announced Priscilla. "We are the oldest families for the most part, and I think we ought to remember all those things about our ancestors. It's very stimulating. The West is so excited over progress and developing the country and all," she finished a little disdainfully, "that it doesn't care about family traditions or--or anything like that."⁴

²Mary Ellen Chase, The Girl from the Big Horn Country (Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1916), p. 20.

³Ibid., p. 63.

⁴Mary Ellen Chase, Virginia of Elk Creek Valley (Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1917), pp. 252-253.

It is not really in allowing Priscilla to say this that Miss Chase's betrayal comes, but in the implication that there is something wrong in this attitude toward the traditions of New England. There is less betrayal when another New England trait bends back to clarify Priscilla's thinking on the matter: "Donald was right, too, about ancestry and coats-of-arms and mottoes being only helps. Her New England conscience told her. . . ." ⁵ Here the author intends to show only New England strength in this dependence on New England conscience.

At the end of Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, Carver Standish (Miss Chase takes no chances in her choice of New England names) is allowed to demonstrate what stern stuff New Englanders are really made of when he voluntarily gives up a New England house party to do farm work on the Wyoming ranch until it is time for school to open. Again a New England snobbishness is suggested in the difficulty Carver's mother has in explaining his preference. This attitude is rather contrary to the traditional New England reverence for the dignity of work, which Carver's grandfather at least is able to appreciate.

It would be easy to suppose that Miss Chase shudders a bit when she recalls this early pair of juveniles--if she ever thinks of them at all--for they contain many of those faults, obviously inherited from some of her early reading, which encumbered the writing of the American sentimental novelists of the nineteenth century. It is only fair to point out that at the time she wrote these two books, 1915-1917, Miss Chase had only a limited background in the study of literature, having chosen,

⁵Ibid., p. 255.

according to her own account, to specialize in Greek and history as an undergraduate⁶ and not yet having begun her graduate work in English literature. It is true that she seems to have read rather widely from the best as well as from the mediocre in English and American literature, but it is doubtful that she would at this time have achieved enough sense of perspective to show her those literary influences on her own writing which time was sure to reveal to her. Thus there is to be found in these two early books a large scattering of those elements which marked quite clearly the multitudinous productions of the nineteenth century sentimentalists. Tears, temperance, a "tender landscape,"⁷ nobility, touching death, optimism, benevolence, even some of the stock characters, and that useful literary device of the sentimental--the letter--are all here and with enough force to remind one of the observation with which Herbert Ross Brown closes his study of the sentimental novel. This observation stresses a point which Miss Chase, most fortunately, gave more heed to very soon after these first juveniles:

The failure of the sentimental compromise should teach our critics that theirs is the task of guiding the creative spirit to face squarely the realities of American life without losing its high ideals. Although an unwitting one, this is the most important lesson these faded favorites of an earlier generation have for us today.⁸

Although, in general, Miss Chase's common sense keeps her from the

⁶Mary Ellen Chase, A Goodly Heritage (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 279.

⁷Herbert Ross Brown, The Sentimental Novel in America, 1780-1860 (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), p. 141.

⁸Ibid., p. 370.

worst of sentimental extremes, and although a certain type of high ideals is something she has always clung to, there is in these two books a tendency to follow some of the ways through which the sentimental has traditionally escaped reality. A few specific portions of these stories may illustrate this more precisely than explanation can.

One of these ways of sentimentalism comes through a particular attitude toward nature. The concept of nature was, of course, of central importance in nineteenth century literature. The poets were greatly concerned with nature and its relation to man. And the concept of nature had its special relationship with the concept of God. The concept of nature attributed to the Romantic poets by Joseph Warren Beach, one of their outstanding critics, is perhaps best stated by him in these words:

Most often this use of the word nature grew out of the poets' desire to associate the "beauteous forms" of the out-of-doors world with the laws and order of the universe, reenforcing the esthetic pleasure derivable from these beauteous forms with the philosophical notion of order and unity, and vice versa. In the more enthusiastic of these poets, it was assumed that the order of the universe is purposive, harmonious and, taken in the large, benevolent towards man and the other sensitive creatures.⁹

This benevolence towards man discernible in the romantic descends in the sentimental to what Brown calls "the tender landscape." When Brown says, "Nowhere outside the covers of their books did sentimentalists find that nature behaved so appropriately,"¹⁰ he describes just exactly what Miss Chase allows to happen, at least in the minds of her

⁹Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1956), p. 4.

¹⁰Brown, p. 141.

characters, in a number of situations in these two stories. Perhaps it should be stressed that this type of occurrence always represents the attitude of a character rather than that of the author directly, and that often the reference may be interpreted as what Beach in another context referred to as a "conscious and fanciful indulgence in the pathetic fallacy" on the author's part.¹¹

One occasion of nature behaving "appropriately" also involves sentimental treatment of a death with euphemistic language and excess of emotion. The letter written by Virginia's father telling her of this death of one of the ranch hands illustrates the sentimental strain of the book so well that it seems best to quote it in full. It also seems noteworthy that this sentiment comes in letter form--that convenient device so much used by earlier writers of sentimental fiction. The explanation that Pedro was Virginia's own special horse which she had left behind her on the ranch when she went East to school is necessary to the understanding of Mr. Hunter's letter:

"I have something to tell you, my dear little daughter, which I know will grieve you deeply," her father had written. It was this that had at first made her heart stand still. "Still, I feel that I must tell you, for sooner or later you must know. Dear old Jim left us last night to begin life over again Somewhere Else. He had been gradually failing for weeks, but he would not give up his work. Yesterday morning Pedro was taken ill, and Jim refused to leave him, saying over and over again that you had always trusted Pedro to him. He worked over him all day, undoubtedly saving Pedro's life, and refusing to leave him, even though the other men insisted upon his giving place to them. At night the other men left him to eat supper, for he still would not leave his post; and when they had finished and went back to the stable, Pedro was quite himself again, but they found Jim--asleep.

¹¹ Beach, p. 551.

"I think you will feel as I do, dear, that it was like Jim to go that way--faithful to the end. We laid him to rest this morning in the side of Spruce Ridge, near the great old tree to which you and he used to climb so often, especially when you were a little girl. You will remember how he loved the sweep of the country from there. The morning was beautiful and clear--the very kind of day he loved best; and as we carried him up the hill, and laid him to rest, a meadow-lark sat on the stump of a quaking asp and sang over and over again. That was the only prayer there was--that and our thoughts--but I am sure Jim would have chosen that for his farewell song."¹²

Jim's nobility of character is the essential sentimental feature of the episode.

The scene which follows some time after Virginia has read her letter emphasizes nature's part in the scene her father described, and also displays the "tender landscape" attitude:

... and sitting there, with Miss Wallace's arms around her, Virginia told of her sorrow, and of dear old Jim, of whom Miss Wallace had already heard. Then she read her father's letter, and the tears which stood in Miss Wallace's eyes quite overflowed when she came to the part about the meadow-lark.

"And he loved the meadow-lark so!" sobbed Virginia. "It seems as though that one must have known!"

"Perhaps it did," Miss Wallace said with dear comfort. "I like to think that birds know many things that we cannot--many of the sweetest things like that."¹³

Miss Chase depicts nature many times in her writing, often describing it with great beauty and authentic feeling, but this kind of sentimentality seldom appears in her work after these early books.

Nature contributes to a more cheerful occasion in the second book but with the same benevolence to man. Here it is possible that the

¹²Chase, The Girl, pp. 168-169.

¹³Ibid., p. 171.

"indulgence in pathetic fallacy" is more conscious and fanciful:

In fifteen minutes everything was in readiness, even to five early nasturtiums in a tumbler on the dining table. They had made a special effort, to open that morning, and the homesteader was grateful.¹⁴

A nature benevolent and ennobling to man is at least seriously hinted in the attitude of Virginia and her New England friend Priscilla towards the mountains of the West. On her last night at home before leaving for school in the East, Virginia reflects on them:

At night the mountains seemed nearer still and more friendly--more protecting, less strange and secretive. She looked at them wondering. Did they really know all things: Were they millions of years old, as she had read? Did they care at all for people who looked at them, and wondered and wanted to be like them?

"Tonight I half believe you do care," she whispered.¹⁵

When Virginia returns from the East at the end of the year, she comments, "They look really friendly this morning with the sun on them . . . and they ought to when I love them so, and am coming back to them."¹⁶

The intertwining of nature and God in the Romantic conception is reflected in Priscilla Winthrop's reaction to the mountains:

Priscilla stood by the entrance, her eyes raised to the distant mountains--great shadows beneath a star-strewn sky. She was learning the old, old secrets of those mountains at night. . . . "I don't believe that any one could look at the mountains and the stars and ever be doubtful about God and--things like that, do you?"¹⁷

¹⁴Chase, Virginia, p. 54.

¹⁵Chase, The Girl, p. 36.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 317.

¹⁷Chase, Virginia, pp. 31-32.

It may be incorrect to suggest that this attitude is completely sentimental, but the romantic and the sentimental are sometimes not far apart, and this particular romantic sentiment is, like the more obviously sentimental traits of the book, an influence from the nineteenth century. There is often a sentimental aura to what has survived from an earlier day. All this is not to suggest that Miss Chase was fully aware of these things when she wrote her series of two books for girls, but her elimination of sentimental weaknesses from her writing as the years went by, without the destruction of some of the values which the truly sentimental of the nineteenth century aimed at and didn't really achieve, is an interesting strand in her development and one which can rather often be associated with her presentation of nature. Although a writer such as Joseph Warren Beach can say, "In twentieth-century poetry the term and the concept of nature have virtually ceased to appear,"¹⁸ we have only to think of such twentieth century poets of New England as Robert Frost and Edna St. Vincent Millay, to realize that nature described for its own sake, for its aesthetic values, for setting, and even for its lessons has not quite disappeared.

Among other attitudes of The Girl from the Big Horn Country and Virginia of Elk Creek Valley which can be traced to the sentimental novel is what Brown refers to as "The Humanitarian Impulse." The crispness of one of his comments on the topic makes it worth quoting:

. . . [the sentimentalists who] had always exalted pity as one of the major virtues . . . widened their embrace to include the whole human species. With the perfectibility of man as a favorite article of their creed, they found generosity

¹⁸Beach, p. 8.

in pirates, chivalry in rustics, humanity in Negroes, and nobility in savages, West Indians and Algerines. They also urged kindness to animals and to servants, and occasionally had a good word to say for such maligned creatures as sailors, soldiers, lawyers, and stepmothers.¹⁹

It is not difficult to find traces of a strong belief in the perfectibility of man in these two girls' books in spite of the hopelessness of such girls as Imogene Meredith, who was apparently placed by the author in the girls' boarding school for the sole purpose of black and white contrast, and Katrina Van Rensselaer, who seemed intended to supply a bit of humor along with her incompatibility with the group of girls at the school, who, incidentally, don't quite escape, as a whole, a certain mark of snobbishness, given them quite unconsciously, it seems sure, by the author.

Of those in the stories on whom the perfectibility of man scored its mark, the two young people Carver Standish and Vivian Winters overcome the weaknesses of pride and fear with true story-book nobility. More significant in the sentimentality of their characteristics and situations are a number of minor characters. Representative of these, there are, in The Girl From the Big Horn Country, Mrs. Murphy and her little girl whom Virginia finds along the road:

. . . a worn-looking woman with a child. Something in the woman's expression made Virginia forget the errand upon which she was bent. She looked more than discouraged--almost desperate. The little girl by her side sat upon a shabby satchel and regarded her mother with sad, questioning eyes. There was something about them so lonely and pathetic that Virginia's eyes filled with quick tears. She crossed the road and went up to them.²⁰

¹⁹Brown, p. 142.

²⁰Chase, The Girl, p. 232.

When Virginia takes the two back to school for supper, their reception by the other girls is cool, almost snobbish. Even Mrs. Murphy is as aware of class distinctions as are the girls themselves when she says, "But, miss, you don't mean come to supper with you? You see, we ain't fit."²¹ The sentimentalists, for all their dedication to the uplift of the lowly, were keenly aware of class status. The name Murphy in the New England context of this story also indicates an aspect of status, as is only too obvious. The incident of Mrs. Murphy, who had been sick and "because we were three months back on the rent . . . turned out this morning," is allowed to end happily in her employment at the school. As an indication of Miss Chase's development as a writer of fiction, the obsequiousness of Mrs. Murphy might be compared to the more genuine gratitude of Mary Christmas in the next book of fiction Miss Chase is to write after these two.

A combination of humanitarian interest and a definite attitude toward temperance gives a sentimental cast to the minor character of William, a ranch hand. Virginia, with all the benevolence of the best of sentimental heroines, does her best for him:

. . . a man sat apart from the others--a man with a kind, almost sad face, upon the features of which the town saloon had left its mark. This was William, one of the best cattle hands in the country when he could keep away from town. To everyone but Virginia he was "Bill," but Virginia said he needed to be called William. . . .

Just how this helped is never made clear but Virginia is convinced of its truth. William's finer side loves flowers and this love Virginia encourages by commissioning him to take care of the flower bed under

²¹Ibid., p. 233.

her window while she is in the East:

"And, if you have any time I wish you'd plant some perennial things in the bed under my window, so they'll bloom early in June. You choose whatever you like. It'll be more fun not to know, and then see them all in blossom when I get home."²²

And so some ten months later she finds on her return home:

. . . and by Virginia's flower-bed, in which spikes of blue larkspur, reaching to her window, were brave with bloom, stood William, with the sadness and the failures quite gone from his face.²³

Such a response seems to illustrate, almost as if made to order, Brown's generalization on this aspect of the sentimental:

Humanitarians took special delight in recognizing a kindred spark of benevolence in the behavior of those classes of people popularly regarded as calloused to the finer shades of feeling.²⁴

Virginia Hunter is shown throughout both books as motivated always by the noblest impulses. She is consistently presented as humanitarian in her acts and attitudes as the preceding examples testify. Not only is she pictured as benevolent towards all those of her fellow humans who are responsive to her benevolence, but she is sometimes noble, almost as if for nobility's sake alone. Her friend Priscilla describes her reaction to the necessary shooting of a bear in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley:

"Virginia was the only one who stayed. She stood by Dick as he aimed and shot. Afterward she told me she would have felt mean to desert a hero whose spirit was just about to

²²Ibid., p. 31.

²³Ibid., p. 319.

²⁴Brown, p. 151.

be taken away from him. She wanted to pay her last respects. But I know it wasn't easy. . . ." (p. 45)

This act of Virginia's only puts into practice what she consciously states as part of her philosophy later on:

"Of course we all want those things [sympathy and love] -- more than anything else in the world. But I think it means just as Miss Wallace said, that instead of demanding them we're to live so nobly that they will come to us--unsought, you know. . . ." (p. 104)

Such an attitude toward nobility implies an optimism also. More even than benevolence and nobility, optimism is a trait which carried the sentimentalists into those extremes of idealism which belie reality. Optimism has, of course, always been a main current in American thinking and writing, and Mary Ellen Chase at the best of her thinking and writing is a worthy part of that current. It is only when optimism is blind or unjustified or even harmful in its effects that it becomes the kind of weakness it sometimes was in the hands of the sentimentalists, whom Brown describes as "escapists, artfully evading the experiences of their own day . . . shrouding the actualities of American life in flattering mists of sentimental optimism."²⁵ Of such an optimism there is occasional evidence in Virginia Hunter's attitude toward life. She says in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, ". . . and I've discovered that when a thing just has to be done, there's always someone to do it" (p. 9). Most things in both books have a way of turning out for the best.

Even in the details of these two books, the mark of the sentimental is present. The tears and "dears" are among their excesses. Since they are juveniles, one might expect sex to have little place in them, but

²⁵Brown, p. 360.

there is a romance in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley between Virginia's Aunt and Malcolm Keith. The rather coy treatment of this is typical of the sentimental method.

This discussion of the sentimental characteristics of these early books has not been intended just to show the stories in their worst light, but to indicate the influence of nineteenth century writing on Miss Chase and also to explain an initial position from which she proceeded to improve by eliminating certain unrealities and by strengthening those qualities which when not in excess and not perverted give a basis for some important realities. One of Brown's concluding statements about sentimental novels has a particular pertinence to what Miss Chase inherited from them:

Worse than uncritical, moreover, would be the easy assumption that these sentimental novels never rang true, that they sprang from impulses which were wholly false, and that they failed to reflect the aspirations quietly cherished in thousands of hearts. The enlarged heart of sentimentality is a disease to which those who readily respond to the appeal of human nature are peculiarly susceptible. It is the excess of a virtue, the perversion of an ideal. No student of our national letters can escape the conviction that ours is an idealistic literature, fired with a passion for justice, liberty, and brotherhood.²⁶

It is only in these two girls' books that the sentimental as it has been discussed here has a strong over-all application to Miss Chase's writing.

There is, with this, the counterside of the coin. The description of a landscape, which at times lends its feelings to the affairs of humans, at other times becomes merely realistic setting, although it

²⁶Ibid., pp. 369-370.

often carries with it an excitement which is aesthetic response to a richness of color and detail. Such description, while it may infrequently approach the danger of becoming a "purple patch," always has a tone of authenticity and is obviously written with the same sensitivity and care which are later to earn for Miss Chase the appreciation of many readers and reviewers. This aspect of her writing has persisted and developed into the quality which in her most recent novel has caused one reviewer to call The Lovely Ambition "this exquisitely lovely novel"²⁷ and another to observe that "the author does seem to regard the writing of fiction as an art."²⁸ Miss Chase's treatment of the Western landscape has all the exuberant joy of new acquaintance with a larger place than her native scene. The author's absorption here with "blue" passages is an enthusiasm which she will attribute to Colin Holliday in Uplands.

Elk Creek Valley was a blue and golden place that midsummer morning in the Big Horn Country. It seemed like a joyous secret tucked away among the mountains, whose hazy, far-away summits were as blue as the sky above them. The lower ranges, too, were blue from purple haze and gray-green sagebrush, while the bare, brown foothills tumbling about their feet were golden in the sunlight. Blue lupines and great spikes of mountain larkspur made of the Valley itself a garden which sloped gently to the creek and lost itself in a maze of quaking-asps and cottonwoods. As for the creek waters, they ceased their tumultuous haste upon nearing the garden, and were content to move slowly so that they might catch and hold the sunlight in their amber depths. Beyond the creek, and through a gap in the foothills, the prairie stretched for miles--blue and green with oats and wheat and alfalfa.

²⁷Alice Dixon Bond, Review of The Lovely Ambition, Boston Herald, June 19, 1960, Section IV, p. 3.

²⁸David E. Philips, Review of The Lovely Ambition, New York Times Book Review, June 19, 1960, p. 4.

Now and then a mountain bluebird was lost to sight among the larkspur, and always a cloud of tiny blue butterflies circled above the creek.²⁹

This description is made of the stuff which will later supply much of her imagery. As she develops her writing skills, her imagery, or "bright images," after her own phrase, will become a more functional part of the movement of the work of fiction, or even of non-fiction, to which it belongs, than it does in the rather separate or static descriptive passage here. Still this is typical of the useful beginning she makes in The Girl from the Big Horn Country and Virginia of Elk Creek Valley. The suggestion of pathetic fallacy in the passage above is slight and is more a manner of speaking than anything to be taken more seriously.

Although these two books have to be considered apprentice work in her writing career, many of the materials she is to make life-long use of have begun to appear. Her development of youthful characters here is superficial in comparison with what she is able to accomplish in her next children's book, The Silver Shell. Her concern for the child-like adult, which also goes further in The Silver Shell, falls in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, on Mr. Levinsky, or Mr. Levy, who believes himself a Roman. Here Miss Chase combines her own interest in history with an interest in this special type of character: "He believes he's Caesar, and so he is. You'll be surprised at the way he speaks and the fine manners he has. It's believing he's Emperor that's done those things, I'm sure." (p. 189) The author's attitude toward Mr. Levy is reflected in Virginia's answer to Priscilla's question about him: "Poor man! I can't see how he can reconcile things in his own mind." "He doesn't,"

²⁹Chase, The Girl, pp. 1-2.

explained Virginia. 'That's the lovely part of it! He's the happiest Emperor I've ever known in all my life!'" (p. 197) In two late novels, The Plum Tree and The Lovely Ambition, there are similar characters, some of whom are happy, but others who are not.

Not only history, but literature, mythology, and the Bible are all alluded to in these stories. These are Miss Chase's personal interests, and she perhaps hoped to inspire like interests in her juvenile readers. It is a tendency far from new for a young or beginning writer to insert large doses of his own enthusiasms into his fiction. Although not always inappropriate here, this type of material becomes more significantly integrated with the main purpose in some of her later books.

Miss Chase is also trying her skill with the use of language. Sometimes what she attempts comes off happily; other times the result is somewhat inept. Her obvious tendency toward high-flown language is to diminish slowly through the years ahead so that the reader is hardly conscious of it in her mature style. She is destined, however, to cling to her faith in the special values of written language. She recognizes its richness in contrast to the poverty of the spoken word as most people use it. Two opposing tendencies in her handling of language sometimes conflict and sometimes harmonize. Her delight in words is explicitly expressed many times in her writing, never more beautifully than in the essay "Words" in The White Gate. Sometimes, particularly in her early style, the tendency to blend indiscriminately the types and levels of language available to her from various sources yields some incongruities. When she uses a cliché, literary or colloquial, she may at this early stage do it unknowingly, but here and even later she is

probably not afraid to use one knowingly when it serves best to say just what she wants it to say, or when her momentum forward is stronger than the need to be original, or even on occasion when it is just her pleasure to do so.

Miss Chase, as she later tells us, was brought up in a home where books were important not just for themselves, but as part of the life of the family, for they entered the games, the conversation, and the thinking of the entire family. To mix the colloquial and the literary in such a situation would be natural. The resulting blend was probably both conscious and unconscious, discriminating and indiscriminating, serious and playful. When this blend appears in her writing it often has a humorous effect. It is a nice problem, not always to be solved, to decide whether the effect is consciously or unconsciously achieved. Certainly later it would have to be assumed that one of her profession would have to recognize it and even deliberately use it. But it might be questioned as to how much humor she intended in the beginning when she wrote, for instance, "where the pigs had their abiding place," or when she referred to the Hunters' housekeeper, Hannah, as "the faithful retainer." It is perhaps ruthless to point out such clichés as "the first square meal," "to cap the climax," or "add the finishing touches," and such literary flourishes as "However, the flower of discretion does not bloom in a boarding school." The important thing is that she was learning to write a book to its end. And what early seems high-flown and over-elegant language matures into a style with dignity of thought and cadence.

The next book which Mary Ellen Chase wrote for young people came more than ten years later. The Silver Shell, 1930, does not demonstrate the elimination of all Miss Chase's writing faults, but it does at least embody a striving for something more real and more significant in the main direction of the book. As a matter of fact there are some remarkably fine things in The Silver Shell, which commend it to adult attention. The importance of the past to the present, which even at the expense of repetition, must be frequently pointed out in any prolonged study of Miss Chase's writing as a whole, here becomes more vital and less superficially decorative than it was in the books just discussed. In The Silver Shell the development of the character of the pre-adolescent Judith is handled with insight and validity. Tied closely to her growing awareness is a conception of beauty which centers around a little silver shell she found at the beginning of the story. This understanding of beauty may also be considered the author's own. Foolish Tom, who is memorable among Miss Chase's minor characters, is more fully developed than his predecessor, Mr. Levy of Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, and he fulfills a more functional role in the story.

One of Miss Chase's best achievements in this story is her attempt to explain through its action the peculiar attitude toward life which belongs to an island community, children and adults together. With somewhat less depth of perception she also presents in The Silver Shell the special way of life of a lighthouse family. Her love of nature, which in the two earlier girls' books centered on the Western scenery of Wyoming, in The Silver Shell concentrates on what is to be found on a

Maine island. There is less emphasis on a knowing nature, more on people's knowledge of it. The emotion is more moderately expressed with more restraint, in spite of a slight throat-tightening trend.

Everything begins on the spring day when Judith finds the shell wedged in a great log of driftwood. From beginning to end the shell is surrounded for the reader, as it is for Judith, with a sense of mystery and imagination. It is always, literally or symbolically, beauty. As Judith first sees it:

. . . the shell . . . bore not the slightest resemblance to the snail-shells, the sea-urchins, and the mussels of Great Horned Island. Nor was any shell even remotely like it in Jamsie's collection, nor in Dan's various findings from sailing here and there along the coast. Its delicate frailness, so incredibly unhurt; its many-hued lustre, which, in the sunlight, sent every conceivable color to riot on the gray surface of the log and, in the shadow, gathered them all home to cover them with a coverlet of silver; the pale rose and paler violet windings of its spiralled chambers only just faintly visible from the position in which it lay; the dainty perfection of its ribbed and pointed tip--all these bore unmistakable evidence that it had lain on smoother sands, that it had gathered its iridescence and its silver from more brilliant skies.

Judith's exploring forefinger, which was trembling from excitement, touched the smooth, cool surface of its outer chamber, and was instantly reflected like a moving gray shadow within unfathomable shimmering depths of color. How could such a tiny shell, in length hardly more than two inches from its tip to the farthest curve of its largest spiral, suggest such measureless depths? How long and willing must have been the patience which had wrought those tiniest curves without a mishap, which had designed and placed those minutest particles of crystal and silver?³⁰

When Foolish Tom extracts the shell for Judith, it appears much the same to him.

³⁰Mary Ellen Chase, The Silver Shell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 39-40.

But Foolish Tom was carefulness itself as he turned the silver shell in his fingers. Not the minutest perfection escaped his eyes--the tiny crystals so delicately embossed upon its ribbed sides, the symmetry of its spirals, growing smaller and smaller but still keeping identical lines as they swept toward its frail tip, the ever-changing, opalescent hues of its lining seemingly at once so diaphanous and yet so immeasurably deep. (p. 54)

When Judith with some embarrassment comments that it is beautiful, Tom replies that it is a mystery. To her question of what a mystery is, he answers, "A mystery's what folks know better if they don't try to understand it." (p. 55) At this same time Tom foretells the future trend of events.

"I sense a prophecy, Judy," said Foolish Tom, "in this here shell. . . . There's startlin' and surprisin' things about to happen to us all in the future that's near at hand. Happiness and a wonderful sadness that ain't sad at all!" (p. 56)

Much happiness does come to Judith, not the least of it being her new awareness of beauty, and her own particular conception of it. This is of special value to her because she evolves her own theory out of her own experience. She abstracts a general idea from the particular things which happen and then applies her idea to new happenings:

Might it not be--she grasped at this idea with all her might for it was half slipping away from her!--might it not be that one really beautiful thing created another? Or helped one to discover another? And then more and more? Might it not be that all beautiful things were really the same?

. . . she thought of all the most lovely things she knew, seeing each in an added loveliness through her newly awakened consciousness. Wild roses against gray, island rocks; the wide, still wings of the white heron in the twilight sky; the shadow of a fishing boat at dusk in the clear water; the frail beauty of the wild cherry trees in May on the way to Foolish Tom's cabin; the gulls at sunset on the brown and green flats; harebells in an August wind; the blackness of the pines against the snow; her blue necklace; her mother's face. Why had she not brought them all together before? (p. 83)

It is evident that Judith is a child who has always been sensitive to beauty or she would not have had these images stored within her recollection to bring forth in response to the shell. Her feelings towards these perceptions of beauty will find an echo a quarter of a century later in The White Gate, where Miss Chase recalls some of the images, most strikingly from nature, which impressed her own imagination when she was Judith's age. In The White Gate she handles them more skillfully, not piling them up so stifflingly as here. But the interesting thing to see now is that Miss Chase has begun to make the imagery part of the movement of her story instead of just descriptive setting alone as in the early books for girls. Judith not only begins to realize what has already been beautiful to her, but sees even more with her new eyesight.

The nasturtium leaves in the bed by the house were new and tiny, and upon one of them, lying at the very intersection of its frail white veins, was a single, perfect raindrop. The sun now full upon it created within its crystal every hue and color of the spiral chambers of her shell; and . . . it lay there upon the leaf, itself, too, so perfect in its daintiness and symmetry; . . . there came floating again to her that winged, teasing thought--that one beautiful thing helped in the discovery of another, that in some strange way, which no one, unless it were Foolish Tom, could understand, each beautiful thing partook of the nature of all others. A month ago she would not have paused at a single leaf, or at any number of leaves although they had been peopled with raindrops. But the lovely, haunting colors of her shell had worked their magic in her mind and imagination. (p. 97)

Throughout the rest of the book the shell continues to work its magic for Judith. When at the end she tries to explain it to her friend and teacher, Miss Field assures her that she has been quite right in her feeling.

"It's what a great and wise man taught long ago. You'll study about him someday. One beautiful thing does make a person see another--that's just what he said--and on and

on through all manner of beautiful things, and thoughts, too, as well, until by and by, if one keeps on, one understands what Beauty really and truly is." (pp. 198-199)

Miss Field also explains to Judith that the ancient Greeks had used shells "as symbols or signs of good and beautiful things."

It is likely that Miss Chase, if not Miss Field, had the philosopher Plato in mind, for the year after The Silver Shell appeared, House Beautiful published an article of hers entitled "Concerning Old Things and New," in which she states her views on the matter somewhat more precisely:

. . . who but Plato can give the conclusion to the whole matter? For in the Symposium is he not dealing with this very subject when he speaks of the nature of beauty and of the manner in which one approaches its contemplation?

He who would proceed aright in this matter should begin while young to contemplate beautiful things; and first . . . to love one such thing only--out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will perceive that the beauty of one thing is akin to the beauty of another. And then . . . how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in all things is one and the same thing?³¹

In her article Miss Chase is concerned with both the old and the new. There is also in The Silver Shell an element of the old which is as important to the girl Judith as her new possession of the shell. In its way the old becomes something new to Judith, illustrating Miss Chase's theory, evolved in her article, with the aid of Coleridge's views on the imagination, that "the old becomes perennially new by its power of evoking fresh emotions."³² This is what happens in the case of the old chest which stood against the wall of the Crane kitchen.

³¹Mary Ellen Chase, "Concerning Old Things and New," House Beautiful, LXIX (January, 1931), p. 52.

³²Ibid.

On the same May day that Judith found her shell, she discovered that her mother was beautiful. That was also the day that her mother chose to reveal to Judith the contents of a box she kept in her own special drawer, the lowest, of the chest. These with the chest itself were the only heritage of Judith and her brother Dan from those days in the history of her mother's family when life had been something more than it was at the present. The letters reveal the kind of past which Miss Chase uses time and time again in both fact and fiction. It is the past of Maine's great sailing days when women often sailed with their captain husbands to visit cultures far more exciting than their own. One letter is from Cadiz, that Spanish city which was so important, particularly as a memory, in the life of Eliza Ann Chase, the author's grandmother, and also in the imagery of a later novel, Mary Peters. Not only this past of adventures across the seas, but a more glorious local past is described by Judith's mother on this unusual evening when her tongue is strangely unloosed, perhaps both by the spring day and by her instinctive knowledge that the time is right to share these things with her daughter. What she says of the islands has, of course, been true of other New England communities both on the coast and inland. They have seen better days:

"What times there was, to be sure, according to Mother. The mainland didn't seem so far off in those days, spite of sailing and there was parties back and forth. And once Cap'n John Norton, your great-great uncle, Judith, fetched the Governor of Maine over to Norton's island, and there was great goings-on, with people dressed up in foreign clothes they'd brought from all the places they'd sailed to. And now Norton's Island's nothing but a sheep pasture, Nash and Great Teal like us, concerned with naught but fish." (p. 70)

This is not a new story; many before and even after Miss Chase have told it. She herself is to tell it again in The Edge of Darkness. The important thing is not what was in those better days, but what its having been so means to the people of the present. Perry Westbrook generalizes what Miss Chase has presented single instances of when he writes:

. . . the most important aspect of any disaster [is] the manner in which the people involved met their misfortunes and continued to live through them. Trite as it sounds, the final value is always the human value; and this is always the most difficult to estimate, because it can be judged only from actual contact with the people themselves.³³

Miss Chase's upbringing and later experiences on the Maine coast have given her a good deal of this "actual contact." Perhaps her experiences in other parts of the world have also given her the perspective to evaluate more perceptively what she has known here. When she gives the Mission boat and its captain a significant part in The Silver Shell we know she must be drawing on the understanding she gained during the summer she herself travelled from island to island on the mission boat Sunbeam. This experience she described in an article "How Four Girls 'Discovered' Maine."³⁴ She also paid tribute to its captain missionary in "The Islands Lose a Friend."³⁵

To go back to Judith and her discovery of a past, it is the knowledge of this past which helps to give Judith the courage to go to New

³³Perry D. Westbrook, Acres of Flint (Washington, D. C.:The Scarecrow Press, 1951), p. 70.

³⁴Mary Ellen Chase, "How Four Girls 'Discovered' Maine," Ladies' Home Journal, XXXIV (May, 1917), 18.

³⁵Mary Ellen Chase, "The Islands Lose a Friend," The Outlook, CXXXIII (February 21, 1923), 365-366.

York to school when the opportunity comes. Her mother had earlier turned an old everyday expression into a bit of imagery to help Judith understand: "We're mostly run out as a lot, Judith, but now and then there's a chip comes off the old block with the old grain still in it." (p. 69) She tells Judith that both she and Dan have this grain. Miss Chase's theme here is that to a young girl just beginning to grow up some knowledge of the past from which her family comes can be of special value. A pride in the past can give confidence in the future. This is one of the human values which Miss Chase stresses here and elsewhere.

The old chest mentioned earlier was perhaps more valuable because Mrs. Crane had kept her husband from selling it for "a great price" to some folks on a yacht. It was left from the old days, and in a sense is a symbol of them.

It was a beautiful chest, reaching nearly to the ceiling. Dan had loved to polish its swinging brass handles and make it soft and satiny by rubbing it with a few drops of oil. (p. 76)

It is typical of the many pieces of beautiful old furniture which was eagerly sought in New England during the era in which The Silver Shell was written. This aspect of New England culture is more extensively dealt with in the novels, Mary Peters and Silas Crockett. In the essay "Concerning Old Things and New" Miss Chase suggests the value that such a possession can have, and heritage seems to be a portion of that value. About an English experience, she writes:

. . . there was suddenly borne in upon me the consciousness that an old thing is not old so much by virtue of the passage of time as by the concentration of association, of feeling concerning it. Far older, indeed than the carved chest. . . . was the affection of their owner for them, was the richness of her imagination, was the power of identifying herself

with her possessions and her possessions with herself.³⁶

There is the opposite view of the matter in Mary Peters, when Mary is able to let many of her possessions slip away and retains mostly the less tangible aspects of her heritage. Things have, of course, different values for different people. One of the values which the Crane chest had for Judith was that of association, for that was where the family collection of books was kept. These books were what had given her a view of life broader than that on the island.

The ideas and the imagery of The Silver Shell are more dominant than one might expect in a book for young people. They account for the effect on the movement of the story noted by several reviewers. One calls the book "full of the beauty of sea, sky and rocks but a little slow for girls who like a story with plenty of action,"³⁷ and another, "rather thoughtful than adventurous."³⁸ Miss Chase seldom succeeds in getting a great deal of action into her stories, adult or juvenile. She is interested in other things, and, one comes to understand, is not most skillful in invention of plot. The story of The Silver Shell seems to lose some of its quiet charm as it moves to the end. It is as though the author had tired of her careful writing and was in a hurry to be done.

One criticism of the book is directed at this careful writing: "It would be much more successful if the author had omitted a great many long

³⁶Chase, "Concerning Old Things and New," p. 52.

³⁷Review of The Silver Shell, Cleveland Open Shelf, November, 1930, p. 132.

³⁸Review of The Silver Shell, Saturday Review of Literature, VII (December 6, 1930), 442.

words and over-polished phrases for which simpler and unaffected substitutes would be suited to the age in view."³⁹ It is very possible that she believed this kind of writing to be most beneficial to her child reader, for she says in the text of the book about Judith: "It was because of these books, although she did not know it, that her speech was better than that of the other children, clearer, more correct, more fluent" (p. 74).

With all its shortcomings, The Silver Shell is much more than another book written to its end. The author has passed beyond her primer lesson of just getting a book finished. Among other things, she is learning to use imagery to carry ideas. This book has imagination and authenticity. In fact, The Silver Shell might be grouped with Miss Chase's regional novels.

³⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

EARLY REGIONALISM

In Mary Christmas, 1926, Mary Ellen Chase makes fuller use than she ever has before of the valuable "capital" which her own girlhood is for her writing. Although not specifically a book for children or adolescents, Mary Christmas is in many ways a book of children and adolescents. Even its title character, Mary Christmas herself, for all her adulthood, is still something of a child; her mythology, which is such an important thread in this little story, surely belongs to a "mythology of childhood." The strange tales which this itinerant Armenian peddler of the Maine sea-coast of the nineties has to tell the Wescott children, bring a light to her own eyes. This light has been kindled by "Beauty"--"the irresistible, torturing loveliness that lies in ancient, lip-worn tales, consecrated forever by their own mystic grace and by the simple faith of a people's childhood."¹

Mary Christmas, although three times as long as His Birthday, is another of Mary Ellen Chase's little books. Its most distinctive successors are the two short novels, Dawn in Lyonesse and The Plum Tree. In this story which the author molds from the place, people, and experiences of her early life, as well as from her imagination, the four Wescott children first meet Mary Christmas when their father brings her home to dinner, having as local judge, dismissed some uncertain charges

¹Mary Ellen Chase, Mary Christmas (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), p. 64.

brought against her by villagers who were startled by "her dark face, uncertain speech, strange gestures, and outlandish clothing" (p. 42). This is the beginning of a long series of annual and semi-annual visits. These visits bring gifts, then tales, and later very personal aid to the Wescotts and are mingled with the progress of their years. After some summers of peddling and winters of lace-making Mary Christmas is able not only to buy a red pushcart to replace her black pack, but also to bring her own boy and girl to this country. Raphael and little Mary turn out to be disappointing to the Wescott children and even somewhat so to Mary Christmas herself. When the First World War comes, Mary Christmas's son Raphael, through some persuasion on the part of the Wescott boys, enlists and later gives "his life in France to avenge his father's death" (p. 134) and the other wrongs committed against his people. The story closes after Mary Christmas has died and become an important memory to all the Wescott children except the one who, like Mary Christmas's own son, had died in the war.

But the plot of the story is of slight importance. All the focus which in The Silver Shell is concentrated on a small object is here centered on the person and spirit of Mary Christmas, who has the strength and vitality of some of Mary Ellen Chase's native New England characters but whose difference of spirit and culture spelled a magic stimulation to the growing Wescott children. According to A Goodly Heritage, Mary Christmas was an actual person, although some of the events of her life differ from those of the fictional Mary Christmas. The Wescotts appear to be modelled on the Chase family.

The color of Mary Christmas's personality, of her costume, and of her manners makes a sharp impression on the Wescotts, but most influential are the stories she has to tell. These stories represent a new variation in the use Mary Ellen Chase makes of the past. The past of the child in His Birthday was the natural Biblical past of the Old Testament. In the two girls' books The Girl from the Big Horn Country and Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, except for the negative use of a Puritan past, there were only small bits from the cultural past which belonged to the girls because it was what they studied. In The Silver Shell, which came a few years after Mary Christmas, the past was one of heritage, similar to that of A Goodly Heritage, although Judith discovered her heritage in a rather abrupt manner. But the past which means so much to the Wescott children in Mary Christmas--there are other lesser pasts there, of course, which serve as contrasts--is one which is not of their own heritage. In fact, it has some contradictions to their own. In a sense the author lets the reader understand that it fills a lack in what their own heritage has given them. Mary Christmas senses a little of this lack when the⁹ children ask her:

"What's Ascension eve, Mary Christmas?" Mary Christmas looked at them in perplexed surprise, and then at the church spire, just visible through the blossoming trees. Evidently she was doubtful as to the sufficiency of New England Congregationalism in the nineties. (p. 63)

Mary Ellen Chase shows her understanding of children in her development of their assimilation of these impressions which the stories of Mary Christmas produce.

When she had gone, they would sort out all these bewildering events and persons and places and put them in orderly, well-kept mental niches, to be taken out and reviewed one at a time; the Garden of Eden with its Tree of Life; the ark and

its one transcendent plank; Saints Jacob and Gregory; the penitent pilgrim with his silver box; Armenian hills and valleys in the single magic moment of Ascension eve. But now overpowered by the wealth to which they had become the heirs, they could only stand and watch her. . . . (p. 65)

Mary Ellen Chase knew that a strange new thought to children is often "too immense and far-reaching for them." It is not that they must reject it, but they need time to absorb it. For all children it is as it was for the Wescotts: "They needed weeks and months to be able to comprehend it." In those weeks and months they made each thought from the Mary Christmas stories their own by playing it in single and collective dramatizations with adaptations to their own environment and embellishments from their own imaginations.

Besides the mystic qualities of Mary Christmas's store of miracles, there is the strong appeal of the age of her past. The children's conception of it is humorously presented from the confused point of view of John, the youngest:

Mary Christmas and her land were so inseparable that it almost seemed as though she must have been there to show its high pastures and clear waters to Shem, Ham, and Japheth. . . . (p. 54)

Here it is clear that the native land of Mary Christmas has one aspect of familiarity to the children, for, as they were quick to note, the second oldest thing there, the mountain where Noah's ark landed, Masis to Mary Christmas but Ararat to them, was in both their Bible and their geography. Thus the past which they knew from their Bible converged ever so slightly with this long past which Mary Christmas knew so well because it happened in her own place and also because she herself "had lived over again the sad passing of so many centuries" (p. 111). Although

the great age and the unfamiliarity of Mary Christmas's past charm the children, it is only her devotion to it which makes them see it, not perhaps for what it was, but as something of special value.

It is, of course, ironic that while the Wescott children are eagerly absorbing Mary Christmas's gifts of the spirit, her own children have apparently been growing up without their mother's love of their heritage. Americanization in Mary Christmas's time at the turn of the century was a different thing from what it is today, more than half a century later. But then as now it was a swifter, more complete process for the child than for the adult. Mary Christmas brought something with her, but from her son Raphael something seemed to be taken away:

A year at school in Portland had taught him many things. Among the most outstanding of these were an astounding command of American slang of a range and versatility known to few natives, the art of chewing gum noisily and continuously, and the most rampant desire to lose as soon as possible all traces of his foreign birth. (p. 86)

The place of the immigrant on the American scene, a natural element of much New England regionalism of the twentieth century, receives only a limited consideration in the writing of Mary Ellen Chase. It is to be given fuller development in Windswept, Mary Ellen Chase's most complex novel, than in Mary Christmas. One book reviewer's comment on Mary Ellen Chase's treatment of Mary Christmas is to suggest: "Yet here and there [in contemporary fiction] characters appear in a way indicative of that generous idealizing of the immigrant to which not a few Americans are prone."²

²Review of Mary Christmas, New York Times Book Review, May 16, 1926, p. 24.

It was apparent even in her first book, His Birthday, that Miss Chase is interested in a variety of pasts, usually with a concern for their qualities, their manifestations, their values, their influences, and their relationships one with another. This interest becomes more and more apparent as one follows the development of her style, her choice of subject matter, and her thinking through the years. The view that she presents explicitly in the prologue and epilogue of A Goodly Heritage, and implicitly throughout that book and more especially so in Mary Peters and Silas Crockett, is only the larger part of an even more pervasive attitude. One cannot safely analyze this attitude down to a point of simplicity. It is too complex for that. Perhaps the most important thing to recognize here is that although it is not everything in her writing, it touches everything there. It selects and forms the imagery which is the essence of her style. It guides the structure of each work she composes, most significantly the fiction. It determines the language she uses. It explains, perhaps, her concern for the young, for they are most impressionable to the influences of the past, any past or all pasts, even though their own past is slight and all pasts will be evaluated by them in any logical sense only after they have ceased to be young. Earlier in this study it has been suggested that the variety of pasts which Miss Chase presents fall into the relationship of nesting one within another, but this is not always true. Sometimes they cluster. Sometimes, to use an image of her own, they are interwoven. Of course, no comparison can state the case precisely.

Important as it is, the land of Mary Christmas, "the oldest land in the world," represents a past of less importance to the reader than

to the Wescott children. The same affection for New England mores and manners, for New England landscape and architecture, for New England remoteness and ways of thought which is frequently a quality of Miss Chase's writing has in this short book its most unequivocal embodiment before those books of the thirties which portray it most fully. Mary Christmas, for all her foreignness, is just as much a part of New England as any tradition or any traveling peddler ever was.

There is some evidence in Mary Christmas of that resistance to change which cherishers of the past sometimes display. Similar evidence can be found elsewhere in Mary Ellen Chase, but here and elsewhere it is usually tempered with reasonableness. Miss Chase's regionalism is not of the kind which Lewis Mumford describes as denying "both the fact of change and the possibility that anything of value could come of it."³ Rather than denying change it seems to be part of her thesis to describe change. She does not deny the possibility that anything of value can come of it, but she does sometimes, in Mary Christmas more than in later books, question the assumption that all changes are for the better.

Childraising, she seems to suggest in Mary Christmas, was well understood by some parents even before the days of scientific study of child development:

. . . . for although they had not made a scientific study of the child from embryo to the beginning of adolescence, they understood quite as clearly as modern parents that there are several things of which children may just as well remain in ignorance. (pp. 28-29)

³ Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization, cited in Harry Estill Moore and Howard W. Odum, American Regionalism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), p. 170.

Also when Mary Wescott suffered some of the common pangs of adolescence, her mother understood something of what was happening to her:

Although she brought up her children before temperaments were discovered or Child Guidance Clinics and project methods were invented, she knew perfectly well that Mary's age was an Age of Discovery; and when she saw Mary's eyes she gave her an extra dose of sulphur and molasses, and suggested that they spend the afternoon making candy for the church sale. (p. 49)

Miss Chase seems to be suggesting that although Mary's mother does believe in such an old-time remedy as sulphur and molasses, she had not only the common sense but the care to fill the child's time with comforting, distracting activity at a moment when her mind is full of unrest. The gentleness and even beauty with which the author treats Mary's phase of adolescence reminds one negatively of the harsher treatment of adolescence in a later American novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith.⁴ The difference explains in part Miss Chase's appreciation of her own special heritage.

The author's comment on the college experiences of the Wescott girls suggests that with change some benefits must be lost if others accrue. She cannot, it is true, resist an occasional note of sarcasm in her statement of change: "Vocational guidance they entirely escaped. No expert, after an interview of ten minutes, told them for what they were best fitted" (p. 106). Perhaps there is even a trace of injustice in the occasional knowing thrust at the new which she includes:

If Mary and Cynthia Wescott possessed complexes of various sorts, they were not made aware of the fact; and if they

⁴Betty Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943).

were temperamentally unsuited to quadratic equations, no one incited them to act upon this convenient truth. (p. 106)

When she depicts the very inconsistent attitudes towards change involved in Father Wescott's political views, she is more objective than when she deals with theories of child-raising and education. She doesn't editorialize; she only observes. She does it with the tone of humor which sometimes touches her own father in some of her later non-fiction writing, the article "Memorial Day 1900" particularly. In Mary Christmas Father Wescott bought an automobile with the same progressive spirit, if not with the same faith in progress, that Father Chase, as the author later reveals, installed in his home the first bathroom in town.

Miss Chase's view of Father Wescott's political inconsistencies shows that she can see resistance to change for the illogical view that it often is:

As though a party dedicated from its infancy to Progress, could look upon such extremists, at their best, as anything short of anarchists! The East must stand firm! Father Wescott accepted this decision as his battle-cry, and, with many misgivings, bought an automobile, a vehicle which itself demanded in those days no small amount of cooperation on the part of its owner. By means of this locomotion Father Wescott could exhort the country at least to stand firm in its loyalty to the safe and sane gentleman then in the presidential chair. This he did while Mrs. Wescott sat by his side in numberless dooryards, a patient listener to conversations which she feared must ultimately prove useful to her also, if someone did not stop those absurd women in Washington. (pp. 118-119)

The past of her ancestors is not the only past which is significant to Mary Christmas. Toward the end of her life she finds value in that part of her own past which she has spent traveling the Maine coast. What was true of Mary Christmas as she revisited places and objects there which had become for her a special symbol and as thus she "kept close

the past with all its beneficence" (p. 124) was also to prove true of Mary Ellen Chase. There can seldom be a doubt in all her writing but that she firmly believes in "the beneficence of the past." And it is her method artistically and psychologically to objectify the past. Things are important in her stories, not for themselves alone, but for the meanings attached to them, most frequently by the characters of the stories. This, of course, is especially true of The Silver Shell, but it is generally true of all of Mary Ellen Chase's writing. It is true in a story such as Mary Christmas where the focus is on a character. There are not only Mary Christmas's gifts to the different members of the family. There is, for example, Mary Wescott's wild crab-apple tree and its associations with Beauty. And there are the drifting petals of the apple blossoms with which Mary Christmas builds a past. She herself chooses these as the symbol of her returning visits to the Wescotts. The white gate which is later to give the title to a book of Miss Chase's essays first appears in Mary Christmas, suggesting that for many years it had for the author a special association with childhood. Just as it took time for the Wescott children to comprehend Mary Christmas's stories and her own story too, so it takes time for a symbol to develop its significance to the human consciousness.

The wild crab-apple tree of Mary Christmas no doubt has its kinship with The Plum Tree of more than two decades later, for one of Miss Chase's characteristics as a writer is New England thriftiness. She is thrifty, but thrifty with a Yankee ingenuity, because she reuses much of her material but always with a difference. She practices, with her material, the old-fashioned custom of "turning" a garment. Furthermore, the scraps

of the garment are apt to appear later in various pieces of patchwork (patchwork was, of course, something of an art), so consistent are her habits of mind with the more material habits of her heritage. From beginning to end she is interested in individual words, their sounds and their connotations. In Mary Christmas, appropriately to the story, she allows old to be Cynthia's special word, but her own favorite, it early becomes clear, is swept, almost always in some combination--here, "sand-swept" (p. 24), "surf-swept" (p. 45), and "wind-swept" (p. 62), which later becomes the title of a novel.

One cannot read the final chapter, "Mary Christmas Days," in which each Wescott child, now an adult reminisces, without acknowledging the sentimentality of Mary Christmas; yet there is more authenticity in the emotion pictured and evoked than is often associated with sentimentality. Part of Mary Ellen Chase's view of the past includes a recognition of the value of having something worth reminiscing about.

On the whole, the force of Mary Christmas's personality and the color of her tales and the integrity of her actions are strong enough to overshadow the old-fashioned techniques of omniscience in point of view and of directness in discussing the events of the story with the readers. These devices and her occasional coyness reflect, of course, the influence of her nineteenth century reading. Fortunately she is soon to outgrow particularly this latter habit, as she increases her control of her style. Modern taste in story-telling will look askance at such statements as: "It is extremely comforting, however, to be able to assure our readers that no dire results followed this act. . . ." (p. 8),

or "And now to return to our exasperated story, which, for the last ten minutes has been fuming with impatience" (p. 11).

But there is a vitality in the author's writing just as there is in the character of Mary Christmas. Without this, Mary Christmas could not seem as real as she does, even though her reality is a romantic one. Among other ideas Mary Ellen Chase has about the past is the recognition that certain moments of one's personal past remain with one with exceptional clarity or at least occasionally return so. The relationship of the past of Mary Christmas to the personal past of the Wescott family is expressed with an appropriate, if not unusual, figure:

Thus it came about in Wescott history that those bright years of childhood when things were things and those troubled later years when the same things could not be bound by their own neat selves became a kind of tapestry shot through and through with colored threads. Blue, purple, red, gold, and silver, they deepened and glowed--the colors of music and poetry, of magical words and ancient tales, of romance and high endeavors, of distant places and strange peoples, of sacrifice and holiness. Into the texture of their lives Mary Christmas had woven those threads in hues that were fadeless against time and circumstance. (p. 91)

When Mary Ellen Chase began a chapter of Mary Christmas like this, "In late September, when a blue haze veiled the hills beyond the harbor and so lay over the upland farms that one who did not know might easily think the land was kind . . . " (p. 68), she was stating the theme of her next book of fiction. Uplands, 1927, is long enough to be classified without qualifications as a novel. It has to be classified as Miss Chase's first novel although she wrote four books of fiction before it: two juveniles and two stories too short to be considered novels. In any case Miss Chase has not been eager in subsequent years to claim Uplands at all. When at the beginning of the forties, Windswept appeared as the

first of Mary Ellen Chase's books to bear opposite the title page a list of books "By Mary Ellen Chase," Uplands was not among them, nor has it ever appeared in a similar list since. Virginia Smith Hall wrote in her honor thesis on Maine writers, "Of her own Uplands she declared it should be thrown into the fire."⁵ Whatever self-criticism prompted this, it was exaggerated because far from acting as Nathaniel Hawthorne did when he collected for destruction all of the copies he could find of Fanshawe, Miss Chase allowed Uplands to be published in a new edition in 1935.

The publication of Uplands and Miss Chase's doctoral dissertation, Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novelist, both in the year 1927, supports the evidences of Hardy's influences in Uplands.

Whatever is to be said critically of Uplands it is an interesting book to consider for its relationships to the rest of Mary Ellen Chase's writing up to the present. Miss Chase's concern with the past, prevalent in many of her books and present in most, is largely lacking here. It is place which takes on special importance. A statement of Miss Chase's about Hardy may very justly be applied to herself: "In his novels Nature, in one form or another, is literally never absent."⁶ The place of nature in His Birthday and also in the early books for girls has already been discussed. There will be hardly a later book which does not show the author's feelings for nature, "in one form or another," but there will be hardly another book which makes it as vital to the

⁵"Down East Today" (University of Maine, 1938), p. 120.

⁶Mary Ellen Chase, Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1927), p. 193.

story as Uplands. Only Windswept among the other novels bears a place title, but Windswept is in part a man-made place and Windswept is a novel of more different focuses than Uplands has.

The most important thing about place in Uplands, an area of somewhat barren farming land above the coast but in sight of the coming and going of the tide through the marshes and even of an occasional schooner, is its paradoxical character of kindness and cruelty, not so much in its intent as in its effects on the few inhabitants who try to live there. The two main characters, Martha Crosby and Jarvis Craig, are awakened to their love by its kindness in April and determine through their marriage either to escape, or to subdue, or even to submit to its cruelty. Jarvis is the only child of Sarah and Ethan Craig, who have become silent and even bitter in their years of effort to exist on their upland farm. Martha, still in her teens, was orphaned as a child and has worked since then as Miss Abby Wickham's "girl." Miss Abby, owner of the most affluent farm in North Dorset, is more important to the theme of the novel than to its plot--perhaps because the theme itself is more important than the plot, which is most simple. The story runs a year's length, as is fitting where the seasons are important to life, but this is not presented with any such emphasis as it is in another Mairé novel, As the Earth Turns by Gladys Hasty Carroll.

In June Jarvis and Martha arrange a secret marriage in a nearby city. The wedding is rather a pathetic affair, but the marriage, in spite of the secrecy, brings them joy. Just before they are to tell Jarvis's parents about it, Jarvis is killed in an August haying accident. In September Martha without telling of the marriage runs away from North

Dorset under the unexpected protection of Colin Holliday, the grandson of a North Dorset neighbor, with whom Colin is vacationing briefly from his college studies. Martha has met Colin just once before at the beginning of the story, in the woods between the Holliday and Wickham farms, but the meeting had made an important impression on them both, and Martha's awakened imagination has responded sympathetically to the volume of Irish fairy tales he sent her after that meeting. In the city Colin takes Martha to the convent where he had gone to school as a little boy. Mother Ignatius gives Martha asylum and occupation helping Sister Monica with the sewing, and Martha spends some pleasant weeks at the convent before Colin declares a love which she cannot accept. When Sister Monica discovers what Martha has not realized, that Martha is going to have a child, Martha goes back to the Craigs in North Dorset. When she dies after the birth of her child, she leaves Sarah and Ethan a grandson to save them from the complete bleakness which has been threatening their North Dorset lives.

Uplands makes much use of a short story called "The Garment of Praise," which was published in Scribner's Magazine in October, 1925, two years before the book appeared. In "The Garment of Praise" Miss Chase includes the scene in the Craig home after Jarvis's funeral and the one following the birth of Jarvis's child. The crux of the short story is that the Craigs receive compensation for the loss of their son in the birth of his son, even though for some time they had not known that this was to be. There are some changes in the details of the story; for example, the buggy ride, in the story, back from a cemetery in a neighboring town is reduced in the novel to a short walk down the

hill from the burying lot on their own farm. Other altered details are slight as are the stylistic changes. The most significant change in circumstances is that in the short story Martha Sutter and Jarvis Craig have not married whereas in the novel Martha Crosby and Jarvis Craig have.

"The Garment of Praise" is one of a small group of short stories, written mostly before Uplands, which are related one to another by locality. North Dorset is the setting of "The Garment of Praise" and of Uplands too, although the neighboring town which is Petersport in the story changes for some inexplicable reason to Stetson in the novel. In the story "Sure Dwellings," the Reverend Phineas Holt, who has a slight kinship with the Reverend Jonathan Fisher, the subject of a biography written by Miss Chase twenty years later, is a minister of Dorset, although much of his story takes place in New York City. "Upland Pastures," actually set in Dorset, is most notable as Miss Chase's portrayal of the character of Ursula Trundy, who continues the author's series of sympathetic childlike adults, which includes Mr. Levinsky in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, Foolish Tom in The Silver Shell, the elderly ladies in The Plum Tree, and eventually Mrs. Gowan and others in The Lovely Ambition. Ursula Trundy shares Foolish Tom's love of the out-of-doors.

Petersport, which is a neighboring town in "The Garment of Praise" and "Upland Pastures," is the scene of a "A Return to Constancy" and, by association, of "A Pinch of Snuff," both of which portray a little girl and a cow. More important, Petersport is the town of Mary Peters. Whatever embryonic plan Miss Chase may have had for creating a large, related setting for her fiction, she abandoned it early. It seems most

likely that she merely outgrew it. If she had such a plan, as the repeated use of the same place names suggests, it may be because Uplands, published in the same year as Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel, was being created at the same time Hardy's Wessex was in her mind. The use of the name of Dorset at least suggests this. The name Peters, on the other hand, from which Petersport is formed, belongs to Miss Chase's native village.

Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel is the dissertation which Mary Ellen Chase wrote for the Ph.D. degree at the University of Minnesota. It is scholarly, and it is pertinent to this present dissertation only as it reveals Miss Chase's own ideas concerning novel-writing and as it makes evident some interesting comparisons with her own fiction writing. Briefly, what she has done in her study is to compare the serial version of The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure with their book forms, and to draw conclusions concerning "the reasons for and significance of" such changes as she has found.

Time and space do not allow the same comprehensive study of the changes in Mary Ellen Chase's own work that she has been able to give to Hardy's changes, nor would the significance of those changes be likely to justify as much attention to them: but it is interesting to note that on three separate occasions one of her short stories published in a magazine as an entity of its own has also been a part of the stuff and substance of one of her novels. Her frequent tendency towards thrift in the use of her materials has already been noted and will be pointed to again. One might compare this habit of Miss Chase's to the "semi-

annual spring and fall rehabilitation"⁷ which Mrs. Stowe's Toothacre sisters, Aunt Ruey and Aunt Roxy, expended on their bonnets in The Pearl of Orr's Island. But the relation of the short stories to the novels is something more specific than this general tendency.

One of Miss Chase's findings as to the reasons for Hardy's changes was "that the avoidance in the serials of the unconventional and the illicit in relations between men and women was clearly due to a desire on the part of periodical editors to keep such material from their readers."⁸ For example, her comparison of two passages in Tess of the D'Urbervilles shows that while in the novel Tess is seduced by Alec, in the serial she has what she believes is a legal marriage ceremony.⁹ Miss Chase's own change from periodical to book is quite the reverse and indicates that the demands of the periodical-reading public and the consequent care of editors to please it have changed from the 1890's to the 1920's, or from England to America. In the story "The Garment of Praise," Martha Sutter remains Martha Sutter to the end, for there has been no marriage before Jarvis Craig's death. The reader is told that their relationship is sinful:

Their [the Craig parents'] meaningless days on North Dorset uplands would be henceforth fraught with meaning; yet those bare uplands must leave their mark upon the son of Jarvis Craig and Martha Sutter. Could the salvation of one be rightly born in the sin of another? Were the fruits of the spirit ever made manifest in the works of the flesh?¹⁰

⁷Harriet Beecher Stowe, The Pearl of Orr's Island (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1900), p. 298.

⁸Chase, Hardy, p. 181.

⁹Ibid., pp. 75-82.

¹⁰Mary Ellen Chase, "Garment of Praise," Scribner's Magazine, LXXVIII (October 1925), 432.

In the book the questioning of their morality disappears with the change in their relationship, for they are married, and their love is the thing which softens for them the hardships of their environment--their love and, one is left to surmise, their early deaths.

There may be several reasons why the author left Jarvis and Martha unwed in the short story; the reasons for the change in the situation in the novel appear to be artistic ones. For one thing, although the characters, the incidents, and the details are much the same, the focus on the characters and the setting is altered, and so is the overall theme. In the story Ethan and Sarah Craig are the main characters, but in the novel Martha and Jarvis are--unless the uplands themselves are. Of the slight changes made in details and wording, most are necessitated by the expansion in the form or by stylistic desirability. One change, however, gives a clue to a focus made apparent in several other places in the novel. This is the emphasis the author puts on the tide or on the sea. All of these changes take place during the thunderstorm which follows Jarvis's funeral. In one place, "She asked Ethan if he thought the hay would be spoiled" is made to read in the novel, "She asked Ethan if he thought the tide had turned" (p. 142). Several brief additions are made in the novel: "'The tide won't turn till seven. We'll get it before that'" (p. 136) and "Continuous, binding together the spasmodic gusts into some semblance of harmony, was the great, surging undertone of the sea" (p. 142). Slight as these changes are, the author would not have been likely to make them if she were not intent on having the tide and the sea assume some importance in the novel.

Besides the obvious change of fuller development, the total effect on the characters as they are transplanted from story to novel is a softening one. This is true even of Miss Alvida Cummings whose name becomes Miss Abby Wickham. Even though Miss Abby bears the brunt of the author's revulsion against the unlovely aspects of Puritanism and evangelism, she is given a final sympathetic touch of understanding in Martha's consciousness. Luke Crosby, a minor character in the story, disappears as there is no longer any part for him to play, and Colin Holliday, with all his Irish and Catholic associations, is added. But the softened view of the characters in the novel seems due not just to the added understanding which can come with fuller treatment, but with the author's development of their environment and their relation to it. And here it seems fitting to consider the part played by place and nature, which are nearly synonymous in this novel, and also the possible comparison of this concept with the one of Hardy which Miss Chase had been concurrently studying. A few of the things she had to say in the conclusion to her dissertation should give some indication at least of the thoughts which were in her mind at about the time she might have been thinking of her own novel. She speaks of the progress of the novel in the nineteenth century towards realism, with character rather than incident "as the motivating force." When she comments on Jane Austen's great contribution to the novel as an art form, she also looks ahead: "But it did need to be taken out of the parlor and made to face the facts of everyday existence in a world peopled with less fortunate souls than the Bingleys or the Dashwoods" (p. 186). She shows a good deal of respect for George Eliot and her use of the novel for philosophic purposes as well

as her realism. In Meredith's concern for human experience she finds something more allegorical than individual, and less dramatic in intensity than is to be found in Hardy. (pp. 188-189)

When Miss Chase comes to the point of asking what features set Hardy apart from his predecessors in English fiction, her answer is, "The first and greatest is his realistic conception of Nature" (p. 197). Then she briefly reviews the place accorded nature by earlier English novelists. When she quotes--from what source she does not say--that Fielding "'took the novel out-of-doors,'" one can only think of how much her own novels, perhaps particularly Uplands, are out of doors. Also one is reminded of what she seems to be trying to accomplish in Uplands, when she observes, "In George Eliot, however, it [Nature] begins to bear a definite relation to her characters and to the events of their lives" (p. 192). What she writes of Meredith's approach to life, however, is significant in a negative sense: "Meredith's approach to life, however, is intellectual rather than emotional, and that very fact in itself precludes much of the sensuous treatment of Nature employed by the novelist whose approach is mainly emotional" (p. 192). Miss Chase's own approach to nature is usually emotional, and only in Windswept and The Lovely Ambition does she portray characters given to an approach to life which is appreciably intellectual. The thinking of most of her characters has a strong emotional quality.

Of Hardy's own attitude towards nature she writes that it "has a vastness of conception and of execution which was unknown in fiction before his time." Her summary is this:

In my opinion, Nature is treated in three definitely different but not necessarily inharmonious ways: First Hardy portrays with amazing accuracy and almost scientific precision all the processes of Nature. Second, he constantly stresses the inter-relation of man and Nature. Third, he depicts Nature, not as an abstraction, but as a vast, impassive organism living her own immense life and careless of that of man. (p. 193)

Although a study of Uplands suggests that it was Miss Chase's consideration of Hardy's treatment of nature which was most influential on her own writing, the picture must be made complete by adding that besides his conception of nature it was, in her opinion, "the artistic and dramatic unity of his greatest novels, and his overwhelming consistency of characterization" (p. 198) that made him great.

The foregoing has been included not as definite proof that Mary Ellen Chase's own fictional writing was influenced by Thomas Hardy but that it would not be unreasonable to look for such an influence. Whether or not he knew that Miss Chase had made a study of Thomas Hardy, one anonymous reviewer made this comment about Uplands: "The incidents are as tragic as those of Thomas Hardy, with never a suspicion of inappropriate softness or sentimentality."¹¹ However tragic the incidents may be, the quotation at the beginning would indicate that Miss Chase did not consider the book as a whole a tragedy, but a romance:

A Gentleman: Is the play then a tragedy?
 The Fool: Nay, sir, not so, at least to my simple mind.
 'Tis too full of bounty to merit that dark word.
 A Gentleman: A comedy! 'Tis good for this sad world.
 The Fool: Nay, again, sir. You are too quick. I say
 'tis a romance.

Adapted from an Old Play

¹¹ Review of Uplands, Saturday Review of Literature, IV (October 15, 1927), 223.

The suggestions of this are many, perhaps more than the author intended. Certainly one of them could not be that she was trying to follow in the footsteps of one who was, in her own words, "above all preceding or contemporary English realists."¹² But whatever was motivating her consciously or unconsciously, what she has accomplished is a mixture of realism and romance, and also a measure of success and a measure of failure, as any first novel, even one by greater novelists than Mary Ellen Chase, is likely to have.

It does not seem unjustifiable to speculate that a young writer who has just made a detailed study of a novelist and wants to become a novelist herself, will at least get some ideas of what to do with her own material from the one she has come to know so well. Of the "attributes of Hardy's realistic art" which Miss Chase considered most significant, it is her interpretation of his conception of nature that she accords fullest treatment in her analysis and that will be most useful in this study. The other two have less relation to it. Whatever artistic and dramatic unity Miss Chase aimed at in Uplands, its structure is weak. The unity the book does have comes more from its attitude toward nature and place than from its drama, and the relocation of place in the second book interferes with this unity. The division of Uplands into two books seems to be only the author's recognition of the fact that all the material she uses is not integrated with the story quite successfully enough. One might not go so far as the reviewer who wrote: "The second Book is largely concerned with Martha's experiences in the convent to

¹²Chase, Hardy, p. 198.

which the author presently removes her for no discoverable reason save a desire to describe at very great length the conventual life and its followers,"¹³ but this section of the book does take away from the focus on the uplands without supplying any compensation other than the relief it gives to Martha from the emotional intensities she had been experiencing and the counterbalance of the Catholicity of the nuns to the evangelism of Abby Wickham. These compensations perhaps do something for the artistic structure, but there is hardly enough incident in the whole book to ensure very much dramatic unity. The greatest artistic unity of the book, the turn of the seasons, has already been referred to, and is as much related to nature as to structure.

The "overwhelming consistency of characterization" which Miss Chase finds in Hardy could not be said to mark her own work in Uplands, simply because character in an individual sense is not that important in the book. It is not that her characters are inconsistent, but that they are hardly complex enough to be so. It is not difficult to reconcile the judgment that the book has "almost nothing in the way of character development"¹⁴ with the one that "Miss Chase is continuously sensitive to the hard tight characters of the natives. It is that rigidity, bred through years of hardships, that is the keynote of the plot."¹⁵ In reference to Hardy's characterization, Miss Chase speaks of "the inevitability of it all" (p. 197) which remains when the book is laid aside. This is not

¹³ Review of Uplands, New York Times Book Review, August 14, 1927, p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Saturday Review, IV, 223.

quite the case in Uplands, for in spite of their deaths, the author has allowed Martha and Jarvis to triumph over their environment, and perhaps the only way she could have done so and been consistent was to let Jarvis die by accident. It is a common device of hers; she is to use it a number of times again, in Windswept, for example, and in The Lovely Ambition. Of these people who suffer accidental death, there is hardly enough of the kind of characterization to make the accidents seem understandable. Although it is inevitable that there will be accidents in life, there must be the right set of circumstances to make any one accident even seem "inevitable."

When it comes to a conception of nature, the likeness between Hardy's fiction and Miss Chase's begins with the fact that it is of great importance to them both. With no thought of claiming Hardy's great skill for Miss Chase, it can be said that the finest writing in her fiction comes often in her depiction of nature in one form or another. This is true also of much of her non-fiction as well. To see this one has only to think ahead to such high points in her non-fiction as sections of "Wormwood--For Thoughts" in The Golden Asse and Other Essays, "The Birth of an Island" in The White Gate, and "Twelve Ricks" in This England. These, of course, involve the inter-relation of man and Nature, which Miss Chase finds so important in Hardy and which in Uplands sustains the burden of the central theme of the novel.

There is often an irregularity in the quality of Miss Chase's writing, which is perhaps the characteristic of one who writes easily and is impatient to move forward. One not possessed of this impatience could

hardly have produced her total output and carried on a successful teaching career at the same time. This irregularity remains but greatly diminishes with time. It seems always to have the least ill effect on her descriptive powers, which are so often directed toward nature. Perhaps it is her great love of nature which makes her willing to take care with its presentation, or perhaps it is just that in this aspect of her writing it is most natural for her to bring to bear with its sharpest realization her great delight in the words of the English language.

Several of the comments of reviewers of Uplands bear witness to the appreciation of this aspect of her writing. Many reviewers for most of the books to come are to praise her skill in description. An Atlantic review of Uplands reads:

This book, if the reviewer mistakes not, springs from the author's affection for beautiful words, for sentences turned with a rhythmic fineness in which each syllable is a conscious and intended element. It is a work of beauty, or it is nothing, and it is beauty of expression which seems to have been foremost in the author's mind as she wrote.¹⁶

But beauty of expression must be attached to something expressible. Usually in Miss Chase's case it is something which is beautiful in reality. Her thoughts on beauty have been discussed particularly in relation to The Silver Shell, which has been grouped here with her books for girls and considered earlier even though it was not published until 1930, three years after Uplands. Not exclusively, but often, beauty for Miss Chase is the beauty of nature. This is especially true in Uplands. She saw beauty in

¹⁶Theodore Morrison, "Atlantic's Bookshelf," The Atlantic Monthly, CXL (September, 1927), n.p.

a raindrop in The Silver Shell; she sees it in a frost crystal (p. 286) in Uplands, and in other small things as well as large. There is the "delicate tracery of a woodbine tendril in shadow upon her cheek" (p. 23). There is "a mushroom faintly tinged with rose" (p. 40), which leads Martha into unfamiliar analogical thought.

In the first spring, at the beginning of the book, Martha, suddenly awakened to new beauties in life, like Judith of The Silver Shell at twelve and like a much older Ellen Pascoe of Dawn in Lyonesse--age seems to be no determiner of this kind of experience in Miss Chase's view--is inspired to set a branch of wild pear adrift in a swollen brook. With a kind of mystical sympathy, Colin Holliday, who never knew that Martha had done this, repeats her act at the close of the book. The scene is described with the kind of careful writing which must have inspired the comment of the New York Times reviewer quoted above:

The sun lay warm on the free, full water. He was carrying in his hand a spray of the wild pear which he had broken from some trees by the pasture fence. The frail white blossoms were past their prime, but with their delicately veined leaves of wine-color they were still lovely. Yielding to a sudden impulse, he placed the spray on a quiet pool which he was passing and watched it drift down the brook. The beauty of the white petals against the amber water did not escape him, not their jewel-like reflections as they floated down the little stream. He watched them quite out of sight, wondering as he did so why his imaginative mind had never thought before of doing such a simple thing. (pp. 296-297)

This may not be the best she is to do, but it shares some of the qualities of the best. And it indicates something of what caused one reviewer to say, "Admirable descriptive passages abound,"¹⁷ and another, "Uplands has been

¹⁷Review of Uplands, New York Herald Tribune Books, September 11, 1927, p. 16.

brought to full book length by the use of numerous descriptions. Most of these are well, even charmingly done."¹⁸ It is in passages such as these that one finds her poetry. That she believes that the novel sometimes has a place for poetry might be gathered from a statement in an Introduction she once wrote for Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd:

Is he not then in Far from the Madding Crowd rescuing a portion of an old and expressive land from the inroads of a new, to him, hostile industrial age, preserving its quaint manners of its simple people, allying it with even older times? If he is, his purpose is essentially poetic, and his book becomes, as I have suggested, a poetic invention before it is a story.¹⁹

Usually Miss Chase is quite accurate in her descriptions which include not just nature but man in action with nature. Often if man is not actually in action with nature, a description is so presented that the reader understands that this is the way one of the characters is seeing it. Or at least this is the atmosphere the characters are moving in. For, example, after a detailed sensory description of a pasture on an August afternoon, the author writes, "It was in atmosphere rather than in detail that Martha saw the pasture" (p. 131). The reader, of course, must see the details, to sense what that atmosphere is. But the characters, particularly Martha and Colin, are sharply aware of the details of nature too. An instance of this comes when Martha sees a jay on a winter path:

As she watched, forgetful of the cold, hardly daring to breathe lest he should fly away, a perfect frost crystal, as clear and translucent as the door of the sunlit house, jeweled for a fleeting moment that magic blue. It must

¹⁸Times Book Review, August 14, 1927, p. 7.

¹⁹Mary Ellen Chase, "A New Introduction" to Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company), pp. xix-xx.

have cast a spell on him, for he sat quite still until the sun had taken back that which it had made so lovely; but on her the spell lingered, claiming many a moment of her days and nights by the flashing of a beam of light so frail and small that one might wonder how it could mirror within itself that perfect blue. (p. 286)

Mary Ellen Chase is able to describe this land well because she is native to it. As W.E.H. of the Boston Evening Transcript has said:

Few authors since Sarah Orne Jewett have had so keen an understanding of the longings that make the men and women of Maine love the rocks and pastures of their lands even as they hate the cold, implacable barrenness of its soil.²⁰

The paradoxical kindness and cruelty of these uplands has been mentioned. A noteworthy aspect of Miss Chase's presentation of them is that she usually describes with the greatest fullness and care only the lovelier features. These are what she makes the reader see and hear and even feel aware of in a supersensory way. The North Dorset which the characters of the story sometimes hate and struggle against exists in their minds and feelings and speech, but somehow it itself doesn't get into the pages of the story or into the readers' consciousness as clearly as it is in the consciousness of the characters.

One difference between Miss Chase's view of the relationship between man and nature and Hardy's is that her characters are more self-conscious in their consciousness of nature in North Dorset than are those in Hardy, who, she finds, "live close to earth, among the sights, sounds, and smells of the natural world, and, permeated by the things of Nature, they become a part of her and she of them."²¹

²⁰Review of Uplands, Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, August 20, 1927, p. 4.

²¹Chase, Hardy, p. 194.

One reason for this difference may be that there is less necessary struggle between man and nature in southern England than in the harsher climate of northern New England. Sarah Craig says of North Dorset: "'And then the winters here! Don't tell me! I know them! They freeze your soul up worse 'n your body. And by and by you get as if you'd never lived at all'" (p. 159). Another reason may be that there is a basic difference between Hardy's philosophy and Miss Chase's, even though there may be similarities between his concept of nature "as the vast, unfeeling Power that rules the world, and is totally indifferent, if not hostile, to man's desires and struggles,"²² and her own. One could not say that there is anything untrue about Miss Chase's definition of Hardy's conception of nature, but it is almost as though she were leaving something out. That something can only be completely supplied by a reading of Hardy himself, but it is something which John Livingston Lowes at least gets at in his essay "Two Readings of Earth." This is pointed out not to take issue with Miss Chase, but to make clear that while she was studying Hardy she was subject to more than her own definition quite makes clear, and that what in Hardy goes beyond her definition has also had some influence on her own concept of Nature as revealed in Uplands. One or two quotations from the early part of Far from the Madding Crowd may do more than discussion to explain this:

The sky was clear--remarkably clear--and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse. . . . To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the role of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement.²³

²²Ibid., pp. 194-195.

²³Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 9.

When Gabriel Oak looked at the sky:

For a moment he seemed impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene, or rather with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man.²⁴

These two quotations do show the indifference of nature to man, but at the same time there is an attraction or an attractiveness in the appearance nature presents to Gabriel Oak's consciousness here that suggests a touch of something more than just indifference and hostility in the relationship between the two. Although Mary Ellen Chase often, like Hardy, found nature "indifferent, if not hostile" to man, she also found sometimes a beneficence in nature, or at least in what man feels from nature. The point here is that there is more evidence in Hardy's work of man's subjective response to nature than Miss Chase credits in her study. This very element, of which she makes very little, may yet have influenced her own view of nature in spite of herself. This may represent tenuous reasoning, but it is what suggests itself when Uplands, Hardy from Serial to Novel, Far from the Madding Crowd, and "Two Readings of Earth" are read together.

Uplands, however, is the work of most concern here, and that novel reveals various facets of Miss Chase's conception of nature. There is a view of nature independent of man:

There was a maturity about the stripped pasture slopes in the sun, a baffling sense of abundance and plenty. They brooded in still comfort while the hours stole quietly on. (p. 123)

There is nature which affects man and which reveals its own paradox to man, even though it is unconcerned with man:

²⁴Ibid., pp. 13-14.

A cloud passed for a moment over the sun, and a great shadow stalked across the hills. From a beneficent land North Dorset grew in that instant, black-browed, sullen, menacing. Within the circle of Jarvis's arm Martha Crosby felt a shudder pull together his strong muscles, felt them involuntarily relax when a moment later the sun shone full and clear. (p. 97)

Mary Ellen Chase's concept of nature includes the large view as well as the small, the one that penetrates the consciousness of her characters as well as the one which remains outside. This view of Martha's sensitivity to nature reveals a bit of the self-consciousness which, in general, the characters of Uplands show in their response to nature:

To Martha the winter was less a menacing reality than a widespread mystic presence. To her now so close to the great mystery of human life, it was at once natural and inevitable that she should enter as far as might be into the hidden things of earth. She seemed, strangely enough, perhaps, not so much to behold as to share in the daily course of the hours, the swift coming of darkness. She could never escape the thought, foolish and unaccountable as it doubtless was, that in some mysterious way a part of her was mingled with the shimmering of the winter air, drifting with the snow over the fields, streaming with the Northern lights which on one bitter January night sought with their opalescent banners the inmost recesses of the white hills. Thus it was that the winter days, black or bright, held for her no terrors, but rather were pervaded with a beneficence. . . . (p. 283)

The force of nature most frequently mentioned in Uplands is the tide. Miss Chase is also to make special use of the tide in Mary Peters and she reveals her own personal feeling about it in A Goodly Fellowship. It seems reasonable to suppose that she wished the tide in Uplands to be a significant aspect of the setting although she does not give it the same dramatic or philosophical force that it has in Mary Peters. Yet the tide, so often present in Uplands, bears into the reader's consciousness almost more strongly than does the land

itself. Colin Holliday of all the characters is most aware of it. He opens the story playing a game with the tide, and then reflecting:

That oncoming tide against which even kings were powerless,
which swept the marshes, drowning the sound of the protest-
ing grass, which at its full lay dark and ominous beneath
the moon, was like life, against the relentlessness of which
who could stand? (p. 4)

This reflection might well be compared to Miss Chase's comment about Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native: "Against the dull immensity of the heath its inhabitants are analogous in Hardy's suggestion to the insignificance of human struggle against the all-pervading and overpowering force of Nature."²⁵

In the night Colin is aware of the tide with that supersensory perception sometimes present in the reactions Mary Ellen Chase's characters have to nature: "He somehow sensed its boundlessness, the rhythm of its deep, solemn motion, its great, noiseless breathing that filled the silent air" (p. 12). Jarvis Craig shares this same kind of awareness, as he "could perceive rather than hear the inevitable movement of the tide" (p. 59). And Jarvis and Martha together sense it, "... the great quiet streaming of the full tide made itself felt to them" (p. 29). Miss Abby's lack of sensitivity is underscored when "her ear could not catch its mysterious undertones" (p. 34). Sometimes the tide is just there to complete a scene; sometimes it is an aid to reflection. When Martha felt "a great desire for she knew not what. . . the still, high water, pale now in the early twilight, suggested it to her by the very contrast of its own fullness" (pp. 18-19).

²⁵Chase, Hardy, p. 195.

The tide is also used figuratively to describe the feelings of Jarvis: "At this moment of flood tide in himself all things seemed easy" (p. 61). Later, "And with his surprise and swift contempt, not unmixed with fear, there came surging back throughout his whole being, with the relentlessness of the full tide, the loathing of his own life, the utter hopelessness of all his dreams" (p. 62).

On the whole, in Uplands, Miss Chase is more successful in making felt the tide and what she finds its special nature to be than she is in making any specific, functional use of it artistically. It seems that at this stage of her writing she is revealing her own response to various manifestations of nature and her understanding, partly intuitive and partly learned from such a writer as Hardy, that good literary use can be made of such material. Although she will not become the great master he was, she will gain in her control of her material and will use it in ways perhaps more distinctly her own.

Miss Chase's summary of Hardy's conception of nature is this: "Though man may be related to Nature through his very closeness to her, she can have no regard for him in his struggles. Indeed, in Hardy's grim philosophy, if he would escape tragedy, he will not struggle."²⁶ But in Uplands the author makes clear that it is her philosophy that only through a struggle does life become fulfilled for man. Her statement of this through Martha's understanding is also a statement of the theme of Uplands and of her reason for considering the story a romance rather than a tragedy:

²⁶Ibid.

Now she needed no metaphysician or mystic to tell her that the only real tragedy is the lack of that abundant life which in its spiritual fullness can triumph over all the sad variety of earthly pain. That lack, she knew, was the tragedy she had feared and fled from. The isolation and poverty of North Dorset, the losing fight against a barren land, these were in themselves but its able hand-maidens and henchmen; reticence and restraint the chains they forged and bound with. Sarah Craig had known that tragedy and had been unable to keep open her way out; she and Jarvis through their new love had escaped it; Miss Abby had seized the unlovely means in her power and beaten it. (p. 278)

Miss Abby, in spite of the fact that she is a two-dimensional, perhaps a type character, supplies an important element in Uplands. She shares with many of Miss Chase's later women characters, and even to an extent with Martha, that trait named "vein of iron" by Ellen Glasgow, but portrayed by other women novelists of the twentieth century. But Miss Abby of Uplands lacks that completeness of "vein of iron" characters which Miss Chase draws in Sarah and Mary Peters of Mary Peters and in Abigail Crockett and Hannah in Silas Crockett.

Miss Abby represents that aspect of New England regionalism which, perhaps to its detriment, makes this a regional novel, for there is a kind of universality in the idyllic story of Martha and Jarvis. Percy H. Boynton's observation that Miss Chase has "not been primarily concerned with Puritanism" but has "woven it into" her "narratives"²⁷ is essentially true of Uplands, although there is no evidence in his treatment of Miss Chase's work that he ever read this early novel. There is, however, more Puritanism, or what has descended from it, in Uplands

²⁷"Two New England Regionalists," College English, I (January, 1940), 299.

than in other novels of hers, and it is less skillfully woven into the narrative. There is implicit Puritanism, the kind which is woven in, in the Craig family and in Mrs. Holliday of Uplands, but the kind of Puritanism Miss Chase is obviously critical of is represented by Miss Abby. Miss Chase gives Miss Abby a semi-humorous treatment, but sees little good in her Bible Society, evangelistic journeyings, and revival meetings, except that they have brought Miss Abby personal release from the restrictions of North Dorset. Later in A Goodly Heritage and also by implication in Mary Peters, the author shows her lack of sympathy for the strand of Puritanism which developed into the emotionalism of the revival meeting and its conversions, and which seems to have lingered late in the state of Maine. Miss Abby's particularly unlovely embodiment of it has similarities in the background from which Mrs. Gowan, a character in The Lovely Ambition, comes.

The Puritanism Miss Chase is concerned with in Uplands is a Puritanism not of the past, but of the time of her story. There is little in Uplands of that past which she depicts so carefully in the books she writes in the thirties. Uplands is predominantly a novel of place. Place and past are both important to Miss Chase in the long run, and often they are mingled. In Uplands, perhaps because it depends so little on the past, she achieves just a little of the quality which she recognized as an accomplishment in Thomas Hardy, when she wrote in a new introduction to Far from the Madding Crowd:

What was his real purpose? I believe it was to capture the **genius and the** spirit of place, in this case, of course, the Wessex countryside, but Wessex only as symbolic of the spirit of place itself, of the personality

and power which environment may possess and through which it may vastly stimulate and increase the aesthetic and spiritual apperception. (p. xix)

Without attempting to compare her artistic success to Hardy's one might reiterate that his example as well as her own familiarity with the Maine countryside could have had its part in the creation of Uplands. All her previous stories have shown her concern for place but in none of them has her development of place been so full as it is here. She has overcome some of the stylistic stumbling blocks which mar Mary Christmas and she has widened her stride, for this is her first full-length novel. Without the experience of writing Uplands, she might have been less successful with Mary Peters.

Uplands is a tentative novel. If Miss Chase began with the idea of creating in her fiction one general place, a Wessex of the Maine coast, she soon abandoned it. Why did she say the novel should be burned? That idea too she gave up, at least by 1935, when she allowed a new edition of Uplands to be published. There may be a reason for her statement which she alone understands. Perhaps she had become too much aware of the weaknesses of the book: her lack of success in unifying all the material she attempts to include, the uncertain structure of the book, the flatness of the characters, her dependence on an unexplained accident to develop even the simple plot, the emotionalism, which "at first glance strikes one [reviewer] as over-stressed sentimentality."²⁸ (The reviewer never says how it might look at a second glance.) If there is sentimentality it comes from an excess rather than a falseness in the feelings described. On the same topic, another

²⁸Transcript, p. 4.

reviewer finds in the tragic incidents of the story "never a suspicion of inappropriate softness or sentimentality."²⁹ Whatever weakness may have distressed the author, one critic observes that Uplands "at times rises to superb literary eminences."³⁰

It should be remembered that it was the author herself who gave the clue that she wished Uplands to be considered a romance. Certainly it has many characteristics of a romance, in spite of its particularly realistic details in everyday life as well as in nature. Perhaps Miss Chase, when she finished her book, realized that it lacked some elements of realism and used this preliminary suggestion to acknowledge the fact, for with all the varying opinions about the differences between novel and romance, no one would be likely to disagree with the statement that, "Doubtless the main difference between the novel and the romance is in the way they view reality."³¹

This distinction was made very carefully by Richard Chase, who in The American Novel and Its Tradition substantiated the presence in American literature of what he termed the novel-romance. This he maintained was a break from the English tradition, which, though not without its romances, has been mainly realistic. Chase wrote:

But the fact seems to be that the history of the American novel is not only the history of the rise of realism but also of the repeated discovery of the uses of romances, and that this will continue to be so.³²

²⁹Saturday Review, IV, 223.

³⁰Review of Uplands, Independent, CXIX (September 24, 1927), 311.

³¹Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1957), p. 12.

³²Ibid., p. xii.

The neatness with which one can fit Uplands into Chase's definition, tempts one to do just that. At the beginning of his book he discussed contradictions and the use of pastoral idylls to resolve them.³³ The contradiction of Uplands has been pointed out and its idyllic qualities described. It would be possible to say about it, "The characters and events have actually a kind of abstracted simplicity about them,"³⁴ and also to note the absence of "a generally receptive intelligence in the midst of things."³⁵ In considering the realism of the story, one might borrow Chase's definition of "romance as something that in the novel arises from and modifies realism."³⁶

This tendency toward romance will be most fully illustrated in Miss Chase's short novel Dawn in Lyonesse, even though that deals with English subject matter. It is present in all of her novels, but in others, Silas Crockett, for example, it exerts less modifying effect on the realism. Miss Chase's dissatisfaction with Uplands may have come from her inability to resolve or reconcile her respect for Hardy with her natural tendency to follow in a tradition of her native literature. At any rate, although she continues to develop her skill in the depiction of nature and of place, there is less cause to suspect that Thomas Hardy has inspired what she is attempting to do. It took her a little time to realize that no matter what one writer admires in another, to do the best she is capable of she must go her own way.

³³Ibid., p. 1.

³⁴Ibid., p. 5.

³⁵Ibid., p. 23.

³⁶Ibid., p. 246.

CHAPTER III

EARLY ESSAYS

"Old knowledge brightens into new."

From first to last, words as separate identities have fascinated Mary Ellen Chase. From the careful, self-conscious selection of words in His Birthday to the simpler, yet dignified use of them in her latest children's books, she demonstrates this fascination continually if not constantly. Besides demonstrating it, she discusses it through her characters' responses and her own. In Mary Christmas the child Cynthia loves words, in Uplands the poet Colin muses on blue, in A Goodly Fellowship the author's mother talks to her children about words, and Mary Ellen Chase the college teacher does the same to her students. In The White Gate she devotes an essay to words. The repetition of certain words and phrases through all her writing reveals the ones she especially favors. Very early the reader becomes aware of her addiction to the word swept, particularly when it is concretely compounded--sun-swept, fog-swept, windswept, etc. It takes somewhat longer to notice the repetition of a more abstract but more pivotal word such as beneficent or beneficence, which appears by no means for the first time in The Golden Asse and Other Essays, 1929, but often enough there to attract special attention.

In these essays and others Miss Chase searches in all experience for what is beneficent. In fact, all her writings, fiction and non-fiction, share to a large extent this same objective. Sometimes she uses the more

commonplace term the good life, to which, of course, all things beneficent contribute. Her fondness for Biblical phraseology leads her to borrow St. Paul's words for what is worth the seeking: ". . . whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. . . ." But the word beneficent, or a variant, is most often the clue to any one of those recurring values which taken together would go far toward spelling out Miss Chase's total philosophy. As they appear individually, some one of them usually underscores the thought which she is at the time trying to make predominant. To Mary Christmas, "the past with all its beneficence" (p. 124) is important, and through her it is also important to the Wescott children. In Uplands it is the kinder side of nature: "Had the marriage of the spring and the land touched her too with its beneficence?" (p. 91) In The Silver Shell, it is a small beautiful thing which brings beneficence. In a later essay "Head and Hands" (first delivered as an address to the American Association of University Women), it is the belief in the beneficence of wisdom and learning which she considers the first Puritan heritage that would be cherished today.¹ In the text The Writing of Informal Essays, which she must have been preparing concurrently with the writing of some of the essays in The Golden Asse and Other Essays, she is finally concerned with "beneficent ideas."²

In an age that has given much attention to an exploration of those

¹Mary Ellen Chase, "Head and Hands Working Together," Common Ground, I (Autumn, 1940), 5.

²Mary Ellen Chase and Margaret Eliot MacGregor, The Writing of Informal Essays (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1928).

aspects of life which are lacking in beneficence, this attitude of Miss Chase's may seem out of keeping, unrealistic, or even superficial. Contrast rather than actuality is perhaps responsible for this. In those areas of life with which she deals--and she leaves many untouched--there is a core of very real substance. If this substance has more often the quality of reiteration than of exploration, it is no less serious or attractive, at least to many of her readers. It is clearly her belief that if the lessons of the ages are not repeated they may be forgotten. When she reiterates it is usually because she intends to do so. Reiteration such as hers has its own measure of creativity.

For the most direct statements concerning the attitudes any author may have toward life, a reader will look to the most personal of his non-fiction. With Miss Chase, her essays serve even better than her two volumes of autobiography. She had been writing essays, or magazine articles, for a dozen years when a collection of them called The Golden Asse and Other Essays appeared in book form. She has continued to contribute to magazines all through her many writing years. In the early years she wrote both short stories and articles or essays; but in spite of the fact that in 1930 she won a \$2,500 prize for the short story "Salesmanship" in a Pictorial Review contest, she soon gave up the writing of short stories and continued only with the non-fiction magazine contributions. In a sense the early stories and the early essays can be linked because they come close together in subject matter, tone, and execution.

Although Mary Ellen Chase is undoubtedly best known for her novels, her non-fiction bulks larger than her fiction. Study of her non-fiction

is important because of its content, its revelations about the author, and its literary merit. Before turning to the essays specifically, it is worth noting the odd degree of inseparability of essay (the term essay, it must be admitted, is of all literary terms one of the most amorphous) and fiction in Miss Chase's writing. There is a pertinent observation in one text of which Miss Chase was a co-author. The Writing of Informal Essays appeared in 1928 just before the collection The Golden Asse and Other Essays. In this text, it is suggested, under a category called Nature Essays, "that Hardy in his novels, especially Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, is a treasure house of ideas and of moods which no would-be essayist of nature should allow himself to miss" (p. 258). Since Miss Chase was herself a Hardy scholar, it might be assumed that she of the two authors, was responsible for this suggestion. It is also true that, as Virginia Hall Smith comments in "Down East Today," Miss Chase's own novels are "told in essay style."

Mrs. Hall, writing in 1938, also made a prediction: "The Golden Asse was quick to prophesy to critics the approach of a new and prominent essayist in literature."³ Mrs. Hall's predictions have not been completely accurate. The little attention paid Miss Chase by the critics and the larger attention of the reading public have turned to her novels and those of her non-fiction works not properly classified as essays. Yet, in a way, Mrs. Hall is right when she calls the essay Miss Chase's

³Virginia Smith Hall, Down East Today, a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Major Honors in English at the University of Maine in May 1938, p. 105.

"most talented branch of writing" (p. 101). Although it is impossible to agree with another statement made by Mrs. Hall, which sounds harsher in quotation than in context: "And the books by which she has become known are really no more than extended personal essays," it is not difficult to share the opinion, even twenty-five years later, that the finest moments of her writing come in her essays and in certain portions of her other writing which, extracted, stand almost complete in a form which might easily be considered essays of one type or another. This, of course, does not say all there is to be said about Miss Chase's accomplishments, but it seems an important point to make. It may also be the explanation for the frequent reprinting of excerpts of her writing in periodicals and anthologies. Just for example, a college text, published in 1961 and entitled Using Prose: Readings for College Composition, takes for its first selection several early pages from the novel Windswept.⁴

Besides containing some of her finest writing and the most direct statements of some of her thoughts and attitudes, the essays, taken by themselves, offer an opportunity to examine, in a single representative form, the changes which have taken place in Miss Chase's writing as she developed her style and matured in her thinking. In no other form has she written so regularly. It must be explained here that essay is being used as a very inclusive term--almost inclusive enough to cover all the short non-fiction pieces Miss Chase has written. In fact, it might almost be used to cover a few of her short stories.

⁴Donald W. Lee and William T. Moynihan, eds., Using Prose: Readings for College Composition (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1961), pp. 1-2.

No book by Miss Chase after The Golden Asse and Other Essays has been published as a collection of essays. Even that book, in spite of its title, skirts around the word essay by referring, in its acknowledgment, to the contents as "essays and sketches." Although the essay-like tendencies already mentioned are to be found in a number of her other books, none of them, except This England and The White Gate, could with any reason be called collections of essays. Even these purport to be something more, and perhaps something less. Each has a unifying theme: This England the country named in its title and The White Gate the topic named in its subtitle, Adventures in the Imagination of a Child. The divisions of each are called chapters in the table of contents, and are referred to in the foreword of This England as sketches and in The White Gate as chapters. Still it seems that neither book has any special coherence except that offered by its subject matter. The individual "chapters" of each seem to have enough subjectivity, literary quality, and individual completeness to satisfy almost any definition of an essay. The avoidance of the term essay is but typical of our times, although no satisfactory substitute seems to be available. Most of the magazine pieces Miss Chase wrote would more likely be termed articles, although, with perhaps a few exceptions, they have more literary merit than the term article implies. In fact, Mary Ellen Chase, herself, writing about Agnes Repplier in "Dean of American Essayists," intimates--not of Miss Repplier, of course--that the essay in the course of American writing had "degenerated into the article."⁵

⁵Mary Ellen Chase, "The Dean of American Essayists," The Commonweal, XVIII (August 18, 1933), 384.

In writing about Miss Repplier at seventy-five, Miss Chase indicates somewhat wistfully that there is no one to take her place in American letters. In another age Miss Chase herself might have been able to do so, as the best of her essays show. In her own age it would have been impossible, and she had the sagacity to turn to other things--novels, popular commentary on the Bible, biography, and even autobiography. Miss Chase's definition, not of an essay but of an essayist, is revealing, not just as a definition, but of her own early tendency toward a bit of feminine pomposity which later mellowed with the years. Writing of Miss Repplier's early books, she says, "Indeed those delectable pages stamp her, even thus early, as one of the relatively few persons in this world who can be safely entrusted with an education." She finds:

. . . one of the indispensable traits of the essayist, a wholesome aversion to egregious pietism and other prerequisites of that aristocratic spirit which underlies and unifies the true essay; a quick, perhaps premature discrimination between rabid and harmless scholarship. . . an unquenchable buoyance of spirit that, whether in convents or in the world, forever maketh all things new; a sense of humor that . . . pierced through shams and saw things straight and⁶ clear; and an instinctive flare for the dramatic. . . .

If this reveals something of Miss Chase as well as of Miss Repplier, it is only what an essay may be expected to do.

Although the essay is not popular today as an art form a good deal of non-fiction is read. Among the many collections of non-fiction writing prepared for use in college courses in freshman English is one whose editor, Leslie Fiedler, is temerarious enough to call The Art of the Essay. In his introduction Fiedler has certain things to say about the

⁶Ibid.

essay, particularly as it exists today, which are pertinently applicable to Miss Chase's essays as well as to those he includes in The Art of the Essay. Montaigne's invention he defines most simply as "the tentative, exploratory form. . . . whose essential subject is always the self."⁷

Through the exploration in the essays she writes, Miss Chase, like the authors discussed by Fiedler, seems not only to reveal herself, but at the same time to learn about herself. It is possible to see in her own essay-writing the development, on a broader scale, which she was hoping to have college students gain from their writing:

[The instructor] must present his students with some practical and simple method of procedure by means of which they may be encouraged to appreciate and to utilize their own experience and through which, it may not be entirely vain to hope, opinions and ideas, yea even perceptions, may eventually find ample room in their somewhat expanded minds.⁸

In Mrs. Hall's opinion, "Her best writing is based on personal experience."⁹ The personal experience Miss Chase uses is so often the experience of her childhood that Fiedler's comment on a group of other modern essayists is equally true of her: "The clue to the self seems to them . . . the lost, original, selfhood; and the search for the child one was, and in some disconcertingly essential way, still is."¹⁰ In Miss Chase's instance, the search into childhood has seemed to increase its rewards as her distance from it has grown, but it was impor-

⁷ Leslie Fiedler, ed., The Art of the Essay (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1958), p. 1.

⁸ Chase, Writing of Informal Essays, p. iv.

⁹ Hall, p. 98.

¹⁰ Fiedler, p. 5.

tant to her from the first.

The Golden Asse and Other Essays is as filled with the "bright images" of her own experiences as was her grandmother's "fancy-aided memory" which clung for so many years to a visit in Cadiz.¹¹ Most of these images represent her own childhood experiences, although several of them reveal the charm exerted on her by the way of life within a Catholic convent. In fact, one of the essays, "The Saints in Maine," is a protest that her childhood was denied those particular bright images which an acquaintance with the legends of the saints would have supplied. It is quite characteristic of her own personal approach to life that she creates for the reader and for herself new images from what she may have missed rather than dwelling long on her losses. It is not Catholic theology which draws her as strongly as it is Catholic culture and custom, for her thought about it all hinges on "the Greek ideal of a barely discernible separation between the ethical and the aesthetic" (p. 146). Her own writing bears witness in this book and elsewhere that however far apart these two may have been forced by the Puritan influences of her childhood she had no difficulty in perceiving the aesthetic quite as well as the ethical. Other essays, particularly later ones, display her respect for certain virtues which on examination would appear to be fostered by Puritan ways and ideals, in spite of her rejection of the negative aspects of Puritanism.

It is perhaps contrast itself which makes convent life fascinating to her. Of the eight essays in The Golden Asse, two besides "The Saints

¹¹ Mary Ellen Chase, The Golden Asse and Other Essays (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), p. 52.

in Maine" celebrate it. "On Kitchens and Cloisters" is strong in its sensory appeals which range from the "delectable and aromatic odors" which Sister Ambrosine carried from the kitchen "to Mass concealed in the folds of her gown" (p. 31) to the rain at Saint Hilda's where "The skies that pour down crystal and silver are beneficent" A brief paragraph about this same rain will illustrate that the quality of Miss Chase's descriptive writing so often praised in her novels belongs to her essay writing too. In fact, she seems to be illustrating her own advice given in The Art of Narration that one of "the various ways by which you may gain pictorial charm and artistic effects" is by "an emphasis on the concrete."¹²

On such a mid-afternoon the gray walls take on a purple tinge like Massachusetts hills on a dull November day. The rain falls upon the roof in a subdued, rhythmic undertone, strikes with a sharp spatter the wide leaves of the grape-vine, and drips from the eaves into widening pools with clear musical tones like the running notes of the clavichord. The poplars on the slopes increase their silver; the stalks of larkspur over the distant garden hedge are wisps of blue smoke. (p. 36)

It would not seem that the Puritan influences of Maine had done too much to inhibit the eyes which saw and the ears which heard this scene from an English convent.

Another essay, "Mystical Mathematicks," celebrates again the "beneficence of Saint Hilda's" and also the author's own willingness, which permeates so much of her writing, to give the wealth of the past its due. Once more it is likely that if her Maine childhood had not given her a lively curiosity, an ability to do physical work, and a propensity to

¹²Mary Ellen Chase and Frances K. Del Plaine, The Art of Narration (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1926), p. 121.

thoughtfulness, all "the comeliness of that retreat"--St. Hilda's--would not alone have made her appreciate "the eternal geometrizing of God" that Sister Irenaeus, the gardener of St. Hilda's, explained to her. She needed also what she had taken with her: a knowledge of Sir Thomas Browne's The Garden of Cyrus, which was so important in understanding Sister Irenaeus's theorizing, and her own gardening experience, which was so necessary in assisting Sister Irenaeus's labors. These helped her to find that "there old knowledge brightens slowly into new; there the actuality of old truths is once more held fast and cherished" (p. 108). Whether Miss Chase herself would, according to her own classifications in The Writing of Informal Essays, call "Mystical Mathematicks" an objective essay on a place, or on a person, or on an author, or a subjective essay of personal experience or of reminiscences, or one of perception, it would be hard to say, and perhaps unimportant to do so.

In The Writing of Informal Essays, the student is warned that the only requirement of the more personal essay is that the writer "must have something to say. And that broadly interpreted means that he must have learned to value his own experience and environment." ¹³ The five essays in The Golden Asse and Other Essays which depict scenes of the author's childhood show that she has learned to value her "own experience and environment." The evaluation, of course, is either implicit or left for direct statement in some other place. "The Golden Asse" describes experiences with a family donkey which her father had obtained as payment of a legal fee, and whose "idiosyncratic hours of meditation and refreshment" along the roadside gave the author and her sister "Cynthia" "the

¹³Chase, Writing of Informal Essays, p. 199.

beneficence" of pleasant outdoor reading. "Not in Cadiz" is a twice-told essay of her grandmother's visit as a young bride to that beautiful Spanish port. Cadiz became imaginatively important to Eliza Ann Chase's grandchildren: "Beneficent, careless city, jocosae Gades! How manifold and gracious were the gifts to our imaginations!" (p. 56) Cadiz also became a central image in Mary Peters, Miss Chase's next novel. "Have you Martin Chuzzlewit?" glorifies the game of "Authors," which gave the Chase children "the graciousness of good company" (p. 66) and "the desire to seek out that aristocracy of letters and to make our own its long and beneficent effects" (p. 65). "A Kitchen Parnassus" contains the winter atmosphere of the family kitchen as viewed from the top shelf of an old secretary by the children who were safely fastened there, out of the way of the cold drafts on the floor, for quiet hours with games and books, particularly books. The subject matter and impressions of all these essays work their way at one time or another into later writing--The White Gate, A Goodly Heritage, or the novels. Only "Wormwood--For Thoughts" seems never to have been heard of again, perhaps because its chief impressions are not quite recapturable outside the totality of the whole essay.

"Wormwood--For Thoughts" is an essay of place, Piscataquis County, Maine, "alike an inland and an upland county." It is an essay of persons--the seventy-eight-year-old triplet great aunts of Mary Ellen Chase, to whom at thirteen one of them, Mary Ann, "had been like that great central lamp, overpowering the other lights by the fierce irradiation of her prodigal self" (p. 84). This simile suggested to the author in the Tiergarten at Berlin years after her visit to her great aunts shows

her own experience of thinking in comparative images. This is also a nature essay in its enumeration of the many herbs sought by "the once herbalist of Piscataquis County, Maine." It is an essay on books too, chief among them being American Medicinal Plants by Charles F. Mills-paugh, without which "Piscataquis County would be a sorry place" and whose repeated direction to let all herb brews "stay for eight days in a dark, cool place" was a fascination to young Mary Ellen. It is, of course, an essay of personal experience and reminiscence, although within the essay itself the author acknowledges that this kind of writing goes counter to the trend of the times: "one is painfully aware in these latter days of the name and the penalty attached in social and intellectual circles to one who is willfully reminiscent" (pp. 97-98). Miss Chase was indeed never to cease being "willfully reminiscent" in her writing. On the contrary, in a later essay, "Time to Oneself," she stresses the pleasure to be gained from reminiscence:

One day I spent hours in attempting to remember just what I had done in what place during the summer holidays of the past twenty-five years. It had the merit of bringing sharply home to me how blurred most experiences become, not because of their lack of value in themselves, but merely because we have not taken time either to appreciate them while they were near at hand or to recollect and re-live them in the years following On another day I lived over my life as a young child trying honestly to bring up from the past those objects and persons, places and pastimes, which had gone into the process of making me. It was fun in the weeks afterwards to come upon bits of me at five and ten and thirteen in my tastes and desires, habits and prejudices, and to recognize them as I had not done before.¹⁴

This touches on one of the values of the past to the present which

¹⁴Mary Ellen Chase, "Time to Oneself," Yale Review, XXX (Autumn, 1940), 135.

Miss Chase is generally so keenly aware of. This past is the past of one's personal memories. Miss Chase deals so often with childhood memories that one is left to judge that in her opinion whatever is stored within one's experience at that time of life is of great value ever afterward, whether it is willfully recollected or whether it returns as half-realized impressions which come of their own accord. Of the experience of recollection it is obvious that Miss Chase herself shares with Solace Crockett in Silas Crockett "the knowledge that age in some persons accentuates rather than dulls emotion and that in the recollection lies more reality than in the immediate experience" (p. 270).

There are characteristics of style in this early volume of essays, such as the author's skill with description, which form a strong basis for the very best of her writing to come. There are other characteristics which she later changes to the improvement of her style, and some which are prophetic of what she is to learn to do with it. A paragraph from "Wormwood-For Thought" illustrates some of these. The climax of the essay comes when Aunt Mary Ann takes her niece into her confidence:

There was more in that soliloquy that I would fain recapture but cannot, anecdotes of country cures brought about by the herb of herbs, legends connected with its use in far-off lands, pertinent advice as to its efficacy in the minor ailments that beset us. I recall instead the first touches of color in that quiet hill country, the red of the sumachs, the bronze of the hazel bushes. But that which she said as she rose to go I shall never forget, though the words may be my own in the sad place of her lovelier, more native speech. (p. 96)

The use of such an archaic expression as would fain is a mannerism of her early style, and it grates more harshly on the modern ear taught to relish simplicity of language than it must have on her own, which was tuned to delight in all the variations, good and bad, of the language

used in her girlhood reading. All the essays in The Golden Asse and others as well indicate the variety of this reading. It is easy to speculate that a family of reading children such as the Chases would have made their own imitative adaptations from the language of their books, and that a child like Mary Ellen who loved words and wanted to write would find it difficult to resist drawing these from her storehouse on later occasions, for her own delight, even in the face of opposing literary tastes.

Not only archaisms, but a somewhat formal, heavy measure connotes the "literary" influences of her reading. There is not so much of this in the paragraph above as elsewhere, but "pertinent advice as to its efficacy in the minor ailments that beset us" may serve as an example. This quality gives dignity, beauty, and strength to her style on the one hand, and illustrates the kind of language whose disappearance some modern writers are "engineering" and against which others, William H. Whyte, Jr., for one, are inveighing. The same quality may also in its weakest moments give Miss Chase's style a tone of affectation, although there are times when she uses it as a device for humor. Mrs. Hall recognizes this in her comment on The Golden Asse and Other Essays: "They range from the more dignified and serious 'On Kitchens and Cloisters' to the humorous 'Not in Cadiz,' written in the same dignified vein and becoming the more amusing thereby."¹⁵

Of course, a pretentious style used as a device for humor is effective only when the reader is willing to believe that the author intended it so. Among the earliest of Miss Chase's magazine articles is one

¹⁵Hall, p. 103.

written in 1917, "How Four Girls 'Discovered' Maine," which is useful to show how far she had progressed even up to The Golden Asse. The article is a description of the missionary work of the Rev. Alexander MacDonald among the islands of Maine, and of a trip on his yacht the Sunbeam taken in August of 1916 by four girls, of whom Miss Chase was one. This experience no doubt supplied some of the material she later used in The Silver Shell. The article has a basic air of chumminess and the reader is presumably drawn into it by the frequent use of rhetorical questions and the second person pronoun. At moments she soars into rhetoric which, while honest, is slightly inappropriate to the tone she has set. For example, she has said of Crowley's Island, "Beaten upon by the irresistible forces of loneliness and isolation, they have lost the American spirit which was theirs in the beginning and are sad, bleeding and broken."¹⁶ This is the same balanced style which on other occasions lends dignity to her writing, but here she goes a bit too far and becomes histrionic, especially by the time she reaches "sad, bleeding and broken." Here the subject matter is too serious to allow the reader to find any suggestion of humor in the elevated style. One more example will not only show the same tendency in this very early style, but also a slight lack of the complete integrity which usually marks all her writing. Here she seems to deny her own deep roots in Maine, which ordinarily are such a matter of pride to her. She writes:

For lo! the coast of Maine has become glorified by the opportunity for service. It is now no longer the spot where I build my summer home and you rival it with yours;

¹⁶Mary Ellen Chase, "How Four Girls 'Discovered' Maine," Ladies' Home Journal, XXXIV (May, 1917), 18.

no longer a place where we meet on golf links and at tennis tournaments. It changed for four of us during that week on the Sunbeam--changed with the sudden realization that a summer colony, with all the pleasures therein, is only the smallest part of its rugged, rock-bound coast line.¹⁷

Although one is tempted to judge that as a native she should have known this all along, to be fair one must remember that it takes time to "discover" even what is one's own. That discovery, as was pointed out earlier in this chapter, seems to be the experience of all her writing, especially the essays--discovering her own.

To return to the paragraph from "Wormwood-- For Thoughts" -- there the author makes a confession of one of her problems in writing when she says, ". . . the words may be my own in the sad place of her lovelier, more native speech." It is understandable that the representation of native speech in writing may have more than once presented itself as a difficulty to her. She seldom attempts complete reproduction of it, and is no doubt wise in this. When a character's background warrants it, she will allow him to be ungrammatical. As time goes on she becomes skillful in using occasional phrasing and choice of vocabulary in the speech of a particular character to confirm his time and place and sometimes his nature. The doctor in Mary Peters and Abigail Crockett in Silas Crockett are instances of this. It has been said earlier that there is a tentative quality to Miss Chase's early essays. The author is trying herself. She is writing because it is a joy for her to do so and a double joy to have her writing published. But she is not yet completely sure of her skill. The admission of her inability to cope fully

¹⁷Ibid.

with her aunt's native speech is not the only admission in the volume that thoughts and feelings are not always put down with the same easy clarity with which they sometimes come to one. At the end of "Mystical Mathematicks" she speaks of "that beneficence of Saint Hilda's which I have tried to suggest in these stupid and inadequate words" (p. 108).

There is also in the quotation from "Wormwood--For Thoughts" a bit of narrative technique which the author uses more fully in some of the novels to come. As impressed as the girl Mary Ellen at thirteen was with all her great aunt had to say about wormwood, the scene in which it was said was what remained in her adult memory: "I recall instead the first touches of color in that quiet hill country, the red of the sumachs, the bronze of the hazel bushes." In a sense this is less a narrative technique than an observation of experience. In both ways it comes close to the center of the author's whole view of life and of her artistic means of presenting it. Specific things, concrete in a person's experience and memory and even imagination, often serve as a focus for emotion or meaning. Sometimes the thing used has an especially developed relationship to the emotion or meaning; sometimes just by being on the scene it absorbs the feeling which is too full or the thought which is too abstract to go elsewhere. Here is the slightest instance of this usage, but it is significant for its relation to other more developed or more complex examples of it. Mary Peters and Silas Crockett are soon to yield some of these. The Silver Shell in a somewhat less accomplished way does the same.

What the author did remember of her great aunt's talk on wormwood, even in her own wording, is interesting in itself:

Wormwood's not only for the body. It's for the mind as well. It makes thoughts, so to speak. I've seen it time and again. Taken right, it's bound to work. I've known it to cure broken hearts and to put life into them. But there are folks in this world who'd claim I was plain crazy to say such a thing. (pp. 96-97)

Her theory might have been viewed with less skepticism today when surprising new qualities are being discovered in modern drugs.

Mrs. Hall, in commenting on Mary Ellen Chase's essays, particularly The Golden Asse and Other Essays, says, "She has never intended the essay for more than entertainment; she has never become didactic; she has never intentionally pointed a moral."¹⁸ This is not quite true, but more of the essays in which she has intentionally pointed a moral have come after Mrs. Hall made her observation. Even so, Miss Chase has from the beginning obeyed her own injunction that "He [the writer of the more personal essay] must have something to say." In spite of the informality of many of her essays and even the seeming lightness of her subject matter, when they are read all together and with the author's books both of fiction and of non-fiction, there is a pattern of values which reveals itself as changing very little except in a growing maturity of outlook and a developing realization on the part of the author as to precisely what the shape of the pattern is. As often as not Miss Chase is more concerned with specifying the place where values may be found than in defining the values themselves. It has already been said that the most direct statement of the author's attitudes toward life come in the essays, although even there they are presented indirectly as well as directly.

Two essays, more formal than those in The Golden Asse, or than any of her others for that matter, were published in Common Ground in the

¹⁸Hall, p. 101.

years 1940 and 1943. The first, "Head and Hands Working Together," is "an abridgement and revision of an address she gave before the convention of the American Association of University Women in Denver, June, 1939, published in the A.A.U.W. Journal for January, 1940." It contains a discussion of the American heritage from the Puritans who came here in 1630 and of the author's own personal experience of learning from the school reader. The second, "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," is part of an address which Miss Chase delivered in Philadelphia before the annual conference of the Secondary Education Board. These and some other uncollected periodical publications of the thirties and forties give straightforward expression to views which have always been involved in her writing. She has always been concerned with the education of children and youth. She has always looked to the past for the best heritage it had to give. For her the strands of this heritage, inseparable as they are, are Puritan and Greek, Biblical and maritime, in books and in things, in language and in people. Usually she is able to view both education and heritage in the light of her own personal experiences. On the whole she is searching for what will make life satisfying and intelligible, or, to use her words, "for capital for living joyously and well in a confused world."¹⁹

What criticism she has for her own age centers largely on its means and hindrances to the development of the individual as an individual. "Too many parents force their children into group activities," she says. In "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," she finds some general weakness in American life:

¹⁹ Chase, "Time to Oneself," p. 139.

We no longer trust our own judgments; we are suspicious of our own impressions; we can no longer capture the essence of experiences because they are forever shared and commented upon by others. We can no longer find the inward and spiritual grace in the outward and visible sign of books, of music, of beautiful objects, of birds and trees and flowers, of snow and rain and mist, because we do not go out and look for them by ourselves. We cannot rise to the life immortal because we move in crowds and companies which are intent only upon the mortal.²⁰

She wrote these views before the word togetherness had assumed its recent good and bad connotations, but the worst of those would probably have suited her feeling about the idea represented in the word. She writes that we have "lost ourselves in the process" of adjustment to others. "We have become people, not persons"²¹ In another context in different words she says the same thing:

. . . we do not like to be by ourselves. . . . We have become people, not individuals. What was once individual and distinctive about us as individuals has been diluted until both strength and color have declined. And with this decline has gone much of our personal dignity.²²

But being herself more often positive than negative, she is more apt to extoll the value of solitude, which she has learned from personal experience. During solitude she had discovered "strongholds of security" in her mind and "also that I had more to give others from the unexpected gifts which I had received in solitude."²³ To one particular experience in solitude she applies a favorite term: "Never has solitude seemed at

²⁰Chase, "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," Common Ground, III (Winter, 1943), 68.

²¹Chase, "Time to Oneself," p. 131.

²²Chase, "An Ancient Democracy," p. 68.

²³Chase, "Time to Oneself," p. 137.

once so exhilarating and so beneficent."²⁴ Certainly this is an idea which receives concrete embodiment in Windswept. For all the influence of place on human relationships in that novel, the most memorable moments are the solitary experiences of a number of the characters.

Miss Chase also regrets the loss of discipline both self-imposed and that imposed on children. This is a part of her Puritan heritage whose value she never denies. She has always believed fervently in the efficacy of proper discipline, whether it affects behavior or learning. Her view of discipline in learning is attached to her valuation of the past:

The tendency in American education during these last years has been . . . away from the hard and toward the easy. Latin . . . is no longer encouraged. . . . Thus they never come into association with many of the thoughts which have made our civilization . . . nor do they experience the immeasurable value of the discipline required in the discovery of these thoughts.²⁵

It is important to realize that there is seldom any indication in Miss Chase's thinking that there is a portion of the past to which she believes it would be desirable to retreat. The value of an understanding of the past is, to her thinking, that it sheds light on what can make for the fullest life in the present. She believes that "colleges really exist for one thing: to make students understand that learning gives one of the greatest pleasures of anything in the world."²⁶ Not the learning of any particular subject matter, but the experience of learning, is a process which can be achieved only through some kind of

²⁴Mary Ellen Chase, "Confidences of a Lecturer," Commonweal, XVIII (May 26, 1933), 100.

²⁵Chase, "An Ancient Democracy," p. 70.

²⁶Chase, "Head and Hands," p. 4.

discipline. Like most New Englanders she must relate to the Puritan heritage in some way, even if that way becomes as it often does, rejection--she finds value not in any specific beliefs, but in belief itself. She concurs with Samuel Eliot Morison "that it does not matter what convictions the Puritans had; the wonderful thing was they had them."²⁷ This idea is not so startling in its context as it is separated from it. Without making any judgment of the Puritan religion itself, she is admiring their respect for their religion, and saying to her own age that it is a good thing to approach whatever values one believes in "through daily living and thinking" (p. 5). This is one of the best uses Miss Chase makes of the past, to show that it is good to have beliefs and values--not any particular ones, but whatever ones are meaningful to a group of people, or even to one person.

Miss Chase would never allow full authority to the past; rather its purpose is to give a kind of freedom to the individual in the present. Of one particular case she concludes, "Here was a matter in which he must obey a larger authority than that of his father, the authority of his own mind. . . ."²⁸

One's own mind is always sacred in Miss Chase's view. It is a part of the individuality she believes in. Writing during the Second World War, she says, "In these days when we all long to be of service in the defense of our democracy we must not lose sight of the fact that the defense of our minds and our spirits is such a service."²⁹ Just the

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸Mary Ellen Chase, "Are Parents Afraid of Their Children?" Ladies' Home Journal, LIV (March, 1937), 64.

²⁹Chase, "An Ancient Democracy," p. 65.

fact that the essay in which she says this takes its inspiration from Pericles' Oration to the Athenians during the time of war emphasizes the fact that she is not always looking at the past as a golden age. Rather she is looking here for a way to keep life good even in a time of change. It is the spirit with which these people of the past faced and solved their problems which attracted her. Although she does not revel in change for the sake of change, she does recognize the necessity for change:

A far worse state of mind is that in which one remains impervious to change and oblivious of the thoughts of those who honestly seek for what seems to them a better way of life.³⁰

The changes which come are personal changes as well as the changes of society. There is an odd contradiction in Miss Chase's view of past experience--a view which is more often stated in her non-fiction and demonstrated in her fiction. She is always hesitant to put full faith in what psychology has to teach. In relation to discipline she says:

We have lost faith partly through our indolence, partly through our half knowledge of certain alleged discoveries of certain of the new psychologists, whom we have interpreted far too literally. . . . We are, we are told, what we must be and we must be what we are.³¹

Perhaps, however, she intends more of her criticism for those who "have interpreted far too literally" than she does for the "alleged discoveries." Certainly in her writing she shows considerable understanding of the experiences which make people what they "must be." She frequently arrives by her own intuition at the kind of knowledge which the psychologists

³⁰Chase, "Are Parents," p. 64.

³¹Chase, "An Ancient Democracy," p. 67.

seek for in a more clinical fashion. The early experience which in the psychologist's view is so important in making us "what we are," is often of vital concern to her. This is, in fact, essentially her main thesis in Mary Peters, and it also must account for her willingness to write such a book as The White Gate, which includes some of the best of her later "essays." The personal experience she describes in "Time to One-self," of going back to her own experiences to understand herself, does not seem so drastically different from what the psychiatrist tries to help a patient do who for special reasons is unable to do this for himself.

It is possible to find apparent contradictions in what Miss Chase says about her feelings toward change within her own time. She can be specific, as when she says:

Personally, having been reared in a period of extreme discretion in conversation, I believe that a decent openness in speech and thought is wholesome both in itself and in its effects.³²

She can be typical. After relating the experience in her youth of being called for by her father after a party, she concludes: "The days of 10:30 and lanterns have gone beyond recall, nor does one pause to regret their passing."³³ What she does regret at one time or another is that certain common experiences or values have passed. When she, on rare occasions, indulges in a bit of personal nostalgia, it usually represents more of an individual emotional regression than it does any thoughtful desire to turn back time. In other words, she is displaying

³²Mary Ellen Chase, "I Like the Younger Generation," Ladies' Home Journal, LVI (December, 1939), 21.

³³Chase, "Are Parents," p. 62.

in action another result of the tenacity of early experience. It is her own background, more than the reality of the moment, which is responsible for her feeling in the following incident:

Last winter I spoke in a great city before a most sophisticated group of women in a magnificent club-house. A wave of homesickness swept over me as I rose and faced them . . . and in the front seat I found it, in the black-clad figure and thin little legs of an old, old woman. She had that light in her face I had missed in all the others, and on her legs visible beneath her stockings were what we used to call in a more golden age than this long flannel drawers. To her and her simplicity I said whatever I had to say and I shall never cease to look back upon her with thanksgiving.³⁴

This is one occasion where she seems to be giving herself up to the pure emotionalism of nostalgia, although it does point out respect for simplicity in life, or at least what seemed to represent that. Her use of the term "golden age" is a rare one, although she did once write a short story, with some implications of autobiography, entitled "The Golden Age." In that story the golden age is represented by a Vergil-reading farmer who in his innocence and simplicity is contrasted with his daughter and her professor, both of whom are more involved in the confusions of their day. The term "golden day" seems to have for Miss Chase more of the mythological meaning of a time of innocence and happiness than it does of an historical period of great cultural development. But she does not use the term much, and it is doubtful that the idea has been very significant in her thinking. She is drawn to too many past ages to settle for one to represent the ideal. She is too realistic and too optimistic, in spite of herself, to want from the past any more

³⁴Chase, "Confidences," p. 102.

than the pleasure which knowing it can give, and some help in facing the complexities of modern life. She is too concerned with the individual ever to be completely devoted to an age. Literature, not history, is her profession.

But if nostalgia is her occasional indulgence, it represents, as in the case of "the black-clad figure and the little thin legs of the old, old woman," the common desire of most people to be comforted by what has long been familiar. Usually, even in what is personally familiar to her, she looks at what might be useful to others too. In "Old Time Christmases in Maine," she is reminiscent about the Christmases of her childhood with their long preparations, ingenious gift-making and unhurried day. Her reminiscence, or nostalgia if one will, is a contrast to the rush, fatigue, over-elaborate gift-giving of a Christmas in New York. The details of the contrast are interesting, the implications obvious. It is the contrast itself which provokes the experience so typical of her essays: "Old Knowledge brightens into new." The old knowledge may be common cultural knowledge, or personal and individual. The important thing is that it "brightens into new."

It would be possible to classify Miss Chase's essays in categories other than the ones borrowed from her own book on Writing of Informal Essays, but these may be more useful for the later period of her essay writing. World War II makes a break between the early and later groups. There is no great inconsistency in the ideas, although the later ones are more specific and practical on the whole. The style changed only to become in general more able, more sincere, and less self-conscious.

There is one characteristic of her style which is predominantly

consistent with her thinking. It is her use of "bright images," to borrow her own phrase, the one she applied to her grandmother's recollections of Cadiz. Not only do bright images fill her writing, essays as well as fiction, but it is her belief that such images are an important part of one's experience, a portion of the good life she is always seeking and is anxious to have sought. The images may be those to be seen in nature—"trees, birds, and flowers."³⁵ Or they may be possessed; she repeats Pericles' reminder to the Athenians:

. . . to find delight each day in those things which at once lighten and make secure the human spirit . . . and in a peculiarly human and simple way he reminds them of their homes, the very houses they have built for themselves, and he encourages them to take pleasure in the actual things, the actual possessions and objects within their homes.³⁶

Some of her own bright images recorded in The Golden Asse and Other Essays have already been mentioned. The other essays hold many, some more than others, of course. They may be very homely in nature, such as those from an early article called "She's Had the Doctor." There was special preparation for the doctor's visit:

In lieu of a bathroom, clean towels were placed on the shelf by the kitchen sink, clean tumblers, a pitcher of fresh water covered with a clean napkin, two or three of the best silver spoons, polished to the highest degree of brightness, an unused cake of soap in a flowered sauce dish.³⁷

In the same essay, she recounts her mother's ministrations to a child with an earache:

³⁵Chase, "Time to Oneself," p. 29.

³⁶Chase, "An Ancient Democracy," p. 65.

³⁷Mary Ellen Chase, "She's Had the Doctor!" The Atlantic Monthly, CLI (June, 1933), 728.

I can still see my mother in the dead of night with a raisin on the point of a long hat pin which she held over a kerosene lamp, while in her other hand was a bit of cotton which was to follow the raisin and close the entrance. This means of comfort and relief retained and disseminated within the ear a welcome heat . . . and one almost immediately fell asleep.³⁸

She becomes rather fanciful in another early essay, "Dean of American Essayists," when she closes her description of a visit with Agnes Repplier. Along with the fancy is the self-consciousness which later is to be less obvious in her work. Still she shows the brightness of imagery which is never to fade:

She [Agnes Repplier] wore a gown of palest grey and poured China tea into China cups as though it were the one most necessary act in the world . . . She described her early unquenchable passion for the theatre in sentences identical in tone to those of her convent recollections. She commented on recent New York successes in language so reminiscent of her later essays that I felt for a moment as though she were a book in my hand, not sitting opposite me in a high-backed chair. . . . And when at last, after an indecently prolonged visit and unnumbered cups of tea, I found myself in the May twilight outside the red brick house, I recalled with no little pleasure that all of her volumes of essays are clad in palest grey!³⁹

Again she uses the familiar catalogue and indicates the personal usefulness of "bright images." When traveling on the train, she finds:

. . . there is time for desultory gazing out of car windows, for stamping on one's mind things which will later flash upon the inward eye: the snow-covered, desolate prairies of Minnesota with the cold at twenty-six below zero, the friendly hills of northern New York white with fruit trees, a meadow lark on a post in Iowa singing above the rhythm of the train.⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., 731.

³⁹Chase, "Dean of American Essayists," p. 386.

⁴⁰Chase, "Confidences," p. 102.

Whether they "will later flash upon the inward eye" with realism, or whether her experience will be like her grandmother's: "How her fancy-aided memory created for itself bright images to become endowed at once with truth,"⁴¹ is less important than that it is possible for both things to happen. Mary Ellen Chase finds both helpful in living and in writing. Perhaps one should say that for her both kinds of experience are "beneficent."

⁴¹Chase, Golden Asse, p. 52.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEAFARING NOVELS

Almost all of the fiction Mary Ellen Chase has written has featured the coastal region of Maine, but only Mary Peters, 1934, and Silas Crockett, 1935, treat the seafaring tradition of that area. This was the tradition the author had absorbed from her grandmother and those other elderly women of her village, friends of her grandmother, who had spent some of their early years at sea. Of them she wrote in A Goodly Fellowship, "As I grew older and dreamed of writing books, I decided that sometime I would write of them and of their finer ways of life and thought. This I have tried to do in Mary Peters and Silas Crockett" (p. 23). The fact that these books had been a long time evolving in her mind may account for their success. A Goodly Heritage, which came out two years before Mary Peters, and Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson, which did not come out until 1948, were also of slow evolution.

Mary Peters is usually the first of Miss Chase's novels to be included in any lists of her books which are made today. There was recognition of Mary Peters as one of Miss Chase's major novels even when it first came out. J. C. Colcord wrote then, "Nothing in the author's earlier work has prepared us for the wisdom and tenderness displayed in the latest book."¹ Although the major theme of Mary Peters transcends any local limitations, the story belongs quite specifically to a special time as well as place, or perhaps, more precisely, to a transition as well as

¹Review of Mary Peters, Survey Graphic, XXIII (November, 1934), 563.

tradition.

In one sense, the region of Mary Peters is not Petersport, a typical Maine coastal village in transition from its shipping days to those of a summer resort, but rather "the broad-backed sea the dispenser of many gifts,"² among them those which nourish both Sarah and Mary Peters to the end of their days. The first long section called "The Sea" gives a serious presentation, from the feminine point of view, of American family life upon the sea, which makes an unusual contribution to American fiction. No women grace the decks of Melville's ships. On occasion, in The Minister's Wooing and in The Pearl of Orr's Island, Harriet Beecher Stowe looks toward the sea, but with her feet firmly planted on the shore. In the time Sarah Orne Jewett wrote of, the seafaring days of men, women, and children alike had already become an influence and a memory recalled regretfully by only a few such as Captain Littlepage in The Country of the Pointed Firs. Of the novels by Maine contemporaries of Miss Chase's which treat the era of Mary Peters, Rachel Field's Time Out of Mind is almost completely a shore novel, and Robert P. T. Coffin's vivid and "romantic" John Dawn has little to do with the point of view of women. Only Shipmates: A Tale of the Seafaring Women of New England by Isabel Hopestill Carter, which came out in the same year as Mary Peters, deals with a similar subject matter. Miss Carter's book contains a good deal more action upon the sea, but makes less artistic use of the subjective experience.

The plot of Mary Peters is the least of its elements. Mary Peters

²Mary Ellen Chase, Mary Peters (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 377.

"throve at sea" in the girlhood years she spent on her father's ship sailing to many ports all over the world. Then at fifteen, after her father's death, she returned with her mother, Sarah Peters, to live in the large family house in her native village of Petersport. She loved her studies there at the academy and learned "that that which had given meaning to her years at sea was somehow deeply hidden within the thoughts of books, ready to give the same secure meaning to those who could take it" (p. 149). Both Mary and her mother, Sarah, had more ability to take meaning wherever they could find it than did most of the other characters in the book. Mary's brother, John, found his meaning in the life on his farm, but he escaped from an uneasy marriage to Ellen Kimball only through his accidental death.

The summer after her graduation from the academy, Mary suffered the hurt of the death of her best friend, Hester Wood, and went on alone for her study at Castine. The external events of her adult life were not very startling. She took pleasure in her school teaching in the country and in the village. After the death of her mother, Mary married unstable Jim Pendleton, whom she had known since their academy days. She loved Jim, but at the same time she understood his weaknesses. There was more restlessness in the years of their marriage for him than for her. His death in an automobile accident which also involved Mary's sister-in-law, Ellen Peters, left Mary to care for the invalided Ellen. In spite of the external inconveniences of this life, Mary was able to live a satisfying inner life with her memories, thoughts, and perceptions. Having sold her village home and Ellen's as well, Mary found herself, in the hard country life on the farm that had been her brother's, able to take meaning and

even joy from the beauties of the turning seasons which so closely surrounded her. The four sections of the book are called The Sea, The Village, The Land, and The Sea. In reality the sea returns to Mary at the end only in her inner life.

Mary Ellen Chase was born too late to know at first hand the shipboard life of the early section of Mary Peters. She had to create it from her imagination, aided, of course, as one reviewer speculated (and as the author herself implied in A Goodly Fellowship) by "the actual memories of some of those persons who can still recall such a life in their own youth."³ Yet this section of the book appears, as J. C. Colcord judged it,

. . . a touching, true and sympathetic account of a little girl's life and development on shipboard in the eighties. Although some technical lapses betray that Miss Chase's account is not from firsthand experience, she has succeeded to a remarkable degree in capturing the flavor and inmost essence of home life as it used to be lived by New England families upon the sea.⁴

Most of the reviewers of Mary Peters had comments to make on this first section called "The Sea," which varied widely in substance and enthusiasm, from the limited praise of a New York Times reviewer to the lyrical exuberance of Robert P. T. Coffin. The anonymous Times reviewer wrote:

In "Mary Peters" Mary Ellen Chase has done much more than a merely creditable piece of work, but she has fallen short of masterly work. Her picture of the sea, as reconstructed, of those days when clipper captains took their wives with them, and when it was not a rare occurrence for a child actually to be born on the high seas, is vivid and compelling. The life of the child, Mary, aboard ship, her contacts

³Review of Mary Peters, Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, September 29, 1934, p. 1.

⁴Colcord, p. 563.

with the sailors, her startled interest in strange ports,
is something very refreshing in fiction.⁵

Coffin, who never seemed quite able to hold down to earth his own flights of fancy even in his book reviews, at least in his reviews of the books of his Maine compatriot, Mary Ellen Chase, used a particularly happy figure to open his review of Mary Peters: "This is not a novel but a symphony. There is an orchestration of incident and description and reflection on the author's part, slow, grave, telling in its cumulative effect. There is a sequence of events."⁶ Allan Nevins employed another musical figure of speech to call the book "beautifully written in a minor key." He also observed, "The childhood and youth of the heroine, delineated at great length but never tiresomely, are presented as the key to the later development of her character."⁷ That the author intended to place special significance on Mary Peters' childhood may be inferred from the quotation from The Brothers Karamazov which comes before the beginning of the story: "You must know there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood. . . ." All of this suggests that from this first section to the end of the last section, also somewhat misleadingly called "The Sea," the author keeps a firm but flexible control of the structure of her book. Mary Peters is, in fact, the most subtly constructed of Miss Chase's novels. Valuable as it is for its own qualities, the first section has

⁵Review of Mary Peters, New York Times Book Review, September 30, 1934, p. 8.

⁶Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Review of Mary Peters, New York Herald Tribune Books, September 30, 1934, p. 3.

⁷Review of Mary Peters, Saturday Review of Literature, XI (October 6, 1934), 160.

an important relationship to the book as a whole. Geoffrey Stone, in his review in The Commonweal, has two ways of looking at this, both important and related to each other: "'The Sea,' one feels, is without parallel, not either by reason of extravagance or excellence but because it is a successful crystallization of personal experience," and ". . . the first section of the book, called 'The Sea,' evokes a clear picture of the sailing vessel. . . . If the picture, for all its clearness remains behind the curtain [a "thin," "translucent" curtain, as Stone calls it], it is because that curtain is an essential part of its existence as a thing of memory."⁸ That the fact of memory, particularly childhood memory, has its effects on any experience is something Mary Ellen Chase habitually takes into account in her writing. Often in A Goodly Heritage the quality of humor has been found in a thing of memory. In Mary Peters, memory's addition is something yet again, and memory's function something still more. Memory in Mary Peters gives understanding to the present and imagination to the future; it is never nostalgic on the part of either the characters or the author.

Although it is impossible to separate form and content except in an arbitrary way, one can see the contributions made to the structure of Mary Peters by historical background, imagery and other uses of language, the thoughts and emotions of the characters, and even the events of the action. Action is a better word than plot, for the plot forms only a slight portion of the structure of this novel. All that follows the first section of the book is tinged with inevitability. Intense and vivid though

⁸Review of Mary Peters, Commonweal, XXI (December 21, 1934), 239.

many of Miss Chase's incidents are, plot has never been one of her major concerns. In Silas Crockett, the novel to follow Mary Peters, plot is of even less import.

But of these other elements of Mary Peters, at least several should be discussed. It has been impossible to locate a piece of writing done by a college girl dealing, according to Miss Chase, with her imagery and its suggested meanings all of which, Miss Chase said, was "a complete surprise" to her.⁹ More important than the fact that it couldn't be found are the facts that the imagery of her writing is significant enough to be written about and that she must think so herself to say that someone has done it, regardless of how firmly her tongue may have been in her cheek on the matter of meaning. Mary Peters is one of the best of her works in which to examine this particular aspect of her writing.

Like The Silver Shell, and like The Plum Tree to come more than a decade later, Mary Peters contains a central image which helps to build the structure of the book. This image, that of Mary's vision of the Spanish port Cadiz, is not only central to this novel, but was adapted from an image which had belonged to Mary Ellen Chase personally from the days of her childhood. Cadiz appears now and again in a number of her nonfiction writings, but it receives fullest treatment in the essay "Not in Cadiz," which appeared first in the North American Review, and then later in a collection of essays. As Miss Chase explains there,

Cynthia and I had early taken Cadiz for our own. When in later years we tried to discover the exact time of its birth in our consciousness, we failed. It seemed to have been born with us like the accepted and familiar

⁹ In a letter written to the author of this dissertation on April 9, 1957.

objects of our childhood, to be a part of us like our hands and our feet. We could no more catch the swift passing into us of its glistening whiteness than we could recall the first time we had become aware of our blossoming orchard or the dripping panicles of our lilacs in a soft June rain. . . . And yet, although our baffled memories refused to register the connection, our Grandmother had been the source of Cadiz.¹⁰

One wonders whether R. P. T. Coffin came to know Cadiz through a similar birthright or whether he was reflecting the strength of the impact of Mary Peters on his imagination when he wrote in John Dawn, published two years after it:

When the Capes of Portugal began to show up on their port rail, they wondered all the more. They rolled out of their hammocks one bright day and saw a white city like a flight of alabaster stairs going up the blue hills.

"If that ain't Cadiz over there," said Easter Toothaker, "I'll eat both my boots."

.
 "There was one woman in Cadiz in my Pap's day. He met up with her, somehow. You know how it is when married men are away from home."¹¹

At least Coffin's application of the image is different from Miss Chase's.

Of course, her own fictional adaptation of it is different from her personal Cadiz, which in turn was distinguishable from her grandmother's Cadiz. In "Not in Cadiz," she interprets it and its symbolism to her grandmother as well as implying its symbolic significance to herself.

The very first section of Mary Peters establishes Cadiz both as a symbol and as an experience to be drawn on for the rest of Mary's life.

¹⁰Mary Ellen Chase, The Golden Asse, and Other Essays (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), pp. 44-45.

¹¹Robert P. Tristram Coffin, John Dawn, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), pp. 184-185.

Unlike Mary Ellen Chase, who never saw Cadiz, and her grandmother, who saw it as a young married woman, "Mary Peters first saw Cadiz in 1880. She was nine years old then." After she has first glimpsed it "all white beneath a sky of Spanish blue," there follows within the consciousness of Mary a reflective essay on "all the white things she had ever known in her short life" (p. 1).

These first few pages of Mary Peters establish several qualities of the book. First, the way the author has of looking within the minds of her principal characters represents a skillful use of the shifting point of view which is both conventional and necessary in this novel where so much of the living is done within the minds and emotions of Sarah, Mary, and John Peters. The mental essays are to continue throughout, adding richness of imagery and thought, letting the reader see some of the details which cause this to be called a regional novel and some which are more universal. There are Mary's amused reflection on "the smells of her schoolhouse" (p. 222), and John's review of weather signs as he stood "looking up at the winter sky": "They were all simple things, these signs, so old that no one could possibly trace them. Sometimes he thought they had been given to the first farmers of the world" (p. 218). Sarah Peters, after a shock has left her body immobilized and her mind more active than ever, analyzes with awareness the changes taking place in her native village, although "for the most part her thoughts were not of things so near at hand" (p. 303). It is this quality of her writing which caused Virginia Smith Hall to write in her honors thesis that "Mary Ellen Chase is the essayist in her novels."¹² Part of the interest of

¹²"Down East Today," a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Major Honors in English at the University of Maine in May, 1938.

this comment is that later on reviewers of A Goodly Fellowship are to observe that it is the novelist writing in the autobiography. Perhaps it is enough to say that Miss Chase wisely uses whatever skills she has without particular regard for the form she is writing in.

All the whiteness Mary remembered in the passage referred to above is for contrast: "But Cadiz was whiter yet . . . " (p. 5). Even before the experiences of Mary's trip ashore to Cadiz, which contributed to the complexity of the symbol Cadiz was to become in the time ahead of Mary, the author does not hesitate to name the Cadiz of her shipboard impression as a symbol:

That shining whiteness she was never in all her life to forget. Although she saw it then for the first and the last time, Cadiz ever afterward was to remain in her mind through many and varying years as the imperishable symbol of security, stability, and quiet order--a place both unassailable and unafraid, a place where one actually knew where one was in a wide colossal world of uncertainty. . . . Flashing upon her tired little mind and longing eyes in one ecstatic vision of pure delight, it was not unlike the beatific vision of the City of Heaven to the Apostle, transcending in jasper bulwarks and blazing emerald streets all earthly perplexities and sorrows. (p. 6)

Here a Biblical simile is used to illustrate, for the reader, the power of the symbol, although only the symbol remains to be strengthened accumulatively through the years for Mary. This particular Biblical allusion is to be used again in Dawn in Lyonesse to explain the significance of Tintagel to Ellen Pascoe.

The importance of Cadiz in Mary Peters may be better understood if the foregoing quotation is viewed in the light of a distinction between two general kinds of metaphors discussed by Cleanth Brooks in The Well-Wrought Urn: "The distinction between metaphor as symbol--I have employed the term 'functional metaphor'--and metaphor conceived of as mere

illustration is, as I have tried to point out, crucial."¹³ In the quotation above, "the vision of the City of Heaven" (even though it is here used as a simile) is "conceived of as a mere illustration," whereas Cadiz, not just as it is introduced here but as it is developed through the story, becomes a "metaphor as symbol" or a "functional metaphor." As such it seems to fulfill the explanation which Brooks quotes from W. M. Urban: "But a symbol is more than a metaphor. The metaphor becomes a symbol when by means of it we embody an ideal content not otherwise expressible."¹⁴ Proof that Cadiz is inexpressible in words, at least to Mary Peters, is the incident of the evening when Jim Pendleton has been translating into improvisations on the piano, violin, and guitar various places they have both known around the world:

. . . she asked him in a sudden, stirring impulse to play Cadiz on its high peninsula. He could not, he said. If he had ever seen it, he could not remember at all what it was like; but if she would tell him he would try. Standing in the middle of the room with his violin on his shoulder, he waited for her to tell him and became again irritated and impatient when she found to her surprise and chagrin that she could not tell him so much as a single word. (p. 139)

Jim Pendleton with his musical sensitivity and also his weakness of character reminds one of Nat Fortune in Rachel Field's Time Out of Mind, which shares some common themes with Mary Peters.

In consciously naming Cadiz a symbol Miss Chase seems not so much to be thinking in terms of a literary device as she is of that way of thought that often makes it easier for some people to understand their own experiences in concrete terms and to attach to places, either con-

¹³Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947), p. 260.

¹⁴Wilbur Marshall Urban, Language and Reality, quoted in Brooks, p. 259.

sciously or unconsciously, certain values which are not usually shared by others. Cadiz does, however, come to function as a symbol for both the reader and Mary. The reader understands that Mary realizes the symbol, at first at least, in an emotional sense as much as any other. In these days, when the interpretation of symbolism in literature has sometimes been pushed to ridiculous lengths, one hesitates to go too far. Yet it does not seem unreasonable to look on Cadiz, in one of its meanings, as symbolic of Mary's whole experience during those early years at sea. (Allan Nevins interprets it, with some justification, as "symbolic of Mary Peter's mind."¹⁵) This seems particularly true when in her own mind she likens her Cadiz to Jim Pendleton's Ponta Delgata, which he has explained to her: "'I never liked the sea much, at least I never thought I did, but a place like that sort of stays in a person's mind. You can't somehow get away from it and what it did to you. It kind of straightens things out--even years after'" (p. 244). It is this kind of feeling in Jim which makes marriage with him acceptable and even satisfying to her in spite of his undesirable qualities:

She looked at him and saw, not thoughts in common, not even experiences in themselves, but rather the emotions which were the harvest or the seed-time of such thoughts and such experiences. She looked at him and felt reaching out toward her all that which had given, which still gave meaning to her life--the swift understanding of Cadiz and Ponta Delgata in the early morning, of fruit-laden boats moving across clear water, of wind-filled sails and long hours of idle waiting on a still sea. She knew that he knew all those things which had quickened her, made her present and future but one with her past. (p. 312)

Cadiz in its final manifestation becomes a hooked rug which holds among its several implications the narrowing of horizons but not, it seems,

¹⁵Nevins, p. 160.

the more serious suggestion in the review by Hazel Hawthorne: "If, after the anxiety and sorrow of her woman's life, Mary's return to Cadiz by way of fashioning a hooked rug seems inadequate, one can think twice and see it as really tragic."¹⁶ But Mary Peters never suffers the defeat which would allow her to be called tragic. Like a few of Mary Ellen Chase's other women characters to appear in later novels, like Willa Cather's Antonia, and like Ellen Glasgow's women with "a vein of iron," particularly Dorinda of Barren Ground and Ada of Vein of Iron, Mary Peters has a kind of triumph over life which makes the word "tragic" inapplicable to her.

Cadiz, although it is central, does not represent the only successful image of Mary Peters. There are other experiences at sea which have given Mary specific moments of knowledge which remain to be used with understanding at later moments in her life. There is, for example, the loss of John's grey kitten at sea and what Mary learned of life and of her brother that day. There is the other ship at sea which Mary and Mr. Gardner had watched disappear over the horizon:

It seemed long minutes before that point of light vanished, and even after it had gone some vestige of the glow remained before they were again alone with sea and sky.

"That's it, Mary," said Mr. Gardiner then. "That's what this life is that you and I know. There couldn't be a better symbol of it. It's hull down with everything that's tough and hard about it. It's only the sails and the glow on them that we'll remember. That doesn't go out. You keep it in your mind even after the sea has taken it. That's what brought me back to ships, and that's what you'll remember all your life." (p. 70)

Time and tide are significant, too, to Mary and even more to Sarah

¹⁶ Hazel Hawthorne, "From the Ladies," The New Republic, LXXX (October 31, 1934), 344.

Peters, who sees in them a relationship to each other beyond the usual one and who sees an aspect of her own life in terms of the two. As she lies in her bed on shipboard and feels and hears the incoming tide of the harbor of Liverpool and hears also across the harbor in the night some sailors singing a stanza of an old hymn, "Time like an ever-rolling stream/Bears all its sons away," she contents her mind, as Mary was to do so often with Cadiz, with the analogies the tide has suggested to her:

That was true, she thought. Life never stopped. It went on in flux and reflux, in its own measured rhythm, old desolations recurring in new, less desolate guises, new sorrows taking the place of old, gaiety coming with its sudden, bright surprise and going inexorably again, sure some day to return though in different form.

The tide was the symbol of it all. The love of her girlhood had lapsed and ebbed, forsaken her shores. Now it had come flooding back, unrecognizable at first but now clearly seen as tenderness and pity. . . .

Nothing was ever final; nothing was ever lost.
(pp. 85-86)

This is not the only time the tide, appropriately to a seafaring, seacoast story, plays its part literally and figuratively in this novel, as it does, to a lesser degree in a number of Mary Ellen Chase's other books from Uplands to Edge of Darkness. Something of the tide's effect on the author herself is beautifully recorded in A Goodly Fellowship.

The figures Miss Chase uses in this novel, either within the consciousness of her characters or on her own part, are usually quite fitting to the story. On land it is natural for Mary to feel things in terms of her sea experiences:

Once when John passed through the room on his way to the staircase, glancing at them with a shy half-smile, Mary was conscious of something happening suddenly inside Ellen's body. Something inside her had tightened all at once like a rope suddenly strained by a wind-filled sail or like the

tremor the ship sometimes gave before she plunged ahead upon a new course." (p. 118)

This early comparison prepares for a later one, applied also to Ellen: "She kept herself well to windward with a weather eye always scanning the horizon" (p. 322). There are others which enrich by suggesting various layers of consciousness, but not cluttering or confusing because they fit so smoothly into the larger picture. There are these, for example: "Years afterward the remembrance of those moments remained with her to still the waves and the billows which he [Jim Pendleton] was to make pass over her" (p. 239), and "At such moments she was like a daisy field in full sunlight or like the glow on the sails of a disappearing ship" (p. 146).

The last quotation uses a land simile as well as a sea one, and it should be pointed out that the two elements are blended in the book. The land and farming on it are the essence of John Peter's life and he sees life in its terms: "He . . . called the world good and the silent earth, which, though it strove with man, was yet his companion, the source of his well-being and his strength" (p. 203). In fact, it is John's striving with earth which contributes to making this a regional novel of New England:

John exulted in the cold. . . . He thought as he thrashed his free arm now and again against his knees how uneventful and dull must be a state like California where soil was never frozen, never lay quiescent and waiting beneath the snow. Even Montana where his uncle had taken up land, land to be had for so little that it was in reality almost given away, must, he felt, be stupid in comparison with Maine. His uncle wrote of black, rockless soil so rich that it fell before the plough in clodless furrows promising acres of wheat with a minimum of labour. Such soil would not do for him, he concluded. He loved labour, the eternal battle with stubborn acres that must be mollified or outwitted some way or another. (p. 207)

In this feeling about New England soil John Peters is reminiscent of David Emerson in A Goodly Heritage, who used to tend the Chase family's garden. The author once extolled to him the fertility of the soils of the Middle West and California. "When I had at last done," she writes, "he only plunged his hoe deeper into the roots of the witchgrass. 'What I'm figurin' on,' he said, 'is the gardener. He must be a mighty onimportant person out in them states'" (p. 235). This attitude, shared by John Peters and David Emerson, toward the rigors of Maine's soil and weather is probably as true as it is one-sided. The author brings out another side of the picture in other Maine novels, most particularly in Uplands.

Another aspect of regionalism is the turn of the seasons, observed through Mary's sensitivity as well as through John's. This book examines all the seasons, not in the fixed pattern of Gladys Hasty Carroll's As the Earth Turns, but as their influence is felt in relation to the other movements of the lives of the characters. Like the tide for his mother, Sarah, the seasons suggest to John an order which should have a relation to human life: "The tranquil symmetry of the seasons as he knew them, the methodical lengthening and shortening of days, the steady, rhythmical movements of moon and stars, growth and decay, depletion and replenishment--all the measured, temperate life he saw about him--made him want the life which earth daily afforded him to be temperate and measured also" (p. 255). Yet for all the tranquillity and rhythm there is never any dullness for John, but rather a joyousness. In failing to understand this, his wife, Ellen, also fails him:

Indeed, the farm seemed all of a piece to Ellen, a piece monotonous in its colouring, woven day by day of precisely the same fibres. Not for a moment could she see that for

John no single thread was like any other thread--that pig-killing on the first snow meant a dark and sombre tone, which might well be counteracted by a good supper and a merry evening, that the birth of the lambs or calves brought their far more joyous hues, that a January morning in the still woods with his axe suffused the whole fabric with light. (p. 254)

But as the tide, Sarah knew, does not always return the same, so the seasons sometimes contrast, seasons like the two summers pictured vividly here--one when John patiently tends his farm through a summer drought and another which comes, in a sense as a fulfillment for Mary:

Her first summer in the country held for her a surprising wealth, a plenitude and richness which she had never before adequately realized and which succeeding summers only deepened and glorified. Summer in a village, rural as it might be, held nothing in comparison. In the open country, close to, even upon the teeming and ripening earth, the summer months were known with a difference. She had lived before upon the farm through the serenity of autumn, through the cold solemnity of winter, through the expectancy of spring, but never before had she experienced in all its intimacy the width and depth of summer, its lavish pageantry, the alchemy of its life and strength. (p. 360)

It is not easy to see why Mrs. Hall has said that the sea in this novel reflects the influence of Hardy.¹⁷ Had she said the land, one might have better understood what she meant. John Peters standing under the stars might recall Gabriel Oak of Far from the Madding Crowd. It is not that John and Gabriel are alike in what they think and feel about the earth, but that they are alike in the fact that they do think and feel about it. This likeness may not be anything very unusual, but the influence of Hardy, which tugged so strongly at Uplands, has lessened in Mary Peters. Miss Chase has learned that southeast England and the coast of Maine are not exactly the same, nor are their people.

¹⁷Hall, p. 109.

The imagery in Mary Peters which contributes to the structure, by its continuity, by its meaning and appropriateness, or by its reflection of the characters, is closely related to the author's own love of beauty, particularly of natural beauty, of color, and of the rhythms and sounds of language. This quality is, of course, not peculiar to Mary Peters, for it is evident, to varying degrees, in all of Miss Chase's fiction as well as in the essays, the autobiographies, and even in the books on the Bible, particularly Life and Language in the Old Testament. Nor is there anything exceptional to be said about it but that here it is subordinated to the other elements of the book and seldom falls short of its intention. A sound image is a minute illustration of why Coffin was prompted to call the novel a symphony: "They . . . rowed home across the great encircling bay . . . music still drifting out to them above the steady rhythm of their looks and oars, above the cries and calls and clatter from decks and galleys" (p. 12).

Sometimes the element of natural beauty is combined with details of a practical nature, as when John, to save water, bathes in the brook during the summer drought: "It, too, was shrunken to half its size, but there was a pool beneath a waterfall, a pool fringed with meadow sweet and joe-pye-weed, where he could sit on the sandy bottom and let a blue dragonfly strike his bronzed shoulders and water spiders skirt about him as he scrubbed himself" (p. 260). Observation of the natural environment is no doubt one of the "qualities which remind the reader of Sarah Orne Jewett" (p. 160) in Mr. Nevins's estimation; and it is not only the environmental characteristics but their place in the memory which prompt Breyfogle to make a similar comparison to Miss Jewett:

The catalogue of things remembered is what stays in the mind after reading Mary Peters. The full tide of summer, the winter's snow and bitter cold, the lights in farmhouse windows as dusk gathers, the smell of sun-steeped pastureland and of salt tide-marsh--Miss Chase improves even upon The Country of the Pointed Firs.¹⁸

There is an obvious temptation to equate two Maine writers who present the sea-coast of overlapping if not identical periods. Yet their differences of treatment and of attitude lessen the meaningfulness of Breyfogle's statement. Among the similarities between the two writers (and there are, of course, a number) is assuredly an appreciation of the natural environment, although Mary Ellen Chase's concern with and use of this beauty is more complex than Miss Jewett's.

There are even suggestions of elements of beauty in the paragraph which describes Mary's knowledge of the tragic death of her friend Hester. The intensity of the moment allows a heightened awareness of even irrelevant details which are still part of the moment. The focus on these details makes the reader more aware of Mary's emotion than an attempt to describe it could have done. The reader has been prepared for this moment in one way by an earlier "motionless moment" (p. 180), between flood and ebb tide, which Mary and Hester have shared in the last spring of their adolescence. Now it is the moment of Hester's death followed by the moment of Mary's realization:

At four o'clock Mary Peters, standing white and breathless at the foot of the staircase, knew that Hester had died. She knew it by the moments of terrible silence in the room above, the door of which had been opened into the hall so that Hester might breathe all the air there was. The sun, lying warm on the white phlox in the garden, streamed through the doorway behind her and

¹⁸ Review of Mary Peters, The Canadian Forum, XV (January, 1935), 157.

flooded the hall with light and warmth. The tall clock ticked on. It had ticked on through many deaths in that old house. It held within its polished case, framed by some old clockmaker, long since dead, the slow resistless accent of Eternity. (p. 192)

The light and warmth of the sun suggest what Hester's friendship had meant to Mary and contrast with the emotional tone of the moment. Even the polished case of the clock, which reflects Sarah's housekeeping, echoes the sunlight from outside. The clock also serves to draw this individual death to death itself. It is common human experience to focus with unusual perception on things within the range of one's senses at moments of unusual emotional crisis. Here, caught up with and yet separated from the tragic emotion of the scene, are specific details of New England local color. The reader is reminded that tall clocks once stood in the hallways of large family homes and that phlox once blossomed hardily in August gardens.

It is such details, not always used to such sober purpose, which add up to the whole picture of the local environment which Miss Chase's story creates. This picture is begun at sea, before the soil of New England is even approached, as when "Sarah Peters held rigidly to the custom of Saturday night bathing, and there was always as thorough a scrubbing in a tin tub in one's cabin as before the kitchen fire at home" (p. 29), and when John wonders wistfully, "Were there nooning trees in Cadiz. . . . when the great wall was built, for workmen to rest under in the middle of the day, to eat their lunch away from the hot sun, and to drink cold swipes of molasses and ginger water, brought out to them by some women as his aunt brought out pitchers to the Maine haymakers?" (p. 10) and when such land pictures stay in John's mind as that of farms

with "house and woodshed, toolhouse and barn all safely hitched together" (p. 53).

When the Peterses are back in Petersport the number of these details multiply. Sometimes they come singly, as when John "would feed his one fire and sit before it with his feet in the oven. . ." (p. 159), or when John and the doctor "walked together out the back door toward the barn where country men felt more at home when speech was not easy" (p. 192). Sometimes the details are legion, as when they cover the August church sale, or the dresses of the Academy graduation, or the January revival meetings, or the weekly church suppers. On rare occasions the author casts a humorous tone over the recital of details which reveal some of the more trivial aspects of the everyday life of the time. The winter-time clothing of the "two lady assistants" at the Academy requires more than a page of enumeration. A bit of irony touches the woman "who, like most of her neighbors, kept her money for church beneath the newspaper in the right-hand corner of her topmost bureau drawer, her money for the missionary society in an old teapot, and her money from the sale of eggs in a pink cup on the kitchen lamp-shelf" (p. 132). When Hazel Hawthorne comments that "the research necessary to the material is not quite melted up" (p. 344), one wonders whether she realizes that this is Miss Chase's native environment and that the task she has performed has been more bringing together than "melting up." The presentation of some of these details shows again the essayist's touch. Their inclusion shows the author's desire to preserve something of a time which has passed out of experience although not yet out of memory. She has used the same method in Silas Crockett.

Among the uses of language which mark the regionalism of the book, vocabulary and idiom are more prominent than the dialect which characterized the stories of the nineteenth-century writer. This is appropriate to the author's purpose, because she is not seeking, as Sarah Orne Jewett so often, perhaps a bit too often, sought, the quaint, the unique, or the peculiar, but something broader, something more generalized. The speech of Miss Jewett's characters, which was quaint in Miss Jewett's own day, seems to us even more quaint. There is much in Mary Peters to call the ear, at least the New England ear, back to the past--words, for example, like "grit and gumption," and "cultch"; and expressions like "fine as silk." Sometimes Miss Chase uses clichés of speech to express clichés of thought. Only to the village doctor does she give a distinguishing raciness of speech. One difference between The Country of the Pointed Firs and Mary Peters is that the earlier book is talked and Mary Peters is thought and felt, in spite of its important moments of speech. Miss Chase, by her own admission in the essay "Wormwood for Thoughts," does not have the skill to reproduce native speech precisely. Almira Todd of The Country of the Pointed Firs literally talks herself into being under her author's most skillful handling. This would have been impossible for John Peters, whose "hands, she [Mary] knew must always speak for him, say the things he could never say in words" (p. 249). Much talking would have been inappropriate even for Mary, who, although far from inarticulate, is reticent and self-contained. It would also have been unsuitable for Sarah Peters, who confines her speech to some distinct purpose of her own which she does not hesitate to get to, such as asking Jim Pendleton if he is running away. When Sarah told Mary about the part Jim Pendleton's father

had in her past, she felt embarrassed and blundering but she went on for Mary's sake because, as she said, "My mother never told me--things were different when I was a girl--and I never knew things I should have known till I was married and found out about them" (p. 75).

There comes a time later in the book when Sarah speaks again, to Mary and John together. If there is embarrassment this time, it is on their part rather than on hers, and there certainly is no blundering; she is forthright, even magnificent, in this scene which is one of the most dramatic in the book, in spite of the fact that it is all monologue. The effect of the scene is heightened by the fact that although there are a number of dramatic moments in the book, some of which occur offstage, the drama is never sustained for long, rarely for even as long as this scene. Late at night, after one o'clock in the morning, after John and Mary have driven Hester's mother home and, with her, the body of Hester, her dead child beside her, and after Sarah has silently served John and Mary, on their return, a warm meal at her dining room table before a fireplace fire, she speaks to them, and she is "as inescapable as the coming tide" (p. 196). Again the recurrent image of the tide is used significantly. All Sarah has to say to her son and daughter is said to help them, but she avoids nothing:

"... but it has to be said some time or other, and now's the only time I know. You can cry Mary. It's good for you. Cry away. And you, John, can stay on the farm a week if you like without coming home. But now's my time and you have to listen to me.

"Probably I'll never speak to you again like this--so far as I know I never have spoken like this. . . . But there's something more terrible than what you've gone through, and that is the thoughts that you keep in your minds about it.

.

"And all sorts of things determine those forces, race, and inheritance and bringing up--things that a person can't be held responsible for. . . .

"There's another thing. You've got to get out of your heads the notion that they did a wrong and sinful thing. Youth is hard until it comes up against the very thing it condemns. It was ill-judged and unwise, but it wasn't wrong, at least in itself. It was wrong only in that it has brought suffering and pain to themselves and to others. Hester hasn't died in disgrace. Don't keep that thought in your heads even if it never leaves her mother's. When the next century comes along and I'm perhaps dead and gone, you'll see people looking at things like this differently. . . .

"We ought to realize that we've had a different life from most in this village. We've known the world, all parts of it, and we can't be shut in by these streets and hills. If you children are, then you're unfair to what you've seen and known. This thing will leave a scar, I know that, but the best way to handle scars, after you've seen them straight, is to remember things big enough to wipe them out. That's the only way I know to steer one's course in this world."
(pp. 196-200)

This long quotation gives only a part of Sarah's long speech, but enough to show that she speaks good plain English simply and vigorously. This kind of language could have been used by John or Mary, had their parts in the story required it of them, for it represents something larger than Sarah's individuality. Pertinent to this understanding is the comment of Geoffrey Stone: "The book is not so interested in portraying the reactions of certain persons to life as it is interested in conveying to the reader the savor and tang of a certain mode of life; in a sense, the characters are only lay figures, required to move and feel in a human fashion in order to make plain something larger than themselves."
(p. 240).

Two figures of speech in the scene, one in Sarah's talk and one referring to her, are most appropriate in the naturalness of their application; for the literal reality, in John's and Mary's past experiences,

of both the tide and the steering of a course increases the impact of their figurative meaning on these two listeners of Sarah's and on the reader as well. Again imagery serves a functional use in the story.

Another characteristic of language found in the quotation above and generally in the writing of Mary Ellen Chase is the one-sentence statement of a meaningful generalization. Mary Ellen Chase in the two-room village school she attended as a child was nurtured on "maxims" and "aphorisms," even as Abby Aldrich, whose biography she was to write later, learned "precepts" from the frequent utterance of the family governess and as the children of the generation succeeding theirs were acquainted with "memory gems." People of all places and all ages have their proverbs, we know, but there are certain traits in the people that Mary Ellen Chase writes of, and is indeed herself of, which make training, doing, speaking, and thinking in terms of some brief generalization of the truth, old or new, both natural and habitual. As fitting to Mary Peters as the tendency to see thoughts and feelings in terms of concrete images is this propensity to sententious or pithy brevity. It gives an additional regional flavor to the novel. The naturalness of this kind of expression comes from long and close acquaintance with the Bible, and its habitualness from the urge of the Puritans to raise children by every means possible to go in the right way and also from the racial characteristic which has sometimes resulted in the over-generalized caricature of the New Englander as laconic. The words of John Livingston Lowes might be borrowed to describe the influence of the language of the Bible in this relationship: "The English of the Bible has a pithiness and raciness, a homely tang, a terse sententiousness, and idiomatic flavour which comes

home to men's business and bosoms. . . ." ¹⁹ As for the influence of Puritanism, no one would disagree that its urge towards the guidance of moral behavior outlasted its religious hold on New England. Habits of speech, of course, often outlast the causes which give rise to them.

In Miss Chase's particular use of this kind of expression in Mary Peters, there are a number of instances which seem original, coined by the speaker or author to meet the need of a special situation. One of these is the sentence from the long quotation above: "'Youth is hard until it comes up against the very thing it condemns.'" On the other hand there are the sayings which are spoken because they have been said many times before. Among these is one of the doctor's: "'Pneumonia is the old people's friend,' he said to the three of them in the Kimball sitting room. He wondered as he said the words how often he had said them in his long years of practice. They always filled in awkward moments when one had to say something or other" (p. 348). Another repeated, but individual, saying is the one that the nephew of Mary's Mr. Gardiner quotes to her toward the close of the story: "'My grandfather sailed himself when he was young,' he said. 'That's why he had nothing to say when his last son threw up school-mastering for the sea. Sailing made men, he always said, as nothing else could make them'" (p. 373).

Among the statements which in their generalities and in their philosophy seem to resemble the precepts which nourished Mary Ellen Chase in her childhood at home and at school, these are a few: "The past is precious to many but because of its very value communicable among few" (p. 243);

¹⁹"The Noblest Monument in English Prose," Essays in Appreciation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), p. 4.

"A village with death in its midst is always peculiarly cognizant of life" (p. 306); ". . . the sun is apprehended only by the light of the sun . . . as God is the only approach to Himself" (p. 69).

Other such statements belong particularly to certain characters of the book. John, true to his generally uncommunicative nature, revolves the crystallizations of his thought only within his own mind. Mention has been made of his essay-like reflection on the weather signs observed by farmers through the ages; it includes a number of old saws and concludes with a maxim of his own: "Like all old things they should not be set aside carelessly, laughed at as useless and outworn" (p. 219). This is unmistakable agreement with the author's own thinking. Another sage observation of John's employs the functional type of imagery, discussed earlier, in an appropriate touch of local color: "A day of falling snow evened out a man's mind as it relieved and evened the contours of road and hill" (p. 269).

Two of Mary's thoughts of this same nature deal with the seasons, which, it has been pointed out, figure prominently in the novel. These are as much feelings as thoughts; apprehensions they might be called. Yet they are contained in the same kind of terse expression just discussed: "The spring had no kinship with the past" (p. 290), but "Death in autumn, shorn of its ruthlessness and simple in its beauty, could not possibly take one by surprise" (p. 291).

It is more natural for Sarah Peters to speak out, for she must use her thoughts to guide her children. When she says, ". . . sometimes you save your soul when there's no other way to do it just by setting things right with your two hands" (p. 168), she is coming close to Mary Ellen

Chase's own thought expressed in A Goodly Fellowship: ". . . the best antidote I know to a confused head or to tangled emotions is work with one's hands. To scrub a floor has alleviated many a broken heart and to wash and iron one's clothes brought order and clarity to many a perplexed and anxious mind" (p. 17).

But like the book Mary Peters itself, precepts and maxims belong largely to the past. Miss Chase's presentation of the past in Mary Peters may be looked at in two ways. One is from within the book; the other is from without. The past as looked at from within the book is that past which has value for the individual characters. This is more the past of their own experiences than the one of tradition. Only Sarah Peters seems to have the long view and the perceptive mind which make her frequently cognizant of the larger framework within which her own personal past has fallen. John, Mary, and Jim Pendleton, who have experienced the very end of this tradition during their childhood, have not continued long enough in it to see it with Sarah's objective eyes. To them these early experiences remain largely a personal matter, which, however, has its influence on their later lives. In spite of the differences of individual reactions, all the characters in the book who have had some active part in the seafaring experience share in some way the breadth of vision it had to give.

Even John, who disliked and mistrusted the sea, brought to the land, for which he felt so much passion, some of the knowledge, conscious and unconscious, which had come to him on the sea. The waiting demanded by the elements could be similar on land and sea: "As the dry, unyielding skies of August bent over his land, he waited upon them just as his father

had waited for days on end in the doldrums for so much as steerageway" (p. 259). And it was John's remembering of the sympathy and kindness shown him by Ellis, the ship's carpenter, which influenced the final events of his life. When he asked old Ellis to come to the farm to live he explained to his mother: "He always set a lot of store by us, you know. And he was good to me about all the animals I tried to keep on board the ship. Those old things that you remember sort of pull at you somehow" (p. 281). When he came, there was little of the former Ellis left, little of the Ellis who had shared John's distrust of the sea but who had taken his own from what the sea had to offer: "He did not love a ship or the sea . . . but he had a fancy nevertheless for odd nooks and corners of the world, and a ship provided ways and means of satisfaction. He had, too, a quaint, philosophic mind, not uncommon to ships' carpenters whose business it is to set things straight after confusion and disaster and to keep things in working order" (p. 7).

There are the old sea captains of Petersport, who together form part of the social structure of the village, but who are realized individually only in the character of Mary's father's uncle, Caleb Peters. Miss Chase, in another of her essay-like summaries, extracts such details of their lives as give them individuality even as a group. The past is pretty much the same to them all: "Once they had faced the future which had driven them from the seas they ceased to trouble overmuch about it. Like the present it would soon become the past in which they really lived" (p. 102). This is the past which Uncle Caleb shares with the other former sea captains, but nested within this past is an older past made vivid for him through his own respect for it and through his voyaging to places

which held the past in the present, much even as Mary's academy studies were doing for her.

The threeway relationship between past, present, and future, or the twoway relationship between any two of them, is one which has many manifestations in Mary Ellen Chase's writing. The function of imagery in retaining the past in the imaginations of the characters, particularly Mary, has been discussed. Mary's life, for all this, seems to be lived mainly in the present. It was this which her friend Hester found surprising: "For some reason she could never dream about the future as Hester could. She seemed always now holding close to the present. Even the wide reaches of the past had for the time become faded, much to Hester's astonishment. She could not understand why Mary who had been all over the world and had seen things that she had never seen did not talk about it more" (p. 163). Jim Pendleton, later in the story, with the wisdom of more years than Hester's, understands that the past, Mary's own and much more as well, has become a distinguishable but inseparable aspect of the wholeness of her present: "'You're old, Mary. There's nothing new about you. That's why you're different from everybody else. You're full of old places and old thoughts. Don't you understand? That's why you can't be touched or-- or frightened by new, untried things'" (pp. 316-317). When Mary tells him she had never paid much attention to the future, he tells her, "'You don't have to. . . because you carry yours along with you.'" Although it would be difficult to state prosaically Miss Chase's thesis in Mary Peters (even if one happened to suspect her of having one), it would not seem irrelevant to say, in the light of much of her other writing, that one of the basic

concerns of her thinking, like that of many other educators in the humanities, is that the young be allowed to acquire enough of the past to be able to carry at least a portion of their future with them. Perhaps Miss Chase has stated it herself, after all, in Mary's reflection on life at the end of the book: "It was rather a kind of waiting--a waiting upon the graciousness and the bounty of the things which had been, in order that the things to come might find one free and unafraid" (p. 379).

Silas Crockett, 1935, treats the same historical past as Mary Peters, but its time span is longer and its method is different. It is a chronicle. In its Foreword the author says, "In this story of four generations of a Maine seafaring family I have attempted to picture the maritime life of the coast for one hundred years."²⁰ The four sections of the book are named for the four generations of Crocketts: I, Silas Crockett, 1830-1850; II, Nicholas Crockett, 1850-1875; III, Reuben Crockett, 1875-1910; IV, Silas Crockett, 2nd, 1910-1933. The lives of the men overlap their sections. The women of the chronicle are as important as the men and their characters more precisely drawn. Solace, the wife of the first Silas, sailed the world over with her husband in spite of her fear of the sea he loved, and she spent her time on shore with her husband's mother, Abigail, a knowing and enduring woman, in her way the strongest character in the book. Nicholas, the son of Silas and Solace, was born too late to enjoy with his father the great days of the clipper ship era, but he at least sailed grain around the Horn to San Francisco. Less fortunate in his choice of Deborah as a wife, than his father was in Solace, Nicholas froze to death fishing off the Grand Banks where he had gone

²⁰ Mary Ellen Chase, Silas Crockett (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. ix.

between sailing berths both to earn needed money and to escape Deborah's dissatisfaction with his way of life. Reuben, born after his father's death and brought up by his grandmother, Solace, was able to continue the family tradition of sailing only to the extent of captaining a coastwise steamer for the Eastern Steamship Company and at last only a Maine ferry-boat. But he was happy in his marriage to Huldah, who was an invalid after the birth of the second Silas. Because he could not pay to keep it up, Reuben had to sell the family home in Saturday Cove, which had given the Crocketts as much unity through the generations as had their love of the sea. Although the second Silas was the only one of the Crocketts to want a college education, he left college to go to work in a fish-canning factory rather than use the little money the family had left to earn a degree which he felt might be as much hindrance as help in making a living. At the close of the chronicle Silas Crockett, 2nd, is the same age as his great-grandfather was at its opening and is as happy over the prospect of his forthcoming marriage to Ann Sewall, a visiting nurse, as the first Silas was over the anticipation of his to Solace Winship, the daughter of Thomas Winship, designer and builder of meeting houses. In spite of the contraction of the Crockett world in the century which separated the two Silases, the second Silas was within himself the heir to an inheritance he felt without knowing a great deal about it:

Looking out from his eyes, standing firmly in the poise of his head were unchangeable things--the daring of Amos and James, the humorous wisdom of Abigail, the steadfast devotion of Solace through years of fear, the faith of Silas and Nicholas hanging to fast-dying sail with the world against them, the secure and patient ways of Reuben, the unshaken and glorious reality of Huldah's love for God. Ann did not know them for what they were, but she saw them there--the substance of all things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen, the everlasting triumph over time and chance. (p. 403)

This states as much of a resolution to as little of a plot as such a novel could have. When the diverse incidents of the century are drawn together it is the contest between the Crockett character and "time and chance" which unifies them. Nicholas is the only Crockett to think consciously of his life in terms of the two elements of time and chance, for they were given to him early, to be recollected throughout his life. The host to a group of sailing commanders, Silas Crockett among them, in the dining-cabin of his ship in Sidney Harbour, where they were all anchored, offered a toast, "Gentlemen, I drink to the passing of a great era." These men knew that steam was against them, but the boy Nicholas, who was present with his father, looked so sad that

. . . the same gentlemen, spying his anxious face cried again, "A further toast, gentlemen, to the young lad in our midst. He comes of a glorious race. May he sail his father's ship to the uttermost seas and prove himself over time and chance!" (p. 158)

It is one of the achievements of the book to demonstrate the contradiction involved in the Crockett struggle with time and chance. Much as "they had thwarted and wounded" (p. 245) Nicholas and defeated him on individual occasions, as in the wrecking of his ship the Mildred May, he triumphed through his very refusal to give up. Just as it was time and chance which took him fishing on the Grand Banks and there took his life, so it was that same experience which gave him opportunity to see his life with some perspective and hope that "he might begin, late as it seemed, his victory over time and chance" (p. 213). Reuben accepted more and struggled less than Nicholas, his father, partly because of a greater inheritance from the maternal lines of his family than from the Crocketts and partly because time and chance themselves were different for him.

There is another contradiction, even more fundamental to the book as a whole, which centers in the second Silas and which accounts for his being given the title name of the book. The author devoted a great deal of care and, as she explained in the Foreword, "much interesting study" to the background material of the book. To do this she was undoubtedly convinced of its worth. Yet, within the story itself, the very details which the author makes vivid for the reader become blurred to the second Silas. For him it seemed enough that the past has been; he was not bound by it quite as his father Reuben and his grandfather Nicholas had been. As Silas said about the house which his father was more reluctant than he to sell, "We've--we've kept it by letting it go" (p. 395). The author was careful in her allotment of names and her distribution of Family characteristics. Within the story both Nicholas and Reuben are more completely developed as individual characters than is either of the two Silases, who, as a reviewer for Forum suggests, "appear more as symbolic characters."²¹ Taking heed of the title, one sees that a function of Nicholas and Reuben is to transmit the traits of the first Silas to the second.

Silas Crockett is dedicated "To the seafaring families of Maine and to their descendants, who still retain within themselves the graciousness and the dignity of their heritage." And so it was with the Crocketts. The first Silas in his young manhood had all the world of the seas and their commerce before him; because of his nature the second Silas also had the world before him even though it was a far different world--one

²¹Review of Silas Crockett, Forum, XCV (January, 1936), v.

that could not have been known at the time the book closed. In spite of his circumstances there was nothing in the least pathetic about the second Silas. He left the college with the thought: "Lots of fellows left college and then went back to finish when they were past twenty-five" (p. 377). Once he had made his decision to go to work and after he had met Ann,

He laughed and sang and tore about the house, was forever thinking of things for them to do, places for them to go. He seemed to be letting loose a store of energy which he had seemingly never possessed before in such measure. He was going up by leaps and bounds in the factory, earning more each month. He wore his clothes well, now that he occasionally had some new ones, was so tall and handsome and well set-up that Reuben was puzzled at times, in fact, a bit dismayed in the midst of his pride and pleasure.
(p. 386)

The reader, of course, can see that he is like the first Silas. One of the things the author has done for the reader is to establish a perspective over time that could not be had so completely in actual life. The choice of a century for the time of the novel imposed a number of limitations on the author in its development, but this perspective is one of its advantages; for this perspective allows the realization that the past is never completely knowable, although its spirit need not be lost. Reuben guessed rather than knew what was true of Silas:

"He's not a bit like me," he said to Huldah more than once. "He's all Crockett, I guess. I shouldn't wonder if he was like the old Silas we named him after. My grandmother used to tell me when I was little about how handsome he was and what a fine figure he cut all over the world. Ann was saying just the other evening from those books she's been reading how people take back sometimes for their appearance and their traits. I guess Silas has taken back all right."
(p. 386)

In no other novel she has ever written has Mary Ellen Chase ever focused so directly on the past, although the past is a thematic thread

which holds so many of her works in relation to each other. Mary Peters is, as has already been stated, the closest to Silas Crockett, because of their common subject matter. The essential, if over-simplified, difference is that in Mary Peters the past is most important for its impact on the characters, chiefly Mary herself, while in Silas Crockett the characters are important for what they reveal of the past. This difference results in a different technique, which will be discussed in more detail a little later. Although these two novels are grouped as seafaring novels, their relationship to seafaring differs. At no point is Silas Crockett as successful as the first section of Mary Peters in creating the experience of seafaring. In Silas Crockett it is the idea of seafaring which is important, the distillation of experience rather than the experience itself. In the Foreword to Silas Crockett the author states that she has "attempted to picture the maritime life of the coast," and that is what she has done. Actual experience on the sea is more fragmentary in Silas Crockett than in Mary Peters and is often reduced to summary narrative and a collection of retained images. Some technique such as this was necessary if a whole century was to be represented.

Mary Peters and Silas Crockett, more than any other books by Mary Ellen Chase, became part of a current trend when they were first published. They belonged to the concern for regionalism which marked the thirties. Comments by the reviewers of Silas Crockett and by other writers interested in the period in which it was written help one to see what the author's aim and her achievement were. This is the way Herschell Brickell begins his review of the novel:

The notable efflorescence of regional literature in Maine during the past five years is one of the most striking

literary phenomena of the times, and constitutes a significant phase of the whole movement in this country toward the study and evaluation of the American past.²²

The record of this movement has been preserved by Harry Estell Moore and Howard W. Odum in American Regionalism, in which many views, including a series which appeared in the Saturday Review of Literature, are quoted. The two authors, writing in 1938, considered the literary portion of this movement as part of the national literature:

When we say literary regionalism is a reality we need here illustrate with only a single major testimony. . . . This is the actual achievement of literature within the last two decades in the field of regional portraiture, or the sum of titles contributed by regional authors.²³

Of this sum, Miss Chase's books are a specific part. The ones she wrote in the thirties are listed by Perry D. Westbrook in Acres of Flint: Writers of Rural New England, 1870-1900, as part of a footnote to his description of the decline of the New England coastal village:

See . . . also Mary Ellen Chase's authentic and beautifully written Silas Crockett, Mary Peters, A Goodly Heritage, and A Goodly Fellowship (Chap. I). . . .²⁴

The same regional literature discussed by Moore and Odum has been referred to by Henry S. Commager in The American Mind:

. . . many things heretofore neglected or ignored took on new significance. A new regional literature, more authentic and less sentimental than that of the 1880's, celebrated every section of the country. Rachel Field and Dorothy Canfield were less concerned with recording

²²Herschell Brickell, Review of Silas Crockett, North American Review, CCXLI (March, 1936), 153.

²³American Regionalism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), p. 185.

²⁴Acres of Flint (Washington, D. C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1951), p. 9.

the fate of New England spinsters or uncovering evidence of decadence than Alice Brown and Mary Wilkins Freeman had been and more concerned with suggesting that New England had not yet exhausted her vitality.²⁵

It is exactly this vitality which the second Silas Crockett inherited from his great grandfather. Gladys Hasty Carroll, another Maine novelist, analyzing her own work and that of her contemporaries, Mary Ellen Chase among them, found a change similar to the one noted by Commager: "But there is one great difference between the New England writing of thirty years ago and that of today. . . . It is the matter of tempo, of immediacy, of vitality."²⁶ J. Donald Adams has seen another change. He noted in earlier writing:

. . . the elements of oddity and quaintness in the local scene, whereas the deeper regionalism for which we are now looking--and which we have begun to get--is not primarily concerned with these superficial differences. It rises out of the writer's oneness with his background and his effort to understand and interpret it.²⁷

It is characteristic of Miss Chase as an author that she writes so often from a oneness with her background and particularly characteristic of Silas Crockett that there she has made a special effort to interpret with authenticity certain aspects of that background.

While it seems obvious that Miss Chase writing in the thirties was aware of her contemporaries writing in a somewhat similar vein, it is equally clear that at the beginning of her writing career she did not set out to be part of a regional movement. Her case might be put more

²⁵The American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 435.

²⁶"New England Sees It Through," Saturday Review of Literature, XIII (November 9, 1935), 17.

²⁷Literary Frontiers (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951), p. 39.

simply. In fact, an observation by Heinrich Straumann describes her type of situation quite aptly: "In a way, almost every modern American novelist is at the same time a regionalist, for the simple reason that the majority of authors . . . resort to their own world of experience for their subject matter."²⁸ This is what Miss Chase has usually done, although in the case of Silas Crockett she has added special study to her own "world of experience" and this has given more perspective and even more objectivity to her approach to her material. It has also probably made it easier for her to handle her material.

Authors of regional literature and critics as well have been aware of the possible weaknesses of regionalism. Lewis Mumford makes a clear statement of this, which is worth quoting, mainly because Miss Chase in Silas Crockett seems to have been able to overcome the dangers which he enumerates:

The besetting weakness of regionalism lies in the fact that it is in part a blind reaction against outward circumstances and disruptions, an attempt to find refuge within an old shell against the turbulent invasions of the outside world, armed with its new engines: in short, an aversion from what is rather than an impulse toward what may be. For the merely sentimental regionalist the past was an absolute. His impulse was to fix some definite moment in the past, and to keep on living it over and over again. . . . In that sense regionalism was anti-historical and anti-organic; for it denied both the fact of change and the possibility that anything of value could come of it.²⁹

To say that Miss Chase avoids this weakness may seem a negative approach to her accomplishment in Silas Crockett, but it is one shared by several

²⁸American Literature in the Twentieth Century (New York: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), p. 68.

²⁹Technics and Civilization, pp. 292-293, quoted in American Regionalism, p. 170.

reviewers of the book. There is naturally some divergence of opinion among them. Amy Loveman found that "With them [the later generations] it is impossible to feel that Miss Chase in her commiseration has entirely escaped sentimentality, even though setting and historical scene remain clear and convincing."³⁰ Others believe her to have escaped it completely. Lewis Gannett differed from Miss Loveman: "Here are four generations of folk happy in their home lives even when they have to sell their houses, and not a tear drop of sentimentality. (That's an achievement.)"³¹ Herschell Brickell wrote, "Miss Chase is too intelligent to write a sentimental line; it is merely that she knows, which some other novelists do not, that there are and always have been, good and strong people, and that they are worth writing about."³²

Sentimentality applied to fiction-writing today is likely to be a harsh epithet. Perhaps this is because it has taken American fiction so long to recover from the nineteenth century onslaught of sentimentality. Like many critical terms, sentimentality does not always have a single, clearcut meaning. Because on occasion the term is applied to Miss Chase's writing--even to note the absence of the quality--it may be appropriate to consider it here. Miss Chase is sometimes idealistic and is often concerned with the emotional aspect of experience. If to be these things is to be sentimental, then that is what she is. But if to be falsely or excessively emotional is to be sentimental, then she seldom

³⁰Review of Silas Crockett, Saturday Review of Literature, XIII (November 6, 1935), 5.

³¹Review of Silas Crockett, New York Herald Tribune, November 12, 1935, p. 17.

³²Brickell, p. 155.

is. There is some aid to an understanding of the history of literary sentimentalism in the conclusion of Herbert Ross Brown's study The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860:

In the age of critical realism which followed the Civil War, they [the sentimentalists] continued to recruit their readers from those who persisted in clinging to myths, who refused to recognize reality, and who sought in fiction an escape rather than a challenge. . . . Worse than uncritical . . . would be the easy assumption that these sentimental novels never rang true, that they sprang from impulses which were wholly false, and that they failed to reflect the aspirations quietly cherished in thousands of hearts. The enlarged heart of sentimentality is a disease to which those who readily respond to the appeal of human nature are peculiarly susceptible. It is the excess of a virtue, the perversion of an ideal. No student of our national letters can escape the conviction that ours is an idealistic literature. . . . The failure of the sentimental compromise should teach our critics that theirs is the task of guiding the creative spirit to face squarely the realities of American life without losing its high ideals.³³

The importance of Mr. Brown's conclusion for this study lies in the possible explanation it suggests for twentieth-century squeamishness about the appearance in its writing of either virtue or idealism, as though the way to escape from "the excess of a virtue or the perversion of an ideal" were to abandon both virtue and ideals. What the abandonment of virtue and ideals has led to in modern fiction is deplored by J. Donald Adams in Literary Frontiers:

. . . all but the most brutish or moronic of men contain within them impulses which rise above the satisfaction of physical or material needs. Yet you would never guess the existence of this incontrovertible fact from the writing of many novelists who have in our time been hailed as realists, as honest and objective commentators on human life. They have chosen to ignore the reality of men's inner world, that complexity of human nature--which is

³³ Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (New York: Pageant Books, 1959), pp. 369-370.

at the same time so simple--that constant and universal struggle between satisfaction and aspiration which must be taken into account whether the novelist deals with its manifestations on a high or low level of human intelligence and character.³⁴

One specific example of Miss Chase's avoidance of any false or excessive sentimentalism in Silas Crockett is the way in which she presents the changes in the Crockett home after its sale near the close of the novel. The house has become a symbol of many things to the family and it is strong in their affections. When young Silas goes back at his father's wish, it has changed. Its changes are no greater, just more abrupt, than those it has endured during the century of the story. The author records them dispassionately, not allowing them to spoil the house in the reader's eye, even though Silas finds that many of the things which held emotional connotations for his father and himself have gone. The new and the old are just two different homes, each with its own appeal, each with an obvious validity. The fact that the author presents the new in an attractive light frees her from suspicion of attaching undue sentiment to the old. It is rather one reviewer who is sentimental when he criticizes:

There is missing from it the sadness you would expect in a story of declining New England, the peculiar sadness of those gutted houses that your headlights touch when you are driving back to Boston from the north. But even sadness would seem inadequate.³⁵

But the house the Crocketts left had not been gutted; such an image would have been inconsistent with their story. Nor is sadness the

³⁴Adams, p. 152.

³⁵Jon Cheever, Review of Silas Crockett, New Republic, LXXXV (November 11, 1935), 146.

emotion the author wishes to stress. There is some sadness, but it is a more universal sadness than the peculiar one of gutted houses north of Boston. Ann expresses this sadness toward the end of the book, ". . . but what makes me feel bad is not that they're all dead, but that we can't know how they felt about things while they lived. . . . That's the sadness in it, I think. . . ." (p. 400) What Ann states here the author objectifies on some occasions. One of these occasions is Susan's rather inadequate attempt to explain to Huldah the significance of the family keepsakes stored in the attic. But the sadness of this represents only a minor strain of the book and Ann's words just quoted come in a scene which the author has labelled at its beginning as one of sentiment--"The sentiment of the thirtieth of May, common to all rural New England" (p. 396).

Mumford's general observation that the impulse of the sentimental regionalist to keep reliving some moment of the past was anti-historical and anti-organic might be contrasted with Herschell Brickell's comments on Miss Chase's freedom from this impulse:

Certain of the regional writers, among them Mary Ellen Chase, are not so much filled with a yearning for another time--the Golden Age that has always fired the fancy of man--as they are concerned with the survival of fine and lasting traits of character that have come down to us as first-hand evidence that not quite all we know about the past lies in the realm of the imagination.³⁶

And an English reviewer observes that to English readers the mental pictures created by Mary Peters and Silas Crockett "of an American seaport must have come as a revelation of an organism of which the existence was

³⁶Brickell, p. 153

hardly known."³⁷ If Miss Chase's pictures reveal an organism rather than a moment suspended motionless in time, if she is more concerned with "the survival of fine and lasting traits" than she is with "yearning for another time," then perhaps she has overcome what Mumford calls "the besetting weakness of regionalism" and is neither anti-historical nor anti-organic.

Rather than being anti-historical, it is history itself that Miss Chase often devoted herself to. As Robert P. T. Coffin wrote in his review, "In Silas Crockett Mary Ellen Chase has added one more volume and her loveliest to her history of a culture."³⁸ When Brickell says of this history, "But there are no museum trappings in the novel--only the settings for understandable, real people, able to reach out and touch lives with ours,"³⁹ he is slightly misinterpreting an aspect of Miss Chase's intention and also projecting a false conception of the function of the true museum.

A clue to Miss Chase's intention may be taken from the novel. Both Thomas Winship and his daughter Solace Crockett have visions of bequeathing something of their past to the future. In fact, there is a parallel, it seems, between what Mary Ellen Chase did in writing the book Silas Crockett and what Solace Winship Crockett had a dream of doing and could not because there was no money for it. Although the dream "died daily even while it was coming to life" (p. 263), some of it took form:

³⁷Review of Silas Crockett, Times Literary Supplement, (January 4, 1936), p. 13.

³⁸Review of Silas Crockett, Commonweal, XXIII (December 13, 1935), p. 191.

³⁹Brickell, p. 154.

She wanted to give it [her father's house] to Saturday Cove as a library and museum. . . . The upstairs rooms, she had imagined, might be the repository of manuscripts, logbooks, records, old drawings, pictures and the like, which should preserve the history of a bit of the coast from carelessness, neglect, and ignorance. (p. 262)

She planned other things for the rooms. Among them would be her father's records of his buildings, records which he had carefully put together, telling Solace:

"When a man's nearly sixty and more than half his working life has gone, he likes to take stock of things he's done. These big sheets I've got together here are the plans of the meeting houses I've drawn and put up. There are fourteen in all and not one of them had any other architect but me. I'm laying them away in a safe place for what they're worth. Maybe somebody will see them someday, but if they don't I'll be neither the better nor the worse for it." (p. 80)

There were besides the meeting houses, dwelling-houses, schoolhouses, vessels, barns and sheds, stores, taverns, and coffins with burial boxes to match. The figures Miss Chase used for these were taken from the diary of a Maine builder of the period. This inclusion illustrates Miss Chase's aim at authenticity.

The wish which has often impelled Mary Ellen Chase in her writing, particularly in such a book as Silas Crockett, is close to the one felt by Solace Crockett when she imagined her memorial:

All these things, carefully placed and guarded within the old house, itself a memorial of the days when men like her father laboured with faith and devotion for the very sake of labour, would perhaps halt time now and then, turn it backward upon itself, make those who looked upon them understand, if only for a moment, the sacredness of traditions, the long dependence of the present upon the past. (p. 263)

There is no place in all she has written where this attitude toward the past is so well objectified as in Silas Crockett. She is not unique

in her wish to preserve part of the past. Heinrich Straumann in American Literature in the Twentieth Century has noted that this tendency goes beyond the confines of literature and has found in the preservation and restoration of old buildings and pieces of furniture symptoms of "the peculiar quality of the American love of the past."⁴⁰ Not all Americans share this feeling, and Miss Chase adds fairness and some humor to her story by allowing Susan, the family servant, to speak her mind when Solace transfers the treasures of the Winship attic to the Crockett attic:

"Do you suppose," asked Susan, standing by the laden clothes basket with her arms akimbo, "that Master Reuben's goin' to have any use for all this clutch or for that matter any understanding of it? Ain't it just goin' from one attic to another for another set of rats to gnaw on?"

When Solace said, "But I can't destroy them, foolish as it seems. They-- they hold the thoughts of people," Susan replied, "There are an awful lot of thoughts in this world. To my mind it's lucky they haven't all been wrote down." (p. 269)

The argument for and against the preservation of the past can only be resolved by making proper use of the past. Lewis Mumford in his chapter "The Pillage of the Past" from The Golden Day uses the contrast between the two meanings of the word reproduction to illustrate the possible uses of the museum: "Cultures flourish in the first kind of living contact; and so far as the museum serves this end, it exists for a worthy and rational purpose."⁴¹ The past which Miss Chase presents

⁴⁰Straumann, p. 57.

⁴¹The Golden Age, A Study in American Experience and Culture (New York: Boni and Liveright, Publishers, 1926), p. 214.

in Silas Crockett is, it is true, a past of her own immediate background. That is the reason she can write of it with both feeling and authenticity. It would, however, be inaccurate to assume that she sees value in it only for those who have descended from it. The Armenian past in Mary Christmas, the Greek past in "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," the Hebrew past in Life and Language in the Old Testament, the English past in Dawn in Lyonesse, all are other pasts, besides her immediate own, that she has written of. Her attitude toward all of these seems consistent with the ideal stated by Mumford:

We cannot, indeed, make the ways of other cultures our ways, but, by entering into all their life in the spirit, our ways will become more deeply humanized, and will, in fresh modes, continue the living past. When we are integrated, we grow like the tree: the solid trunk of the past, and the cambrium layer where life and growth take place, are unified and necessary to each other.⁴²

It may be offered as a reasonable criticism of Miss Chase's work as a novelist, that for all her endeavor to keep alive a feeling of and for the past, she is usually not specific as to just how the past can be useful to the present. Perhaps in the greatest of literary art this kind of problem is solved without didacticism, but at no point in her novel-writing does her answer to this problem come out very strong or very clear in spite of a few scattered hints. There are, however, many critics who would not demand such a solution, and many other writers who do not offer one.

In the thirties more than at any other time during her writing career, Miss Chase was writing novels within a specific literary trend. In an article reviewing four new books, Silas Crockett among them, Lloyd

⁴²Ibid., p. 228.

Morris observed "that the most important tendency in our recent fiction springs from an impulse to interpret the present in the light of the past . . . authors are profoundly concerned with a contemporary predicament and use history as a resource or an instrument."⁴³ Morris was not as eager as others to label this regionalism. He felt, rather, that "these writers, for the first time in our literature are using specific locality to illustrate a theme national in scope and application." One aspect of Morris's observation touches Miss Chase's work especially:

Some of them [novelists] have likewise left their theme unresolved so that their books seem to challenge the present to discover objectives as pertinent to the human spirit as those which it had renounced. This effect is strongly present in the excellent Maine novels of Miss Mary Ellen Chase, in Miss Ellen Glasgow's "Vein of Iron." . . .⁴⁴

The conjunction of Vein of Iron and Miss Chase's Maine novels is appropriate for another reason which also transcends their location. Miss Chase's women, the Crocketts as well as Mary Peters, have something of a "vein of iron." They are not, to be sure, put to the same rigorous tests, but they have many similar positive qualities. What Gladys Hasty Carroll, looking to characters from Sarah Orne Jewett, Rachel Field, Robert P. T. Coffin, Mary Ellen Chase, and herself, finds as "a distinctive quality of spirit in Maine women"⁴⁵ seems in reality to extend beyond Maine if one considers the kinship of these women with some of those created by Ellen Glasgow--Dorinda Oakley, for example.

⁴³"Some Recent American Fiction," North American Review, CCXLI (March, 1936), p. 275.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 279.

⁴⁵Carroll, p. 17.

Perhaps the explanation of this comparison is implicit in Randall Stewart's finding of "a Puritan quality" in the twentieth century Southern Revival.⁴⁶ In Silas Crockett a changing cultural pattern and a veering religious trend are both revealed in the fact that Huldah Crockett at the end of the Crockett century was more Puritan than Abigail at its beginning.

Mrs. Carroll, writing in the thirties, found her own group of contemporary Maine writers "all like the rest of New England a little blind to the exact significance of the present." Of Mary Ellen Chase specifically she said, "Miss Chase writes of the days of clipper ships and up to the era of antique shops and stops there." She also made what seems a fair assessment of Miss Chase's overall attitude toward the past:

But our attitude toward that past is not what Sarah Orne Jewett's was. Mary Ellen Chase may overestimate its charms but she is not wistful about it. She does not write regretfully nor mournfully. There is none of the hush of a cemetery on a summer afternoon about her books. Rather, there is something of the resilience of a spring-board, as in "A Goodly Heritage"; she seems to be saying, "This is a fine place from which to make a big jump!"⁴⁷

J. Donald Adams, writing two decades later on the topic of Literary Frontiers, shows a more general philosophy about the use of the past in literature which should be encouraging to writers with Miss Chase's taste in subject matter:

A writer does not necessarily retreat from his own age or fail to bring illumination to it merely because he sets the time of his story at an earlier hour. Truth and light are not so time-bound as that. And our writing as a matter of fact, is overweighted with contemporaneity.⁴⁸

⁴⁶American Literature and Christian Doctrine (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), pp. 21-22.

⁴⁷Carroll, p. 17.

⁴⁸Adams, pp. 28-29.

Writing a novel is a different thing from writing a chapter of history or even from creating a living museum. How can the novel accomplish something which is lacking in "the vast monographic literature of professional historians" and "the vaster literature of antiquarians and local historical societies" which Bernard DeVoto considered "a rich part of our cultural heritage"?⁴⁹ Certainly the novel must possess something more than authenticity. Several reviewers of Silas Crockett suggest in part what Miss Chase is able to achieve with her material. Brickell wrote:

The strength and appeal of the chronicle novel depend upon the successful re-creation of the past, its re-vivification, and at this Miss Chase, quite obviously without taking any liberties, exhibits notable skill.⁵⁰

R. P. T. Coffin, who was always sympathetic with Miss Chase's treatment of Maine, says of this story of "the Maine of her seafaring ancestors":

That Maine culture was one in which pomp and principle went hand in hand, and Miss Chase makes both shine like the shores and houses among which they flourish.

Local epitaphs and songs, the bright lexicon of coast cakes, . . . and such tart wisdom as that which prophesies that "there's nothing like cashmere to attract moths"--these things play their part. And observation of universal beauty too: a new-born baby smelling like April rain, and the instant sympathy of two women carrying babies, though they are races and civilizations apart.⁵¹

Coffin's view of the book thus suggests that it is in its way like Solace Winship Crockett's dream of the upper rooms of her girlhood home

⁴⁹The Literary Fallacy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), pp. 89-90.

⁵⁰Brickell, p. 154.

⁵¹Coffin, p. 191.

"a repository . . . to preserve a bit of the coast" (p. 262), but both Brickell and Coffin indicate that Miss Chase endows her material with light and life. To consider the way she attempts to do this is to find some of the difference between a novel and a chapter of history. Technique, whether deliberate or intuitive, facile or searching, is something modern critics have been asking of the novel. Two views on technique which almost coincide are expressed by John W. Aldridge and Mark Schorer. Schorer recognizes the attention which has traditionally been given to content:

The novel is still read as though its content has some value in itself and as though technique were not a primary but a supplementary element, capable perhaps of not unattractive embellishments upon the surface of the subject, but hardly its essence.

Just before this Schorer has said:

Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the achieved content, the form, the work of art as a work of art that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.⁵²

Schorer goes on at some length to demonstrate his meaning, which is not greatly different from what Aldridge says in a simpler statement:

By technique we ordinarily mean the writer's instrument for discovering his subject matter. The best technique will be the one which discovers a given subject matter the most thoroughly, which illuminates and makes meaningful the greatest area of raw material through which the writer moves in his search for meaning. Raw material cannot be subject matter until it is illuminated by technique.⁵³

⁵²"Technique as Discovery," reprinted in Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-1951, selected by John W. Aldridge (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1952), p. 67.

⁵³Critiques and Essays, p. 104.

Although Mary Peters and Silas Crockett both use similar background material and are, therefore, presented together in this chapter called "Seafaring Novels" and although in one sense, if not in every sense, they may both be considered regional novels, one thing which differentiates them is technique. This, if one follows Aldridge, makes different use of their similar subject matter. A choice between the two would be governed somewhat by taste, but Stanley Young, not the only reviewer choosing Silas Crockett, gives reasons for his choice which at least hint at technique:

This book definitely extends Miss Chase's reputation. To my mind it goes far deeper in interpreting the heroism of the past and the stubborn passion of seagoing families than did ever "Mary Peters." With this novel she imposes order and peace and serenity out of the materials of the past, and she does so without any tricks of style, without false moves or devices. She has the gift of understanding disciplined by the gift of selection. With "Silas Crockett" she takes her place among the rarer talents of the present.⁵⁴

Mr. Young is quite accurate when he says that the author "imposes order." The feeling of order is one of the total impressions of the book, but with a full century and the seven seas to deal with, the author had to find some means of imposing order beyond chronology and family relationships. In Mary Peters it has been noted there is a continuity of imagery. In Silas Crockett, there is no central image such as Cadiz in Mary Peters, and yet it is largely through the use of imagery that the author gives order to her story. Early in the book the reader learns something about the life of Abigail Shaw Crockett, mother of Silas: "In a swift kaleidoscopic train of images these things passed through her

⁵⁴Stanley Young, Review of Silas Crockett, New York Times Book Review, November 17, 1935, p. 1.

mind as she looked upon young Silas on the pierhead in the spring sun and wind" (p. 24). Very often this is the way the chronicle moves forward, "in a swift kaleidoscopic train of images." These images accompany the narrative and sometimes almost seem to substitute for it. They mark the dramatic moments, often holding more intensity of feeling than the action itself. In a way the quick shifting of images creates as much of the feeling of life and movement of the story as the action does. Sometimes they cluster. They also appear in catalogues. The most vivid of them stand singly and occasionally recur, not frequently as in Mary Peters, but significantly. Often these images delight with their strong sense impressions. They carry a satisfactory sharpness even when they are associated with bitter or sombre or fearful emotions. Individually their force is fragmentary; together they give form and substance to the story.

Often the images must be summarized. All the voyages Silas Crockett made in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century could not be followed separately. Miss Chase compresses them into summary passages in such a way as to emphasize their multiplicity and yet give individuality and vividness to his activity. A few random examples may indicate the way she handles these details in a summarizing way.

. . . for small New England brigs and schooners . . .
left their multifarious gimcracks in return for goatskins
and tropical woods and cochineal, the last of which
coloured the frosting of cakes on many a church-supper
table in isolated New England. . . .

But heaven-made ice from a hundred New England
ponds and lakes once it reached Calcutta and Bombay,
once it had slipped down the parched and suspicious
throats of nabobs and rajahs and commoner folk in all
varieties of cold drinks, could be sold for almost any
price. . . .

. . . and Central Wharf in Boston received in due time enough packed figs to supply the whole of North America, Turkish carpets for the wealthy, and innumerable sponges for many a Saturday night bath from Maine to the New West. (pp. 74-75)

But the images are individual as well as summarized. Memory holds its own pictures which return at significant moments. Among the most vivid of these significant moments are the last bits of consciousness which Nicholas Crockett experiences before his death in the cold of his watch on a fishing vessel.

There are several aspects of the ending of Silas Crockett which indicate Miss Chase's view of the relation between the present and the past. Gladys Hasty Carroll was undoubtedly right about Miss Chase's failure to spell out precisely the implications of the past for the present, but this novel does come directly up to the present of its day and it does honestly acknowledge the problems of that depression period of the nineteen thirties, leaving the reader to understand that the character which Silas Crockett has inherited will help him face whatever he must.

Miss Chase allows the past to linger, even though there is much Silas doesn't know about it. He has a sense of it, a feeling for it, rather than any logical thoughts about it, when he says close to the end, "People say the past is dead, but it can't be. I feel it coming back whenever I see a dingy old schooner like that one out there beating along the coast" (p. 401).

The second Silas also has several brief experiences in which he sees matters very clearly--moments of perception they might best be called since "perception" seems to be very important to Miss Chase. She holds it up as an ideal to be sought in the essay "Time to Oneself,"

when she writes,

If we mean by culture the swift or slow perception and understanding of the meanings latent, and different, for each individual in beautiful things, in books and music, art and nature, science and religion, then in order to rear a culture which shall withstand war and confusion and cruelty, we must take time to discover these meanings by ourselves.⁵⁵

This quotation indicates the value she places on "perception." In her fiction, however, perception comes more as a result of intuition than from direct search. There are moments of perception for special characters in a number of Miss Chase's novels. In fact, to be capable of perception is a special attribute of her finest characters. Perception is usually swift rather than slow. Two moments of it are especially important to the second Silas Crockett. At his grandmother's funeral in the family parlor, the minister's Bible reading which ends with the words "Death is swallowed up in victory," gave the fourteen-year-old Silas a stir of understanding about immortality--the kind of immortality which was in some way related to his own ancestors hanging on the wall:

A door somewhere in his mind seemed to have swung wide open for a moment, allowing him dimly to understand that that which the minister was reading had really relatively little to do with the still figure in the coffin, that instead it had to do with all people and all things everywhere, with him and his mother and father, with days and hours, weeks and months and years, with the sun and moon and stars, with the assured faces of the Crockett men so alive on the walls, looking down at his grandmother who was dead. It was but a momentary perception; the door swung to again before he could hold it open; but he was always to remember in after years the odd and new experience of light thus flooding his thoughts. (pp. 363-364)

In a sense it is the experience of perception which is almost as important

⁵⁵Mary Ellen Chase, "Time to Oneself," Yale Review, XXX (Autumn, 1940), 140.

as the specific perception itself.

Near the close of the story Silas had another "flash of understanding clearer than that years ago at his grandmother's funeral." What he understood seemed to be clearer to him than what he was able to say about it. Referring to new discoveries he said,

"All the things we've learned can't take away what's rooted in us through generations like these around us and through this coast and sea. Believing in a thing doesn't mean that you've got to understand all about it first. That's where our generation makes its mistakes, it seems to me. I think believing in a thing means hanging onto it because you know it's good and, even when you lose faith in it for a time, still hanging on to what it did for you when you had it. . . . I believe the truth is a much bigger thing than just what you prove in your mind about it." (pp. 402-403)

CHAPTER V

TWO AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

In years ahead when the past Mary Ellen Chase writes of in A Goodly Heritage is less likely to touch the recollections of its readers than now, that book may become the least "mortal" of all that the author herself has called "my mortal work."¹ Although it is a companion autobiography to A Goodly Fellowship, which followed seven years later as "a complement, perhaps a sequel,"² the very differences which make that later book a better example of a structurally unified autobiography make A Goodly Heritage more likely to survive the tests of time. George F. Whicher criticized lightly when he wrote in his review of A Goodly Fellowship: "What Miss Chase calls 'the presumption always latent . . . in autobiographical narratives of those relatively unimportant' is not entirely exorcised from her pages, but it is greatly mitigated by her power to communicate a eupeptic enthusiasm for her profession."³ While A Goodly Fellowship, presumptive or otherwise, may long remain entertaining and enlightening to the general reader and stimulating to the teacher, A Goodly Heritage, because it focuses its centrality on a less individual figure and addresses

¹In a letter written to the author of this dissertation on April 9, 1957.

²Mary Ellen Chase, A Goodly Fellowship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. xii.

³George F. Whicher, Review of A Goodly Fellowship, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 26, 1939, p. 3.

readers more widespread in time, place, and interests, has less risk of ever being considered presumptive, even in its undertaking. Here she writes "as one of the multitude," affirming, "For although I write of New England life and particularly of that life as it was experienced in the State of Maine, the account cannot be termed sectional in that out of New England so many of our Western states were originally made."⁴ She hopes to reach as audience both "those to whom that past is memorable" and "those who will never know it" (p. 8).

The unity of A Goodly Heritage is a less tangible, less definable unity than that of A Goodly Fellowship. The unity of A Goodly Heritage depends not so much on structure as on mood, tone, and attitude. While the material is more diverse and less capable of easy organization than that of A Goodly Fellowship the oneness of the significance which Miss Chase draws from it holds it all together. This unifying quality is part of the author's creative contribution to the necessarily unalterable factualness of the material. It is, of course, any author's creative power which makes an autobiography worth considering as literature. When the author's creative power is directed toward interpretation, the result, as Wayne Shumaker describes it, is that

. . . interpretation as well as origination . . . brings into explicit being qualities and essences which before have been only potential--that is to say, impossible with the universe as it is. Moreover, the obstacles to a complete and flawless recapturing of the past render inevitable in autobiography as in history, the creation of a new past--a past recognizably similar to the actual past, in obvious ways, but different, in spite

⁴Mary Ellen Chase, A Goodly Heritage (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 7.

of every straining for truthfulness, in shading, in inclusiveness, and even in coherence and comprehensibility.⁵

Now certainly the "new past" offered to readers in A Goodly Heritage contains a kind of truthfulness which transcends the kind which Mr. Shumaker is referring to. Not only has Miss Chase halted time to show in high relief significant bits of her own typical background, but she has not hesitated to place her own particular values on that background or to suggest that many other Americans shared them. Furthermore, while there is nothing dogmatic about her general view of these values, there is the broad thought that, whatever one's age, it has its own special worth and the wise person opens his eyes to see what that worth is, rather than regretting its circumscription. This positive attitude is at one and the same time the prevailing spirit of the book and also a part of the heritage which she finds goodly. It could never be Mary Ellen Chase's attitude, as it was Willa Cather's, that the past represented a good more desirable than the present or even than the foreseeable future, and that the past was something to be yearned for.

Her attitude is one of the remarkable accomplishments of A Goodly Heritage, for here in the very book which is dedicated to displaying most engagingly the benisons of what has ceased to be, Miss Chase seems most willing to relinquish them cheerfully. This is doubtless because she is wisely content to hold lightly what she is most sure of. There are indications in her prologue and epilogue that just the experience of writing this book had made her more certain of the worth of what she

⁵Wayne Shumaker, English Autobiography, Its Emergence, Materials and Form (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), p. 112.

has depicted; she writes in the epilogue: "I said, and perhaps believed, at the beginning that most of the middle-aged among us were by early training, environment, and education unprepared for the New World in which we must live. I see now that the best of us have had instead an invincible preparation" (pp. 295-296).

But there is no narrowness in this view; what has been good for her generation cannot be held to be best for all generations. If any reader of her other regional writing is in danger of believing that she is holding up her own place and its own past as something one should mourn the loss of, here are her own words to disprove it, and they are words very close to the center of the meaning of all her writing, although meaning is seldom so explicitly articulated as here. In the beginning she says, ". . . I write not to draw a moral but to paint a picture. Rather would I seize upon what made an age distinctive than attempt to present that age as a palliative or as an example to a different present" (pp. 7-8). At the very end comes the statement which best explains what she has accomplished here, if, indeed, there is by this time any need of explanation:

Surely the lines fell unto us in pleasant places, places meet to prepare us for the Newest of worlds. That we missed much of all which the New World possesses, of all which will doubtless prove its own goodly heritage to those of its generation--this is incontestable. But the wise among us will seize upon whatsoever things are here and now of good report because of their larger honesty and justice, cultivating meanwhile from the gifts tendered especially unto ourselves a merry reliquishment as well as a larger understanding. (pp. 297-298)

It is too early to tell just what significance the age she has written of will assume in the long view of history, but it begins to look

as though the particular perspective of Miss Chase's position which allowed her to look back at "a relatively stable past" and ahead at a future of which change is the chief characteristic was more unusual than might at first be supposed. Those who are of the generations following Miss Chase's have cause to wonder if there will ever again be "a relatively stable" period. Regardless of the position of the particular age, it is likely that this autobiography, which is something both more and less than an autobiography, will always offer both factual and spiritual significance to those interested in its interpretation. The book reaches back, particularly in the two middle sections on the Puritan and Seafaring Traditions, to several of the final aspects of the American frontier. Perry Westbrook, in Acres of Flint, reminds us of the importance of this:

"When we do begin to understand it the vitality of the American pioneer⁷, especially as its inherited potentialities operate in the frontierless America of today, we may better understand why contemporary Americans behave as they do."⁶

Whatever future ages may learn from the examination of this particular past, it must not be overlooked that this past was to Miss Chase something to be used--to be used, it may be added, with true Yankee ingenuity and sure New England thrift: "When I had done and entered upon college teaching, I found, like all others of my age and generation, a new civilization in which to live and work, converting whatever had been of value throughout a relatively stable past into capital for a new and unstable present" (p. 294).

⁶Perry D. Westbrook, Acres of Flint (Washington, D. C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1951), p. 3.

There are more ideas about this special type of American past stated directly in A Goodly Heritage, among them the author's interest in "that synthesis of the hand and of the mind which arose from the idealism, the freedom, the simplicity of American life" (p. 262); but the direct statement of such ideas is the lesser part of the book. More significant is the fact that the author so often makes it possible for the reader to experience these ideas and the life of the age they are concerned with. The "new past" she creates does indeed "bring into explicit being qualities and essences." To understand how she has done this so appropriately and effectively one should consider her techniques. Narration, often an especially fitting dramatic narration; documentary evidence; and a sharp sense of humor all function together.

The use of documentary evidence in A Goodly Heritage draws the book, as far as the use of materials is concerned, closer to biography than autobiography usually is. This is not as paradoxical as it may seem, for Miss Chase is centering really on something other than herself. She selects those of her own experiences, unique as they may be in themselves, which have in them something which will throw light on the ideas and experiences in ways which Shumaker attributes more to biography than to autobiography: "Whatever the similarity of their purposes, biography and autobiography are, materially speaking, often nearly as widely separated as history and the novel. The one draws facts from reading, observations and interviews; the other raises memories into consciousness."⁷ Now there is a good bit of material in A Goodly Heritage which adds substantial weight to the many valuable memories raised into Miss Chase's consciousness.

⁷Shumaker, p. 35.

In the section on the Seafaring Tradition she devotes a whole chapter, "A Boy's First Voyage in 1856," to an account written down for her by Captain Edgar Stevens. This account of courage is the Captain's memory raised into his consciousness, and written down fifty-five years after the event, but it was a memory kept fresh by many retellings, for Miss Chase says it "had always held a favorite place in our ears" (p. 187). Then, too, the Captain's account of his voyage contains some things besides the re-creation of the voyage itself. Two of these things Miss Chase points out: "the stirring quality of his own speech" (p. 187) and "an interesting commentary on the educational powers of such a relatively school-less life as his, spent instead under the relentless tutelage of the sea" (pp. 187-188).

The chapter following "A Boy's First Voyage" includes a letter by the author's own grandfather, not equal to Captain Stevens's narrative in correctness or style but significant because it was written only three weeks after the shipwreck of which he was the only survivor and also because, as Miss Chase says, it "describes better than any words of my own, not so much my grandfather as the type of men to which he belonged" (p. 206). An earlier section in the book contains quotations from a letter, less grim, written by the same grandfather.

The section on the Puritan tradition includes excerpts from the writings of the Reverend Jonathan Fisher--largely from his correspondence--which serve to picture spiritual, and some non-spiritual, affairs of his Blue Hill parish. So large was the Blue Hill inheritance from Jonathan Fisher that Miss Chase was nearly two decades later to devote a whole book to him and carefully chosen selections from his writings. Finally

even the last section of A Goodly Heritage has its own documentary material in the form of quotations from the author's own academy notebook.

Not only does this documentary evidence increase the historical value of the book, but it makes the reader feel closer to the subject matter. The author's own humor is reinforced by the humor, conscious or otherwise, of those whom she quotes. Certainly a reader will be both entertained and made sympathetically understanding of a vanished way of life, when he reads a partial list of commissions to a "shopping sea captain" which includes a "hoss harness," "tobaco," pocket knives, nails, a hat, flour, calico, stuff for a wedding dress, steel traps, a doll, "one cane snake's head preferred, not to cost over \$1," and "one singing bird cage" (pp. 165-166). This is the kind of direct evidence which gives A Goodly Heritage the value of historical authenticity and at the same time its tone of distinctiveness, which could only be attained from the perspective of one era looking back on another era which is near enough to be well and affectionately understood, and could only be achieved by a writer who not only has that perspective but who has the skill to communicate it to others.

At the same time as Miss Chase authenticates her book with the kind of documentation just discussed, she realizes the validity of a heritage which is not quite as close to the literal original as primary documents represent. Such a heritage is the Cadiz already discussed which appeared in somewhat different forms in "Not in Cadiz" and in Mary Peters. Cadiz also appears here and there in A Goodly Heritage along with other evidences of the whole legacy her grandmother's seafaring days had bequeathed her. That her grandmother heightened and embroidered her tales, Miss

Chase never expresses any doubt, nor does she doubt the reality of the creations which became more important to the grandmother and her descendants than the literal actuality could ever have been. The part these stories played in Mary Ellen Chase's young consciousness is indicated by her comment on the story of her grandfather's wreck: "I cannot remember when I did not know and treasure its every detail. It seemed to have been born with all of us, like our hands and our feet" (pp. 202-203). One aspect of the author's childhood which distinguishes it sharply from the childhood of today's American youth is not just that there were stories then to be told, but that there were older adults with the time, imagination, enthusiasm, and opportunity to tell them. Certainly the separation of first and third generations in today's society has been responsible for some of our social and psychological changes. How well really does each generation know the second generation before it? Just as birth, death, and serious illness, for better or worse, have left the average home of today, so have grandparents. Miss Chase does not make such observations herself, but the thoughtful reader of what she has to say of her grandmother and others of her grandmother's generation cannot help making them for himself. How many grandmothers of today give their granddaughters a vision of Cadiz and one of the chemises from a second trousseau, the first trousseau having been lost in a shipwreck on her honeymoon voyage?

It is difficult to separate even for critical inspection the drama of Miss Chase's narration; the skillful results of her controlled if not measured prose, which is the composite of as many appropriate ingredients

as the medicinal concoction, called "Kickapoo Indian Sagwaw," which her father bought annually from an old Indian chief; and the keen humor which permeates the book, softening by the grace of reminiscence what might have pained at an earlier day. In fact, if one does separate these aspects of her writing for comment, one realizes that they go together again behind one as soon and as inseparably as the waters of the Red Sea closed behind the Israelites.

The same novelistic sensibilities which were also to guide Miss Chase's writing of the second autobiography, A Goodly Fellowship, dictated to her inclusion in A Goodly Heritage of several dramatic incidents. Usually they feature someone other than herself, as in Captain Stevens's own account which has already been mentioned, or as in her retelling of the story of the bargain of the melon seeds on the island of Tsung Ming. One whole chapter, however, dramatizes an occurrence of her early childhood and yet seems to portray more distinctly both the religious climate of her background and the peculiar psychology of any active five-year-old mind than the particularly personal experience which it actually was. This chapter, called "An Early Encounter with the Holy Ghost," comes significantly in the section on "The Puritan Tradition," for it illustrates that some of the drama which had always adhered to Puritanism still clung to it even in an age when its religious fervor was disappearing even in such remote spots as Blue Hill, Maine.

The understanding with which the author presents herself as the childish protagonist in this drama is not as much autobiographical insight as it is typical of a curiosity which runs through much of her writing from her first book, His Birthday, to the recent Edge of Darkness.

The thoughts and emotions of children and adolescents have always been an area of fascination to her and one which she usually explores with considerable perception.

In her account of her first acquaintance with the Holy Ghost, she portrays the natural egotism of the young child who must go her playmates one better and be the Holy Ghost while they are only ghosts of the Hallowe'en variety and who, when called to account, displays the flaw of pride at this self-bestowed distinction and suffers the downfall to which this pride has led her. The deadly seriousness of the elderly neighbor who pronounces this downfall to the erring five-year-old is its own comment on such a survival of the Puritan attitude toward sin: "You have said a very wicked thing, my child. When you are older, you will know how wicked. God has struck people in his Book dead for less than what you have said. Go home, now, very slowly, and ask Him to forgive you!" (p. 129) The child, who is being raised to have the utmost respect for elders, does, in this most dramatic scene of the book, exactly as she is told and with the pathos that might accompany the denouement of an adult tragedy. That she continues, five-year-old that she is, to be tormented for some months by "fear of God and of the righteous anger of my parents should they learn of my sin" (p. 132), is further comment on the state of parental discipline at the end of the nineteenth century. The epilogue of the drama shows that the experience had lingered long: "A yet more bitter irony was in store for me when long afterward my apprehensive ears heard the minister in the Sunday morning Bible reading refer to the Holy Ghost as the 'comforter'" (p. 132).

In spite of the successful re-creation of the mood of childish fear,

the recollection is told with no grimness but with an underlying tone of humor. Certainly only a humorous turn of mind could have allowed her so objectively to describe in retrospect the Great-Aunt so cruelly if so unconsciously responsible for the mental torment of her very young self: "As she prepared herself daily in the stern orthodoxy of her fathers for death and the Judgment Seat, so she strove to fit all children and young people for a thoroughly uncomfortable and anxious existence" (p. 126). As often in Miss Chase's writing, it is the structure of this sentence which gives it its humorous tone. Its balance and antithesis suggest that she could have come to its composition directly from the reading of Alexander Pope in his most genial mood. It is undoubtedly this same element of contrast which sustains the subdued tone of humor throughout the whole episode. It is the incongruity that makes us smile, and the incongruity here exists between two aspects of the same occurrence. What could not be too exaggerated to show the re-creation of childish suffering appears at the same time to be both drawn out and exaggerated to the adult who is looking back quite tolerantly on the whole affair.

The chapter as a whole had a motive beyond those of humor, entertainment, tolerance, drama, or the exploration of child psychology. It was to show an effect of the inheritance from Puritanism. Even this heritage, which seems dubious in its value at this point in her narrative, comes out, when the scales have been balanced, in this book and elsewhere in her writing, as goodly, at least in certain respects. Percy H. Boynton in commenting that Miss Chase has not been primarily concerned with Puritanism also observes that it is woven into the fabric of her narratives and that her "picture of the rural New England scene is the better for

it."⁸ It should perhaps be added that it is also the more honest for it.

Although the number of dramatic scenes that can be narrated in such a book as A Goodly Heritage is necessarily limited, it should be remarked that Miss Chase makes effective and liberal use of the dramatic moment at every opportunity. Among these moments are her father's announcement of the death of John Greenleaf Whittier; the writing on a slip of paper at her Aunt Caroline's command the date "December 31st, 1899"; her grandmother's effective punishment of all the children in the family for their laughing taunts at the traveling "purveyor of what he called 'Comfort Powders'": "Calling us into the house, she read to us in a threatening, awful voice that just tale of the children who laughed at the Prophet Elisha, calling him Baldhead" (p. 83). This last also illustrated one of the various applications of the Bible both to the life of the age she is depicting and to the narrative she is relating. Of course the reader who has made a childhood acquaintance with this particular Bible story can best comprehend the dramatic effectiveness of her grandmother's punishment.

Perhaps only the reader who has grown up in a past when non-native fruits such as oranges and bananas were a rare and precious luxury can comprehend to the core the dramatic importance of the possession of a whole bunch of bananas by the Chase family, but all readers must join in the high moment of:

. . . drama [that] occurred one noon when my father upon inspection of the great ungainly bunch, suggested that we cut the yellowest. That he contemplated any

⁸Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 83.

distribution never once occurred to any of us, neither to exhibitors nor to spectators. We watched him procure a box, mount it, and draw his jack-knife from his pocket. I can yet feel the stilling of my heart when he handed down to me, who waited below with outstretched apron, five, six, eight, twelve bananas, when he proposed that we should treat our friends. From that day to this I have never been able to regard a banana with the supercilious stare of the cultivated mind and eye. The munificence and magnanimity of my father, the opulence and distinction of us as a family remain always to be evoked by any chance sight of that humblest and ugliest of fruits. (p. 168)

Again she has caught a dramatic moment and given it an undertone of humor by the contrast between the importance of the incident in the eyes of the child at the moment of its occurrence and the triviality which it will appear to the reader of a later day. But there is more than a touch of drama and a tone of humor in the paragraph. There is reminiscence for those who have known such a situation and information for those who have not, information that once upon a time most men, even professional men like Mary Ellen Chase's father, carried and used jack-knives and that girls wore aprons and used them for many purposes. The suggestion of family consciousness and pride is a reiteration of what, one realizes by the end, is a minor theme of the whole book and one of its theses.

This penchant for the dramatic is related to the author's philosophy of teaching, as A Goodly Fellowship reveals. Miss Chase often portrays the dramatic more successfully in her non-fiction, in her autobiographies, in the essays, and even in her commentaries on the literature of the Bible, than she does in her fiction. And the same is often true of her success in the use of humor. One aspect of her humor in her non-fiction she attains easily, just by her selections from the material available

to her. Little special literary technique is required to make the reader smile when she records that, after the wreck of The Bride had divested her grandmother of her entire "first" trousseau,

The news of her misfortune swept through the city, and she was almost immediately inundated with clothing of every description. Unfortunately, however, the Bermuda ladies were moved beyond the practical thought of consultation and comparison. For the first articles sent to minister to her necessities were a comical and lavish succession of thirteen white silk bonnets! (p. 215)

It is in connection with the same grandmotherly adventure, or rather in connection with the retelling of it, that the author again makes use, with a tincture of humor, of the incongruity between her own childish imagination and reality itself:

For according to her own asseveration she was saved by a miracle! A meteor fell, and by its light enabled the British captain to launch his boats and to take off the shipwrecked officers and crew.

As a child, I always saw this act of God as a gigantic ball of fire somewhat resembling my mother's wash-tub, suspended in mid-air above my grandfather's dismantled and ruined vessel; in fact, I was conscious of a bitter disappointment when, at a more mature age, I learned it was but a strange glow in the sky and over the water. (pp. 213-214)

In this instance, and in many others, it is the looking back which creates the humor. In fact, this aspect of the "goodly heritage" is specifically remarked from time to time during the book's progress. Perhaps this point can be related to one phase of what seems to be Miss Chase's particular, larger thesis, the values of the past to the present, whether that past has been studied, inherited, or experienced. For what more healthful use can be made of one's own experienced past than to enjoy the humor to be reaped from it? Some of her recognition of this is contained in such comments as:

It is at least a matter of some regret that the next generation will never know that family rite, instituted by sulphur and molasses, alleviated by Kickapoo Indian sagwas, and carrying in its long wake such resultant humour in reminiscence. (p. 80)

and

For they Aunt Maria and Uncle John provided our childhood with the exciting gifts of contrivance and secrecy and our mature years with sources of unextinguishable laughter. (p. 90)

But, of course, much of the strength of the thesis in general and of this book in particular is that with the humor supplied by this reminiscence there is entwined something of sterner stuff:

Is not, therefore, the reason for my continued quest only that I may rediscover from my whimsical and humorous contemplation of such a symbol something of that moral force behind my grandmother's ultimatum in the year 1898? (p. 147)

All the reviewers of A Goodly Heritage have praised her fine prose, but each in a different way. One says, "She uses the English language with exceptional skill, grace and charm."⁹ Arthur Train observes, "Written with gayety, wit, and observation, in an admirable literary style, to which the author's love of the classics has manifestly contributed, it A Goodly Heritage is an engrossing, and at times amazing narrative. . ."¹⁰ and George N. Schuster calls the book "an example of beautiful, chaste and evocative style."¹¹ Another speaks of her "quaint, almost Biblical English."¹²

⁹Review of A Goodly Heritage, New York Times Book Review, November 27, 1932, p. 10.

¹⁰Arthur Train, Review of A Goodly Heritage, Saturday Review of Literature, IX (October 29, 1932), 214.

¹¹George N. Shuster, Review of A Goodly Heritage, The Commonweal, XVII (December 7, 1932), 165.

¹²Review of A Goodly Heritage, Catholic World, CXXXVI (January, 1933), 505.

Truly, all these must be considered at once, for it is only partially accurate to call her prose Biblical and to forget the part the classics play in it, or to call it beautiful and chaste and fail to mention its gayety and wit. To call it quaint is to suggest that uniqueness which comes from its peculiar combination of many familiar elements and also that whimsicality of style, though not of subject matter, which may have prompted Robert P. T. Coffin to comment on the reassurance the book gives "that Humor can be more than a guffaw."¹³ One must, in all honesty, apply the term "literary" to most of Miss Chase's writing. This style is probably a necessity for her, for she writes with that care by which exactitude determines her choice of expression regardless of its source. In fact, the same elements of her style which were observed in The Golden Asse and Other Essays may be found here as well. Again what she tells of her early life indicates that the rhythms of colloquial speech and the heightened significance made possible by a vocabulary broadened beyond the colloquial were probably the unconscious blend of her everyday speech, as they are apt to be in the speech of any literate person whose life does not get too far from the workaday world. Here in her language is the "synthesis of the hand and of the mind" (p. 262), which she finds written more largely in the life she has been portraying.

But her style is worth discussing only because it functions to make the reader feel and understand and appreciate the subject matter. The two together represent a "usable past." Coffin notes one special use of that past:

¹³Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Review of A Goodly Heritage, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 20, 1932, p. 7.

In these days when Yahooism is too often mistaken for good health in literature and well people are often represented as a little lower than the beasts, a book like "A Goodly Heritage" is a timely reminder that we are really, as we believed as recently as two decades ago, only a little lower than the angels.¹⁴

It is easy to agree with Coffin.

A Goodly Fellowship is linked to A Goodly Heritage first by the obvious repetition in the titles themselves, and then, of course, in the somewhat thematic emphasis this repetition gives to both books. Although Mary Ellen Chase has written essays, even collections of essays, which are most autobiographical in character, these two books stand together as her one autobiography. If she ever chooses to write another book about her life it will have to be added to these two. The author herself points out in the Foreword to A Goodly Fellowship: "My book is, in a sense, a complement, perhaps a sequel to A Goodly Heritage written ten years ago" (p. xii).

Where A Goodly Heritage is the most extensive statement, both direct and indirect, of what we have called the most prevalent underlying theme in all of her work, the value of the past to the life of the present, A Goodly Fellowship as a whole places its stress on personal past. One must look closely and a second time to see what connection at all this second autobiography has with such a broad main theme. Here experience itself is highlighted, but it is perhaps a subconscious aspect of her Puritan inheritance that makes her, for all the joy of experience and her retelling of it, seek to justify that telling. The seventeenth century New Englander writing his autobiography with some attention to

¹⁴Ibid., p. 7.

form and style could, according to his religious tenets, have felt justified in the amount of care and attention to something so personal only as "it might teach other men . . . something of the way to go," or only as it might become "an interpretation of the divine in terms easily grasped by men."¹⁵ The religious responsibility may not be so commonly felt today, but the need to have a reason for centering attention on oneself may well be considered a part of that Puritan heritage, goodly or otherwise. After one has read her book, if not before, Miss Chase's justification becomes acceptable--although it may never seem necessary. After she writes, "I shall enjoy putting into words my experiences in a wide variety of educational institutions," she adds, "Moreover, since the past thirty years have witnessed so many changes in American education, in both schools and colleges, in both theory and practice, it may be that such a record as this will be of interest and, perhaps, of value." (pp. xi-xii).

It is typical of Miss Chase's perceptiveness and of the detachment of her objectivity which runs a parallel course with her most personal involvements and thus brings into being much of her humor, that she sees, on occasion, among the values of the past to the present those things which one ought not to emulate or perpetuate. A prime example of this in A Goodly Fellowship is drawn from her two years at Mrs. Moffat's School for Girls. Mrs. Moffat was a great doer--chiefly of duty, in many variations, and her zeal in influencing others to do likewise resulted in a

¹⁵Kenneth B. Murdock, Literature and Theology in Colonial New England (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 110-111.

serious illness for Miss Chase. "Mrs. Moffat was also one of the last of a certain type of headmistress not uncommon to the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth practically extinct in any sort of school. She was distinctly of and for an age, not, fortunately, for all time" (p. 127).

More typical, however, is her view of that which is truly valuable in the past, that part of our real or imaginative past which is preserved in old books where "the great things of the human spirit still shine like stars pointing man's way onward to the great triumph or the great tragedy" (pp. 304-305).

One of the greatest causes of her irritation towards the modern theories of education being experimented with at the time she was writing A Goodly Fellowship was that what they recommended was not really new but nearly as old as education itself, and had always been practiced by the best teachers. Before John Dewey and before "progressive" education, the practices they recommended were being used by the Hillside Home School in Wisconsin "not . . . because its headmistresses had discovered something new and untried. They were utilizing old virtues in education too little used perhaps, but surely as old as when Socrates sat down to talk with young Phaedrus about the nature of love and the soul under plane trees by the river of Ilissus . . ." (p. 94). At the close of the book, when all her educational experiences have been related, and her educational opinions made plain, she declares that among the educational concerns valued at Smith College, where she was to remain on the faculty until her retirement, was "respect for tradition and for the wisdom both of the past and the present" (p. 291).

Although many of the values of the past must come to us through

books, Miss Chase has given emphasis to that part of the past which one absorbs not from books but from those other contacts with the past available in one's own environment. She has devoted A Goodly Heritage very especially to this and even reiterates it in the first chapter of A Goodly Fellowship. She feels a particular debt to a group of elderly women, her grandmother's friends, from whom, "because of a past peculiar to themselves" (p. 20), a past containing years spent with their husbands at sea, she had learned of "finer, larger ways of life and thought" (p. 21). This debt she says she has tried to acknowledge in Mary Peters and Silas Crockett. And she was to recur to the matter some twenty years later with rather different treatment in The Edge of Darkness.

All in all, however, neither the great past she shares with all of our civilization who learn to search it out in books, nor the lesser, but equally vivid, past peculiar to her native environment is of major importance in A Goodly Fellowship. More important here is her own personal, experienced past, particularly in the area of education. A number of her other writings also show her imaginative fascination with the ways in which the past can become inextricably caught up with the present. This relationship may depend on actions of the memory which one cannot always consciously explain, such as her recall of sudden sights seen from train windows. She writes:

I have all sorts of these swift glimpses, the benisons of time and place, in my memory, to be taken out and looked at again and again whenever I feel the need of them. Sometimes without waiting for my summoning they flash out from my subconscious mind, re-creating themselves upon all manner of odd and unrelated occasions. (p. 259)

Sometimes for Mary Ellen Chase, the power of the past becomes even

stronger than this because of the intensity of certain experiences. In this category come certain aspects of her first trip to Europe:

Indeed, these things have never once been touched by the dimness of memory, never once threatened by its uncertainty. When I look upon them now, I have the odd sensation that they are not within the province of things remembered, but rather, because of the intense reality they held for me, they have been projected from the past to live by my side in the present . . . these things and hundreds like them, I am convinced are, by some odd process of perpetual re-creating, in my present rather than in my past. (p. 149)

Then there is the impingement of the past relationship with another person upon one's present--a more abstracted and generalized area of experience, one more intellectual and less sensory than the return of the concrete details mentioned above. She referred to President Neilson's retirement from Smith College in this way: "Yet he is forever present in those realities which he has made abiding and secure in the minds of all those who have lived and worked with him" (p. 303).

The bits of the past which continue vividly into the present are few in comparison to what may be called forth by retrospection. And retrospection is the method of this book as it must be the method of all autobiography except where documentary material from letters and diaries is introduced. Even the loosest of definitions of autobiography will hesitate to accept letters or diaries in themselves as true autobiography, for the form must have more unity and more purpose than a day-to-day, or week-to-week view of one's activities, even one's own, allows. And this may be the paradox of all autobiography if it is expected to present the truth of history. In fact, it is even the paradox of history itself. Miss Chase recognizes this when she writes her last chapter on Smith

College, where she was still teaching in 1939 and expected to continue to teach for some time: ". . . in looking back upon any experience at all the mind is apt to seize upon and bring into sharp relief only the things of value which have marked that past experience" (p. 288). Thus she acknowledges what Wayne Shumaker in his excellent study, English Autobiography, points out are necessary characteristics of the type as a literary form. In stressing the creative aspect of autobiography, he states that "the reduction of chaos to order is creation" (p. 111). It is this order which Miss Chase is able to achieve when she looks back and sees "the things of value," but she is also admitting Shumaker's contention that autobiography is "far from being a flawless transcript of reality" (p. 111) when she says that the mind looking back brings "into sharp relief only the things of value." Here she recognizes, at least indirectly, what Shumaker calls the "lapses of memory" common to all autobiographers.

In writing the Smith chapter, Miss Chase realized that it is sometimes difficult to evaluate an experience in which one is still involved, but she felt that she had acquired some perspective on her years at Smith: "Yet my thirteen years in Northampton possess a past as well as a present; and since in retrospect my first year here has been almost identical with my last in its offerings, I must feel that memory and actuality, the past and the present, for once unite to present an honest, if an individual, point of view" (p. 288).

There is no doubt that the perspective of the autobiography was affected by the fact that Miss Chase wrote it while she was still teaching and still had a number of years of teaching before her. She was,

unlike most autobiographers, neither at the end, nor long past the end, of her career. She was rather at its maturity. The joys and problems of her profession were still present ones to her, but the remainder of her teaching years were less likely to produce change than continuation. Therefore, what she gives her readers, without sacrificing completeness, offers an intensity of perception and emotional fervor which might have been lost if she had waited until after her retirement and had recollected it all in the tranquillity of complete retrospect. What she accomplishes by this timeliness is what Shumaker refers to as the successful fusion of the passive consciousness and the active one.

It may seem, at first glance, more difficult to reconcile A Goodly Fellowship with the main theme of this dissertation than it was with its companion A Goodly Heritage. The title and the pattern of development of A Goodly Heritage stress the consideration of values of the past to the present as part of Miss Chase's basic philosophy; furthermore, it also presents material which has become the stuff of a good deal of her more inventive creative writing. A Goodly Fellowship, however, shows the woman not as the creative writer, except, of course, in the skill of its writing, but as the teacher. When Shumaker discusses the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill, he says, "Like all, or nearly all autobiographers, he wrote about the part of his life which was most vividly real and important to him" (p. 148). There is no reason to think that her teaching has not been the part of Miss Chase's adult life "most vividly real and important" to her. This is corroborated by things she has said elsewhere as well as in this one book. Obviously, if teaching has come first with her, writing can have come no higher than second place. This relationship

of teaching and writing has two special significances for this present study. The first one is the effect of the writing experiences not only on the composition of the volume under discussion but also on the career about which she is writing. This point will be discussed more fully later on.

The second point needs only to be stated. One of the motivating factors in the writing of this dissertation has been that Miss Chase is one of a fairly large group of contemporary writers who combine the two professions of writing and teaching. In placing teaching first she is perhaps atypical of the group. At least it will be well to remember that any final evaluation of her writing must take into account that the author herself appeared to consider it a secondary accomplishment. Although many writers throughout the history of literature have followed other professions, the particular combination of college teaching and writing has prevailed particularly in the twentieth century.

When William Phelps wrote in his review of A Goodly Fellowship that "there are few active teachers who have combined success in teaching with success in writing,"¹⁶ one infers that he believes Miss Chase is one of these few. As Phelps goes on to explain that "in general teaching is bad for writing" because "teachers must impress their minds with reiteration, emphasis and exaggeration, qualities fatal to what should be a mature literary style," one realizes that again he is suggesting that Mary Ellen Chase is the exception. Actually the reiteration and emphasis she uses

¹⁶William Lyon Phelps, Review of A Goodly Fellowship, Saturday Review of Literature, XXI (November 11, 1939), 6.

here are purposive and not without effect; such exaggeration as there is the reader must guess at and, even when he thinks he finds it, must see that in this particular case it only underlines her own well-taken point that in teaching, exaggeration, perhaps mainly in the sense of dramatization, has its necessity. It seems that she turns what might be weaknesses into virtues. At any rate, Phelps commends her for making the choice between writing and teaching by choosing both. At least she could not have written A Goodly Fellowship without choosing both.

A writer of any other literary form may improve his skill by practice as he produces one work after another in the form, but the number of autobiographies by any one writer is limited. Later it will be seen how Miss Chase's skills as a novelist affected her autobiography. Now it seems pertinent to see how A Goodly Fellowship stands up against the criteria for the form which have been formulated by the most recent of critics to focus his attention exclusively in a book-length study on this art of writing which has been so little defined. Among other points Shumaker lays down the dictum: "Yet still it remains that good structure demands a subject, that within the subject there must be progression and not circular eddying."¹⁷ Certainly better than A Goodly Heritage, A Goodly Fellowship meets this requirement, for not only is there in the latter, as in its companion piece, a definite subject, but there is also a progression lacking in the first. The progression in a time sense is, quite naturally, chronological, but more than that there are two other types of progression which, while they may not move in a direct line, certainly go forward with a good deal more accumulative force than mere

¹⁷ Shumaker, p. 137.

circular eddying. From Chapter III on, after the introductory Chapter I and after the "inspiration and vision" of Chapter II, the reader is made aware by many means, including such a chapter title as "I Seek My Fortune," that the whole life of Miss Chase as a teacher was in reality a search for what was personally the most satisfying situation within the bounds of the profession. She makes no bones about saying that she found all that satisfied her at Smith College. Of course, even in retrospect, she does not present this as a conscious search, for she pictures each successive period of her educational experience, each usually centered on a place, as so richly satisfying in itself that there is very little room during it for much yearning toward a more complete experience. Yet, until Smith, there was always some urge or reason for moving on. At Smith, after thirteen years, she knew there was not, nor would be, any such impellents as had motivated her earlier moves. The sixteen years from the publication of A Goodly Fellowship to her retirement proved her knowledge correct.

A second type of progression which is something more than movement through time, both in her experience and in her handling of it, is the formulation and crystallization of her own ideas about education. To call these ideas theories would be to give them too much of a smack of something she protests quite vigorously against. Since her method throughout the book is more narrative than expository, more informal than formal, these ideas are introduced at such points as the central situations make appropriate. Her retrospective point of view allows her to be more articulate about these ideas than she might have been able to be at the various periods when her experiences first placed them in her consciousness. One

unifying aspect of the ideas she has accumulated about teaching is contained in her reiterated attitude toward some of the formal educational theories of her day. The tinge of protest in this attitude makes it stand out from the rest of the book which contains very little protest of any nature. The culmination of her thought on teaching comes in the next-to-the-last chapter, which is called "The Teaching of English" and toward which she has moved throughout the book in a mental course roughly parallel to the more physical course which took her at the end to Smith College.

She prepares the reader for the course her thinking is to take even as early as the Foreword where she says,

I do not, however, write as one having authority on "Education" as a profession. I know little of theories and am inclined to be suspicious of those experimentalists who are forever tampering with that most personal of possessions, the human mind, and with new ways and means for its nurture. I am a teacher and not an "educator," and what I know of my job has been acquired not through experiment but through experience, not by theory but by practice. (p. xii)

The experience through which she has learned what she knows of her job has a dual nature which extends rather completely to the nature of the book as a whole and which also calls to attention certain aspects of autobiography in general which Shumaker has pointed out as differentiating autobiography quite distinctly from biography. Most of the chapters of A Goodly Fellowship deal ostensibly in experiences where she herself is the teacher, but usually somewhere in the course of each experience she manages to turn the tables and tell what she herself has learned from others. This duality of turning outward at the same time one is presumably centering on oneself is, Shumaker tells us, a natural characteristic

of autobiography. He tells us that "rather paradoxically . . . an autobiographer's focus is often less sharply on his ostensible human subject than is the biographer's."¹⁸ His explanation of this fits Miss Chase's case very adequately: "The perceptive or reflective autobiographer, therefore, often expends much of his own and his reader's attention on objects other than his own personality and deeds."¹⁹ Thus we get an example like the following of the paradoxical or dual nature of the communication offered to the reader in autobiography. She writes:

My mother in the nineties had never heard of the project method of teaching. She was spared both the terminology and the talk of the "new" schools. But like all good teachers, old line or progressive, she knew that what we taught ourselves through her guidance and suggestion would remain longest in our minds. She was forever encouraging us to make up new plays and games out of our lessons at school and from our books at home. We learned fractions from cutting pies and apples, and measurements ascertaining the square or cubic feet of our own flower beds, wood-piles, and stone walls. (p. 13)

Here she is focusing the reader's attention on the "personality and deeds" of her mother at the same time she is admitting him to her thoughts on what constitutes good teaching as well as her judgment on one aspect at least of educational theory current at the time of her writing but subsequent to the time she is describing. It is this juxtaposition of the two temporal planes of past and present which Shumaker insists "makes autobiographical form possible"; ". . . all autobiographies hold what was up to view in light reflected from what is."²⁰ So we have in one brief

¹⁸Shumaker, p. 34.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 35.

²⁰Ibid., p. 114.

selection her mother's deeds brought from the past by her memory, but considered in the light of her knowledge of contemporary educational theory. Most significant to the meaning of the book as a whole is the implied judgment, as the reader is admitted to the author's most specific thought while being asked to see with his eyes the concrete actions of another, the author's mother, the author coming into the action less significantly as only a member of the large family which learned these things from their mother.

The foregoing is only one example of the many instances which carry the burden of the gradual, but not systematic, development of what Miss Chase saw as the significance not only of her own personal experience placed in its larger setting, but also of her perceptive observations of the actions of others.

There is a reciprocal importance between the opinions of two reviewers of A Goodly Fellowship and a further generalization about autobiography taken from Shumaker. George F. Whicher opens his review with the comment: "This book is not a novel, though it reads like one"²¹; and another reviewer says, "Miss Chase recounts her experience as a teacher, but it is always the novelist who writes"²² Shumaker's observation concerns the relationship of the two literary forms, autobiography and novel, from which autobiography has borrowed some literary conventions: "Indeed there are evidences that the novel and autobiography are moving, in some respects, towards closer similarity; the novel is becoming more highly personal, autobiography is adopting more of the technique and

²¹Whicher, p. 3.

²²"The Education of an American Teacher," New York Times Book Review, November 19, 1932, p. 6.

tone of fiction."²³

Certainly, whether she has done so consciously or not, Miss Chase has used in this autobiography some of the techniques which are characteristic, but not exclusively so, of fiction. Its structure has already been discussed. Surely in this respect the thought given to form, the preparation for the end made from the first chapter onward, is characteristic of the care the novelist employs in arranging the material of a novel. Actually the reiteration, emphasis, and exaggeration which William Lyon Phelps has been quoted as considering fatal to a mature literary style are used with some artistic skill to strengthen the structure and tone of A Goodly Fellowship. Throughout the book whenever she has learned something about teaching, from her own experience or more often from what she has seen others doing, she has emphasized her learning, as she did in the quoted comment on her mother's teaching abilities, by looking at it in the light of all the understanding acquired in later years. This technique not only emphasizes the learning but gives her an opportunity to reiterate some of the basic ideas which no doubt prompted her to write the book in the first place. Now this is not precisely the procedure of the novelist, but the manipulation of one's materials which this involves shows the self-conscious work required of a good novelist, but not always to be found in the autobiographer.

The exaggeration which the reader sometimes surmises that she uses contributes more to the tone than to the structure, but again suggests the techniques of the novelist. The very fact of selectivity tends to exaggerate what is selected. The novelist heightens what is useful to

²³Shumaker, p. 110.

him and never brings into existence what is not. The autobiographer must leave much unsaid that has actually existed and, thereby, places some exaggeration on the importance of what is said. Furthermore, it is natural for a writer of Miss Chase's enthusiasms and spirit to exaggerate. Of course, since she herself can be the only authority, the reader cannot judge with finality that what she writes is exaggeration; he can only recognize in it the tone of exaggeration. An example is this picture she gives of herself on her first day of school-teaching:

I began my teaching experience with an unseemly display of passions which I had never known I possessed--anger and disgust, scorn and fury. I was a veritable Maenad in frenzy as I stormed up and down my narrow aisles. This pathetic pretense of courage, aided by the mad flourishing of the razor strop, brought forth to my amazement as though by magic the expression of respectful fear upon the faces of young giants. . . .
(p. 37)

If this is exaggeration, it is of the kind which is often more truthful than mere statement of fact. The tone is certainly one of utter truthfulness displaying the state of emotional reality which overlaid that of factual reality.

Miss Chase takes few liberties with her reader's credulity. Although she uses a novelist's techniques, she is careful not to take a novelist's liberties. She never asks the reader to believe she has remembered accurately what the reader would know it was impossible for her to remember. For example, when she uses conversation, one of the novel's devices, she reminds the reader that she could not possibly remember it word for word, by prefacing a conversation with her grandmother about the teaching of English with this statement: "Upon each return we used to have disturbing colloquies of this nature" (p. 265).

Within the last statement is the key to much of the style and content of A Goodly Fellowship. What Miss Chase selects to tell the reader is often what has happened more than once. Out of all experience, what is frequently repeated is often most worthy of record in that it gives the most accurately representative view of life. Usually she records such repetitions of experience with a method employed in the novels Mary Peters and Silas Crockett, which like this autobiography cover a long period of years and, therefore, must necessarily contain a good deal of summary statement. Usually she is able to keep these summary passages vivid and real by the use of concrete details.

Shumaker makes a sharp distinction between what he calls the expository mode of autobiography, the narrative, and the mixed mode. Probably the mixed mode describes A Goodly Fellowship best, but often the blending of the expository and the narrative is too thorough to be considered even a mixture. Particularly where she summarizes habitual action with sensory vividness, she seems to be rolling at least three prose modes into one which is remarkably suitable to the autobiographical form. Three separate paragraphs from the chapter "My Experience As A Lecturer" illustrate this so aptly that it seems worthwhile to quote them in full. If it is necessary to make any defense of these paragraphs in relation to the structure of the book, it may be said that although they do not deal directly with teaching they portray by-products of the experiences of the lecturer, whom Miss Chase considers "something of a teacher" (p. 247). Besides this, they add insight into the mind of the teacher who is the central subject of the book.

The swift changes of weather on my winter journeyings
always interest me. I make it a habit to get out of

the train at stations where we stop in order to detect the temperature. I like to go to bed in the cold dampness of Chicago and wake to peach trees in the sun. I love an afternoon of falling snow, a night of intense cold. Once in North Dakota where we were delayed through waiting for a late freight train, I walked a mile upon the prairie in cold ten degrees below zero. Orion was brighter than I have ever seen him, Taurus, Aldebaran, and Sirius. (p. 257)

I have seen from train windows the long line of the Pacific breaking upon yellow beaches below gaunt, threadbare hills of rock with gulls swooping and circling above their summits; oranges hanging on small, shining, compact trees; a field of scarlet poinsettias. Once I went through the High Sierras on a bright morning when the tall black spruces sent shadows of purple across ravines filled with snow. Once in Maine at low tide I watched the wind sweeping over marsh grasses and knew suddenly that for some odd and unaccountable reason, it was the saddest and most solitary act of Nature. (p. 261)

It is for these that I pack my suit-cases, endure tired feet and the memory of my own ill-begotten words, eat too generously of chicken patties, and return home dirty and tired. For I am among those who glory in the possession of a country *which*, from ocean to ocean, holds within itself so many sure and certain glimpses of eternal life. (p. 261)

Not only do these paragraphs show the combinations of modes of writing discussed above, but they also picture the autobiographer looking out on the world and at the same time recording very much of what is deep within herself.

She uses sensory perceptions with a novelist's skill through much of the book. As the reader of the passages above can see and feel with the author, so he smells with her when with Harriet Tapley at Brooksville, Maine, she "used to go junketing about in a smelly old sleigh" (p. 51); or hears with her when an epidemic of whooping cough hits her rural school: ". . . from November until late February we punctuated our teaching and

reciting with monstrous reverberations, not to say with the frequent and loathsome accessories of whooping cough at its height" (p. 47); or hears more pleasantly "the two sounds which always bring St. Catherine's back" to her: "the silence which there is sound, and the quick, subdued, diligent tread of many footsteps moving always hither and yon upon the Lord's business" (pp. 242-243); or tastes with her the chocolate ice cream which she always associated with the less physical taste of triumph (p. 180).

It has been mentioned that the summary style of writing used often by Miss Chase is also used by the novelist. Shumaker says, "The novel . . . requires scene as well as summary,"²⁴ implying thereby that as autobiography approaches the novel in form, it too should have scenes. The pictorial skill with which Mary Ellen Chase catches both people and places, no matter how briefly, leaves the reader with the impression that the book has a vast number of scenes. Perhaps the creation of this impression is part of the author's creative power, for there are in the book very few specific individual scenes. Chief among the ones that there are is the memorable scene of the author's first encounter with a drawbridge. The delightful humor with which the author presents it is, she assures the reader, completely retrospective. This may point to a significant fact about Miss Chase's humor, which flows easily, piquantly, and happily through A Goodly Fellowship. It has been noted that humor is sparse in her novels. Yet in almost all her non-fiction writing--that is in the autobiographies, in the biographies, in the essays--and even in a few of the short stories which are based on personal experiences, her humor is frequent and vigorous. One of the best examples of her humor, controlled, sustained, and brought

²⁴Shumaker, p. 173.

to a climax, is a recent essay, "Memorial Day 1900." But humor in A Goodly Fellowship is largely an attitude, and pretty much, though not entirely, one of retrospection. It is most likely the objectivity of retrospection which encourages the author in her humor. Perhaps it is even the process of introspection involved in this kind of writing which produces the humor, for there is, for all of her seriousness, a refusal to take herself too seriously, and a concomitant refusal to take too seriously those who take themselves too seriously.

If the reader of A Goodly Fellowship hopes that from the chapter called "The Teaching of English" he will learn something about Miss Chase the writer, he will be disappointed, for even here as elsewhere in the autobiography she avoids with almost deliberate self-consciousness, although with purity of focus, the revelation of much of the writer's side of her personality. She writes of her delight in studying similes with her students, but in spite of her pleasure in them, she is remarkably restrained in her use of them in this book, and wisely so. Her use of imagery in a less figurative form is so much of the tone and substance of the book that the doubling of it which the use of similes involves might be confusing and might destroy the sharpness and significance of the sensory impressions she has succeeded so well in creating. When she does use a simile, it is one obviously natural to her way of thought and, seemingly, written down because there is no other way to say what she has in mind.

Another characteristic of Miss Chase's style somewhat related to her use of imagery is the influence of the language and thought of the Bible on her own language. There is artistic congruity in the fact that

this characteristic is particularly prevalent in the autobiographies, for what she tells in them about her early background and training indicates that this usage is most natural to her. This comes to her in two ways, directly from the Bible itself and indirectly from the speech of New England on which Biblical phraseology had been grafted from three centuries of close acquaintance. Miss Chase never uses the Bible ostentatiously. In fact it is likely that the reader may miss some of her implications. Seldom does she quote directly and identify as she does when she turns the words of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans against American graduate schools: "I am debtor both to the wise, and to the unwise" (p. 199). More often the Biblical words lace easily into her own, as when she says, "Even the knowledge that anger could be released upon meet occasion created a wholesome fear in teachers and students alike of whatsoever things were unlovely, untrue, impure, and of bad report" (p. 119); or ". . . everyone but me was dedicated to the principle that man does not live by bread alone" (p. 71); or "That hunger and thirst after righteousness, so grafted upon the New England mind by two centuries and more of precept and surviving today even among the emancipated in all manner of odd tenacities, seemed somehow not to have 'taken' with them" (p. 21); or "As the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, so the fear of my father was the beginning, middle, and end of our years at school" (p. 14); or "Surely the lines fell unto me in pleasant places" (p. 99). This last is an especial favorite of hers and is also used elsewhere.

There are some Biblical comparisons such as: "Yet had I known her meaning of the simple verb, I should then and there have fled her awful presence as the scriptural children fled from the presence of the Elisha

bears" (p. 151). And there is the response of her visual imagination: "Here it was easy to picture the scriptural cattle upon a thousand hills and quite as easy to assume their belonging to God since there was no other visible owner about" (p. 172). It is apparent that she cannot stop her thought from falling into the Biblical phrase or analogy, and here there is no cause for her to withhold this expression of her thought, for this more than any other is her own book and should be expressed in the style most natural to her. Furthermore, the connotations deepen her meanings.

Although Miss Chase has little to say about her writing in A Goodly Fellowship, there is material here which throws some light on others of her books. Of the two books written in Montana which she refers to in A Goodly Fellowship so briefly as to omit their titles, particularly the second bears the setting and some of the details from her autobiographical chapter set in that state. Certainly the garden at St. Catherine's is related to the one in Uplands. And even though she has said that she never took but one character from real life,²⁵ surely the Sisters in both Wind-swept and Uplands and also her handling of convent life in those books must owe much to her experiences at St. Catherine's, more, no doubt, to what is not described here than to what is. The tide which has appeared in several quotations in this discussion of A Goodly Fellowship must have been akin to the tide which played its part in Uplands and in Mary Peters. The ideas for several of her short stories must have come from her University Extension work in Minnesota. She has made definite mention of the

²⁵Mary Ellen Chase, "From Anecdote to Article," in Robeson Bailey, Techniques in Article-Writing (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1947), p. 237.

fact that both Silas Crockett and Mary Peters were written in acknowledgment of what she had learned from her grandmother's circle of friends; Sarah Holt, who is to come much later in Edge of Darkness, must have been inspired by the same group of ladies.

The reader's eyes are turned so often to all the characters Mary Ellen Chase has met during her educational peregrinations that it is only with the reflection which follows the reading that he realizes the fortitude of the central character herself and her kinship with many of the women central to her books of fiction. The discussion of A Goodly Fellowship should probably not be closed without a consideration of George Whicher's charge:

The defect of Miss Chase's narrative as she continues her story of graduate work at the University of Minnesota and her later teaching in university and college is that it lacks relief. Every phase of her experience is too "goodly," not for credence but for sustained interest. There should be a villain in the piece. Perhaps Miss Chase has felt the lack, for she devotes a few pages to the dullness of graduate school teaching One is left wondering where she derived her impression of the stodginess of graduate teaching, since she evidently never encountered it personally.²⁶

First let it be said that Miss Chase has left herself defenseless against Professor Whicher's last charge. She writes: "For I have become persuaded both by direct and by indirect evidence that the worst teaching known to all ages and states of learning is at present perpetrated in certain of our graduate schools and that the nadir of this teaching is found in the fair fields of English literature" (p. 200), and after discussing the matter in a general sense for several pages, she uses a good deal of direct evidence "to absolve the Graduate School of the University

²⁶ Whicher, p. 3.

of Minnesota from any such imputations on graduate schools in general" (p. 203). One can agree with Professor Whicher in wanting her to justify her criticisms, but one cannot agree with him in the suggestion that the criticism of the graduate schools is a feeble attempt to compensate for the lack of a villain. If he must have a villain he might better have selected modern theories of education, particularly those of the "progressive" schools, for Miss Chase does at times paint them rather dark. Of course it is paradoxical that the graduate schools which she inveighs against the most were least touched by the theories of progressive education.

But to get back to Professor Whicher's first charge that every phase of her experience is too "goodly," it seems that she is more defensible against that charge. It can be said that she warned the reader of her theme in her very title. If Shumaker is right that even an autobiography should have a central theme to give it emphasis, then A Goodly Fellowship gains structural soundness from its emphasis on what is "goodly." This is not a novel, even though it may at times read like one, and while an autobiographer may manipulate he must also strive for truthfulness and must not invent. Certainly Miss Chase's weeks in the Bible Institute, her overwork at Miss Moffat's, her exposure to Fraulein Franke's screaming and knuckle-rapping, and her illness which sent her to Montana were not all "goodly." If her life seems to progress more smoothly in the latter part of the book, this must mean that it truly did so. The happy ending she could not have changed even for the purpose of sustaining interest, for this was fact and not fiction.

It must be admitted that the strain of goodliness which seems quite justifiable in the two companion autobiographies does run through her fiction

as well as through her non-fiction, more often in the fortitude of her characters and in the values in life suggested indirectly by the author, than in any happy outcome of the fictional events which comprise the lightly plotted structure of her novels and stories. If there are those critics who object to this, it can only be suggested that the criticism of American literature which has asked for the darker side of life might be as far from realism and balance as the movie-going American public which has wanted happy endings. Bernard DeVoto, in his attempt to assess American literature between the two World Wars, reminds us: "Even in the dreadful years of the early 1930's, when the most severe strains ever put on us made the nation face common failures new to the national consciousness, the generality of Americans felt no such despair as literature felt."²⁷ The lack of despair in any of Miss Chase's writing may be one thing which places her somewhat outside the main stream of the literature of this period, for she seldom neglects the same affirmation which DeVoto attributes to Robert Frost--"that human experience has dignity."²⁸

²⁷Bernard DeVoto, The Literary Fallacy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), p. 165.

²⁸Ibid., p. 118.

CHAPTER VI

ENGLAND

The shift in Mary Ellen Chase's writing from the seafaring novels to her next two books, This England, 1936, and Dawn in Lyonesse, 1938, is largely one of subject matter. Two years spent in England gave her the material and the motivation for this change. Her usually strong feeling for the past was naturally touched by the older past she found in that country. Her love of nature, always apparent in her writing, is displayed in the outdoor tone and in the lyrical passages of both books. Along with this is the sense of place, which frequently in Miss Chase's writing is as strong as the sense of the past and which has a stronger identity than her mere love of nature. Her humor is, typically, more noticeable in This England than in the novel. Her style continues the same traits she established earlier; she is a bit simpler in This England, and more beautifully and imaginatively lyrical in Dawn in Lyonesse. Her approach to her material shows both relish for it and reflective assimilation of it. Together the two books reflect the interest and respect which many Americans, particularly New Englanders, have felt for the older country.

The titles of the thirteen separate essays of This England--"sketches," the author calls them--name quite clearly the topics treated: "The Weather," English Sources of American Irritation, English Manners Urban and Rural, English Trees, The West Country, The North, English Food,

Twelve Ricks, "This Royal Throne of Kings," An English Sunday, English Railway Travel, The Spring in England, On a Bus in Somerset. But as Esther Cloudman Dunn said in her review of the book, "It is more original, penetrating, and provocative than the chapter headings indicate."¹ The sketches have, collectively, two aims:

They are meant to chronicle various impressions of the English as people,--of their traditions, their habits and manners, their predilections and aversions--and to present a picture, necessarily inadequate, of their unparalleled countryside.²

These things all the essays in This England have done suggestively but not exhaustively. Individually they have done other things as well. In making comparisons between England and the United States and France, the author has something to say about these other two countries too and about their people. As is to be expected in essay-writing, the author has revealed a good deal about herself, sometimes in her selection of material, sometimes in her manner of presenting it, often, it would seem, inadvertently.

The sketches are light and pleasant in tone, but beneath this surface is enough substance to be provocative of some serious reflection. They have no doubt provoked as many satisfying personal reminiscences among many readers as they have for several reviewers of the book. Esther Cloudman Dunn, for example, said, "It is a book . . . to be read for passages which speak directly to one's personal and favorite memories."³ A

¹Review of This England," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 29, 1936, p. 5.

²Mary Ellen Chase, This England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), Foreword.

³Dunn, p. 5.

Christian Science Monitor reviewer wrote, "Well, many of us have had our experiences. . . . This book allows us to bring out those memories to be savored again."⁴ With these rapidly changing times, it is possible that the book will contribute to the preservation of a little of England, just as other books by Miss Chase have more fully caught a mood and a time belonging to New England. If or when the English develop an interest, as Americans do from time to time, in examining the ways their country has appeared to foreigners, This England may serve as part of the documentary evidence. It is irrelevant here, but there is an interesting contrast, for example, between This England and the more grimly realistic picture from the preceding century found in Hawthorne's English Notebooks.

The past which Hawthorne at times found somewhat over-powering and even depressing was always appealing to Miss Chase. She found the past both in the English character and on the English landscape. When she notes that it is disappearing she becomes doleful:

It must be as easy and relatively as inexpensive to build an attractive cottage from materials native to the district in conformity to the lines of those that have stood for centuries, as to erect one that is ugly and quite out of keeping with its environment. But unless the idea and ideal are soon engendered, the English countryside everywhere will have lost much of the attraction it has long held both for the fortunate inhabitants of this island and for visitors who come to see it.
(pp. 80-81)

The words idea and ideal are key words in This England. It has been noted earlier that Miss Chase has a strong feeling for words. Certain ones appear and reappear all through her writing. Others flourish for a time--perhaps through the period of several books--and then subside. Sometimes

⁴Review of This England, Christian Science Monitor, November 24, 1936, p. 18.

they come in pairs and sometimes they have a special significance for one book, as time and chance did for Silas Crockett. Idea and ideal are used several ways in This England, but they may be easily turned to the focus of the whole book. Although its essays represent impressions and although "They are meant to be desultory rather than summary or conclusive, to suggest, perhaps to recall, rather than to inform,"⁵ there is through them all a search for what is representative. The individual incidents and descriptions are chosen because they illustrate what is widespread. In other words, Miss Chase is trying to present the idea of what the English and England are like.

What the people are like includes their ideas or their ways of looking at things, which she shows sometimes in variations and sometimes in unanimity. She found unanimity in the English attitude toward royalty, which she said Americans can recognize more easily than they can understand:

The King is an idea before he is a person; royalty and all its magnificence an idea rather than an ideal; and this idea, one thinks, comes in its daily application closer than most ideas to the old Platonic notion of the Universal. (pp. 136-137)

And it is Miss Chase's willingness to see as much of the ideal as possible that makes what she pictures so generally pleasing.

Several statements about the English past show it to be, in Miss Chase's eyes, something so accepted as to involve no self-consciousness about it. The past controls English behavior: "The English admire naturalness, but with them to be natural is, of course, to be English, which in its turn means to be the product of centuries of unwritten social

⁵Chase, This England, Foreword.

precepts" (p. 46). They have "a widespread regard, even veneration, for what is long-established and thus, at least to most minds, permanent, stable, durable" (p. 134). The English possess "a composed past, a tranquil present, and a unperturbed faith in a steady, self-sufficient future" (p. 33). The implications are that without the first there could hardly be the other two.

Miss Chase is somewhat analytical but not always consistent about the past in England. When she writes of English trees, she makes a distinction: "In her appearance England is old, but not ancient. . . . Even her oldest trees . . . do not carry one's thoughts beyond the Middle Ages when, through the mixture of Celt and Saxon and Norman, she was already England" (p. 64). And she is whimsical as well as analytical: "They [the trees], too, share in that mingling of qualities, that synthesis of elements, which has resulted in the singular people of England" (p. 64).

In the West Country the past is different: "The past in the West Country is longer and older than elsewhere, extending far beyond history into the dim reaches of myth and legend" (p. 77). The many associations of the West Country touch her imagination (how tenaciously, will be seen in Dawn in Lyonesse), and she thinks, "One should re-read the Iliad and the Odyssey in Cornwall, for Cornwall is curiously Homeric. The Greeks who traded there for ten centuries before the Christian era must have felt pleasantly at home" (p. 77) In the West Country also is "the green and pleasant land to which Hardy in his novels recalled the ancient name of Wessex; and although he frequently portrays it in a darker hue than it presents to the less profound observer, no one has depicted it so clearly or so well" (p. 74). Here in her own statement is confir-

mation of the notion that Hardy's own dark view cannot be her own. For all her responsiveness to Hardy, she hasn't portrayed his "darker hue" on American soil, even in Uplands, nor can she share his mood even on English soil. In spite of the tragic tones and implications in Dawn in Lyonesse, the sunshine, the flowers, the bird's note, the awakened imagination, the dawn itself are the things in her tale which linger longest in the reader's imagination.

In the North she finds a landscape which seems to belie her judgment that England appears just old and not ancient: "The North is a land of perpetual yesterdays, and the very vacancy of her untenanted moors goes beyond the Roman and the Celtic to the prehistoric" (p. 92). Of course, the consciousness of other pasts she knew about colored what she saw in England. In "Twelve Ricks," one of the loveliest of the sketches, she sees what only one acquainted with the classics could see:

They [the ricks of hay] rolled centuries swiftly back to Vergil, and Horace, Homer and Hesiod, to other sheaves and stacks gathered together on the high fields of Italy and in the valleys of Greece. (p. 121)

The important thing is not just what kind of a past she found in England, but that she was so aware of it as she used it to explain English character and to give tone and meaning to physical England. She found this past, in general, good. As might be natural for an American, she was especially aware of its length: "Country churches on Sunday retain more of themselves and of their long past than on week days" (p. 147); and,

There is more than the picturesque or amusing in this pastoral scene [of a lambing meadow] which is enacted every spring; for these long meadows throughout England have to no small extent contributed to her history for well-nigh a thousand years. (p. 177)

Just as her view of the past in England was revealing of her own predilections, so were her views on other topics; in fact, so was even her choice of topics. For all her play at humor, she hardly shows herself in her most engaging light when she treats the subject of "English Sources of American Irritation" in the chapter so named, and elsewhere in the book. There are some places where other Americans might not hold completely with her statement of the American point of view. It is a small matter, but, for example, in mentioning differences in terminology, she comments that when she asked to buy a darning-ball she was annoyed at being shown balls of wool and finally told that she must mean a darning-egg. (p. 55) Some of her American women readers would have known darning-egg as a perfectly understandable American term.

There would seem to be more personal, than typically American, reaction in some of her findings on this topic of irritations. To speak of the "stubborn courtesy of the English" (p. 30) is to praise rather backhandedly. To consider a people "uncompromisingly what they are" (p. 19) makes one wonder what she would have them be. It seems a little inconsistent, no matter how much her life may have changed, for one who has in all previous books extolled the virtue-making qualities of the vigorous life on the northern Maine seacoast, to class herself as "a pampered American." Had she forgotten Maine fog and damp and cold, when she said, "I have many times exclaimed with all the irritation which only a pampered American can feel that Cape Cod at its worst might well have looked and felt like the Riviera to the Pilgrim Fathers!" (pp. 6-7) Then too there is a little of the poseur in her attitude toward English shops. The stories she has written of her own life do not leave the impression

that she has always been accustomed to smart Fifth Avenue shops, though here she writes of "the American":

When he waits five minutes longer than necessary for change in an unattractive, badly arranged shop, his vexed mind hurries to Fifth Avenue where something in the very tone of the shop windows suggests the liveliness, the smartness, the vivacity of American demand and supply. Even the best windows on Bond Street, he says to himself with some degree of truth, are dowdy compared to those which his homesick memory reviews. The smile and the courteous "Good afternoon", which invariably conclude his shopping encounters, do not tend to mollify or assuage him. (p. 35)

Even though this coincides somewhat with popular notion, the reader may resent a little that one of Miss Chase's usually perceptive judgments leaves the impression that Americans in general are so irritable and impatient.

In comparisons Miss Chase reveals that her knowledge of her own country is not always complete. On the subject of a French spring she becomes lyrical:

This year I followed upon the heels of the spring in France from late March until mid-April. The lilacs and cherries, quinces, magnolias and Judas trees of Provence had dropped their blossoms when on Easter morning in the green fields and gardens of Isere they were in full flower. Two days later in the small dark valleys of the Jura the close purple buds of the lilacs were only just flushing with violet. . . . (p. 173)

But she dismisses spring in the United States briefly: "The arrival of spring in most of America is sudden, bursting upon us one April day when we are sick to death of sodden snow, cold March winds, reluctant trees" (p. 174). Still as she followed the lilacs in France, she could, with more leisure, follow them northward in eastern United States, from the Piedmont in North Carolina in April, to Boston, Massachusetts, in May, to the island of Monhegan, Maine, in June.

But perhaps this is unfair, for most of what Miss Chase writes in This England is intended to show her appreciation. All that she says about spring is meant to indicate her special joy in the English spring, most of all in its length: "The wonder is that it is held so long in its completeness, that its flood does not diminish" (p. 182). (Again, as so often before, Miss Chase applies the metaphor of the tide to her way of seeing something new or surprising or difficult to understand.) In another instance, what she says at the conclusion of the chapter on "English Manners, Urban and Rural" is intended as praise of the English, even if she is praising at the expense of a hit at a field of knowledge that she can seldom bring herself to see any good in:

If they [the manners of this England] arise fundamentally from the English idea and ideal of Repression of the Ego at all costs, one is inclined to regard such repression as an asset and not as a liability. The grateful traveller and the sojourner may well offset the anxiety of the psychologist! (p. 59)

This time idea and ideal are linked rather than opposed. Her continued use of these two words emphasizes her effort, for all her predominant use of details, to arrive in This England at some generalizations and even abstractions.

The way she uses the form of her writing to accomplish this is interesting to note. This England followed Silas Crockett, and most of the devices of style in the two are similar but she uses them in quite different proportions. In Silas Crockett she often flung image after image in calculated abandon to build up a total impression. In This England she often leaves one scene, one incident, one experience to stand, in rich starkness, for others which might be associated with it. In each of these instances she usually produces a significant emotional quality. She conveys her

pleasure in "Twelve Ricks" and effectively adds meaning to pleasure. This very brief essay is simple and strong, and the carelessness, the haste, the posturing, and the vanity which sometimes intrude to mar some of her good writing seem shorn away here. She has watched the twelve ricks for months, at all hours and in all weather.

A rare wet snowstorm has plastered their roofs with white; they have stood taut and secure against Cambridgeshire winds tearing across the fens. Heavy dews and mists have lent a ghostly appearance to them, made them like some mysterious northern settlement swept by fine snow. English frosts have clothed them with half an inch of rime and held them sparkling in the sun for eight long hours of a cold, clear day. (p. 119)

These were her pleasures, but the ricks did more than give her pleasure: "They connoted the stability of life upon the land, the everlasting prose of labour, the nameless line of those who plough and till and harvest, the long, continuous epic of the soil" (pp. 120-121).

It is pleasure, however, in the imaginative and the real together, that is the mood of "Twelve Ricks." Anyone who has looked at a single satisfying feature of a familiar landscape at all kinds of times can understand this pleasure. This is the way of seeing which Aldous Huxley maintains can bring relief from boredom to many people who find life in our modern world meager and purposeless.⁶ It is also the kind of appreciation which Pericles encouraged among the Athenians, as Miss Chase herself was to point out more explicitly and more didactically in a different kind of essay from those in This England. In "An Ancient Democracy" she wrote:

⁶In an interview on MIT Science Reporter, WGBH TV, Winter, 1960-1961.

. . . the end and goal of human life, lived seven days a week, is simply this awakening of human consciousness to the possibilities existing in the familiar gifts of life itself. For in this awakening of consciousness in this quickened, sharpened sense of the meaning of experience and of objects, in this opening of the eyes that have been blind or only half seeing lies the only education and the only culture.⁷

In writing like "Twelve Ricks" Miss Chase in her way seems to be fulfilling the artist's function of making us see more clearly what has been there all the time. Certainly the result is similar to that described by Browning in "Fra Lippo Lippi":

. . . we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted--better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;

So single and so representative of all moods of loneliness is her painting of London on a Sunday that it quite overshadows all the pleasant possibilities of Sunday activity outside the city described in "An English Sunday." Single also is the impact of the pathetic irony involved in her observation of two country women and their contrasting flowers in "On a Bus in Somerset":

Their flowers immediately attracted my attention. The stout woman had arranged hers upon a wire frame in the shape of a cross. Roses, marigolds, snapdragons and the amputated heads of magenta phlox, they could not have presented a more bizarre or hideous combination of colour. But that the stout woman was secure in her pride of them and of their unique arrangement and that her companion was clearly envious were at once apparent in the care of one and in the covetous gaze of the other. The bouquet of the thin, pale woman was beautiful in its simple distribution of blue love-in-a-mist with yellow daisies; and I felt suddenly sorry that the wire contraption of her neighbour could so plunge her into a depressing comparison. I gathered that the flowers of each were

⁷Mary Ellen Chase, "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," Common Ground, III (Winter, 1943), 67.

intended as a present to the same nurse in the Bath hospital, and that she who had not long to live had suddenly and cruelly been forced to undervalue her own gift. (pp. 193-194)

Miss Chase selected this incident and went on to develop it as an illustration of her general observation that among the country people of this part of England there was "a kind of acceptance in the finality of circumstances which is both pathetic and reassuring as one ponders it" (p. 199). There was a common expression which she thought "sums up the whole matter briefly and concisely, drawing together a dozen emotions and tying them neatly into one bundle" (p. 191), and she closes the incident with the thin woman saying to her stout neighbour, "Well--there 'tis." A more universal aspect of the incident, which she makes apparent but does not generalize about, is the irony which so often attends the process of comparing one's own with another's.

Such an incident has too much pathos to let the humor of it show very broadly, but there is a trace of it in the incongruity of the stout woman's use of the wire cross "saved from me ol' father's funeral flowers" (p. 194). Each reviewer of This England notes its abundance of humor, and usually adds, as the Times reviewer does, "But behind the humor lies always a deep sympathy."⁸ The reason for this may be that many of the humorous touches of the book come from the people in it. The author does, however, repeat one humorous device which she has used before, notably in The Golden Asse. In the essay "On Weather" she gives an exaggerated, inflated effect by the use of a high style for a light purpose. She begins the essay, in fact, the book itself, with a sentence containing two triads:

⁸Review of This England, New York Times Book Review, November 8, 1936, p. 14.

"As all know who read that estimable, matchless, and somewhat dull daily, the London Times, the weather of the British Isles is always accorded a position of respect, deference, and honour" (p. 3). Miss Chase's writing is full of sentences which are beautiful examples of rhythm and balance, but here the variation in the third element of the first triad by its drop in elevation changes the tone of the whole to something less than the respect the words of the sentence imply, to a gentle kind of ridicule. What she does first by a change in the rhythm of the thought and sound she does a bit later on by her application of the vocabulary of formal English to a topic not always accorded such treatment--among Americans at least. That it does receive such handling from the English she goes on to demonstrate, using her own language to simulate the kind of language she is attributing to the Times. The suggestion of mockery is mitigated by the element of seriousness in what she is saying about English weather:

No one who has lived for two years under its omnipotent sway would wish it moved from its high station or question its inalienable right to its position. For, one gradually comes to understand, it has played a far greater part in the upbringing of the nation than have the Norman Conquest, Magna Charta, the Puritan Rebellion, or the Great Reform Bill. Through its countless combinations and permutations, through its manifold ramifications, it has moulded English character and shaped British destiny. Nor could one wish any alteration, any intrusion of the familiar, in the deliberate, dignified and wholly literary style in which observations upon it are couched. Even the movements of the King himself from Buckingham to Windsor, from Sandringham to Balmoral, the audiences which His Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant this dignitary and that, are not more elegantly described. (pp. 3-4)

There follows, of course, a typical Times description of the weather. Miss Chase uses this dignified style to suggest humor most often when there is an incongruity between subject and presentation. Under other

circumstances she writes a seriously rhythmical and dignified style, frequently for lyrical effects.

Almost anything else that could be said of the style of This England could be said of Miss Chase's style in general. It might be noted that she often takes full advantage of what the use of place names can add to the tone of her writing. She concludes an interesting catalogue of places in "The West Country" with:

Cornish villages in great number are named for strange and unfamiliar saints, St. Tudy, St. Teach, St. Dennis, St. Petroc, St. Columb Major and St. Columb Minor, and above all others the charming St. Mawgan-in-Pydar. And although the treeless hills of Cornwall look dark and Celtic enough when one climbs them in the rain, there are always her unsurpassed cliff-girt harbours, their quays, strewn with nets and tackle, her blue-jerseyed, stooped men busy with their boats below the screaming gulls, her fuchsias and geraniums clambering about white cottages facing the sea--Coverack, Boscastle, Cadgwith, Crackington Haven, Mevagissey, and Porthscatho. (pp. 82-83)

Parts of "The West Country" such as this explain her choice of setting for the other book inspired by her years in England, the short novel, Dawn in Lyonesse.

In Dawn in Lyonesse, Miss Chase gives us one of the most imaginative presentations of the thesis which, touching most of what she has ever written, ranges from frank statement to artistic suggestion. As she lets Ellen Pascoe state it at the end of this story, "The old things there, they make people new once they learn about them."⁹ These "old things" associated with the old, old Tristram romance may seem a far cry from the old things celebrated in Miss Chase's New England fiction and non-fiction. Here Ellen has to learn through almost chance reading and at the late age

⁹Mary Ellen Chase, Dawn in Lyonesse (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 112.

of "going on thirty-four" (p. 59) of the imaginative wealth associated with her native Cornwall, whereas the sterner values of the "goodly heritage" of young Mary Ellen Chase were by their very nature quite inescapable. Yet both of these situations are only examples of all that the past, in its numerous and varying manifestations, has to offer to the present and the future. What the past has to offer in Dawn in Lyonesse is a wisdom more of the heart than of the mind, as is suggested by the author's quotation, before she begins her story, from Edwin Arlington Robinson's Tristram.

What Ellen Pascoe comes to understand about the past, and what we cannot doubt that Miss Chase herself believes about the past, appears particularly in those early pages of the book which Theodore Purdy, quite misunderstandingly, dismisses with the thought that ". . . the tragedy of these women becomes compelling and believable once the initial romantic machinery has been safely set in motion."¹⁰ In her usual hours of wakefulness which, according to season, either precede or coincide with the dawn, Ellen has time to consider the past. Until a few months before the opening of the story, the past for her has been that of her own individual experiences, but now:

The past no longer held its earlier stubborn possession of her thoughts. It had receded so far into itself that an effort on her part was required to draw it out, to look at it, to know that it had been real and that its very reality must in a large measure determine her future. Instead she lay in her bed in her small tower room of the great Castle Hotel and surrendered herself to the stouter claims of a more resistless past, a past which had so merged with her present for close onto five months that she could not easily disentangle the one from the other.
(p. 10)

¹⁰Theodore Purdy, Jr., Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, Saturday Review of Literature, XVII (March 12, 1938), 6.

It is this second past, thus sharply distinguished from the other and kept quite distinctly so throughout the story although it sometimes touches the other and at times seems to be submerged by it, "which halted time, stopped it long enough for her to become aware of springs of life which she had never known. Now she had dreams, visions, aims and desires, which heretofore had had no place in her life" (pp. 13-14). All this has come of her reading the Tristram story in "the red book" belonging to the King Arthur's Castle Hotel where she is a waitress. She has read the story so often that not only has it brought her a new vision and understanding of life but many of its lines are so distinct in her memory that her recollection of them at appropriate times in the action of her own story indicates her perception of what there is in the old to mark out her understanding acceptance of the new. The author has taken these special lines from various prose versions of the story and worked them into the main story with great deftness.

But Ellen's personal past and the past of the age of chivalry are not all of the past to be found here. These are strengthened and enriched by other aspects of it. There are folk superstitions, both those currently believed by Ellen and others of Cornwall and those so outdated as to be clung to only by one who "belongs to the ol' day" (p. 83) like Derek's ninety-year-old grandmother, who must have the plants tied with bits of black and the house opened to release Derek's spirit after he drowned himself to escape the tragic position of being the betrothed of Ellen and the lover of Susan, Ellen's best friend. Then there is the old church: "It was very old--centuries back it had been built--and people who knew about ancient churches often came to look at it" (pp. 80-81). There

is the black hair of Ellen, Susan, and Derek, all three, suggesting very old Celtic ancestry. It is, however, the American professor whom Ellen serves at the hotel, who supplies the minor link with that past most securely bound in with the major themes: "He was a geologist, he told Ellen, who had never heard the word, and he was something of an archeologist as well, which stupendous name meant that he was interested in what had taken place in Cornwall centuries before he and Ellen had ever seen the light of day" (p. 30). He deepens the sense of the past by telling Ellen that standing stones near her native Land's End had been placed there a very long time ago: "'The Romans weren't Romans at all when those stones were placed. And Christ hadn't been born. Perhaps even Moses hadn't smashed up the Ten Commandments'" (p. 38). Here the Professor is counting on Ellen's, and Miss Chase on the reader's, conception of a past that is extremely old, for Moses and the Ten Commandments belong back very early in Biblical history. With Ellen, and surely with the reader too, this reference is successful in its impression, for later she remembers that the little bird who dogs her steps on the heath is akin to others which had sung "on this very heath and others like it long before the Romans had come to Cornwall, before Christ had been born, or Tristram and Iseult had loved and died, perhaps even before Moses had smashed the Ten Commandments and angered God against him" (p. 53).

One of those old stones near Land's End supplies an important bit of the structure of the story. It links past to present, superstition to event, the waking and desire brought by spring to the waking and desire brought by the illumination of the romantic past. The wishes made on passing through the circle of one of those ancient dolmens or quoits are

fulfilled in two ironic ways. When Susan Pengilly wished that Derek Tregonny, whose love she had stolen from her friend Ellen, would not marry Ellen, she did not dream he would be prevented from his marriage by his own suicide. When Ellen wished "that Derek might somehow wake as she had done, might understand and share her new life" (p. 39), she did not know that he had already waked under the influence of spring and Susan's leading on and that what he understood Ellen herself would come to know only from Susan's lips and share only at second-hand retrospect. When Miss Chase in This England commented on the "unanalyzed perception of acting in a play" which was to be found characteristically "in secluded valleys and villages of the West Country" (p. 191), she was speaking of the same kind of objectivity which she brings to life in Susan when she describes for Ellen the change which took place that spring in Derek: "Derek's changing of issself, not being silent any more and shut-up-like. 'E woke up somehow. 'E was different. 'E was like a person in a story, not like folks 'ere. I never knew 'e could be like 'e came to be 'E began to say things like in books--" (p. 105). The language of this recalls another of Miss Chase's comments in This England: ". . . in the West Country dialect has survived, and lingers as nowhere else in England Pronouns are spoken without regard to cases" (pp. 78-79).

A use of dialect such as this supplies only one of the strands of language twisted together to form one of the artistic strengths of the book. Each strand maintains its own identity and yet the whole is something stronger than the added strengths of the individual strands which run through the story, each almost from start to finish. Another variety of speech, besides the dialect, is that used by the American professor,

and objected to by the reviewer Olga Owens, "The only jarring note to us is the American professor Surely he would not tell this simple peasant girl to 'give the book the once over,' to 'snitch the cream,' or greet her with "Some morning, Ellen.'" ¹¹ This use of slang may be more jarring to the reader's ear today than it was twenty-five years ago when the book was written. The author also allows the professor to use some stiff, over-formal expressions in his conversation. These are probably intended as good fun on the professor's part. To Ellen he says one morning, "I'm going away today, Ellen, to the place of your unkindly engendure." Of course, he expects her to ask, "What's that sir?" (p. 27) To the head-waiter who seats him at the table he says, "Don't discommode yourself, James" (p. 34). Perhaps even the reader who is familiar with Miss Chase's attitude toward words and can appreciate what she intends here may find this usage as "jarring" as Miss Owens finds the slang. This tendency in Miss Chase's use of language fortunately becomes less obvious as time goes on, and in her last books it is rarely noticeable.

Besides these two strands of the language of speech, there is another element largely associated with oral language, which appears more often in the thoughts of Ellen and, therefore, in closer relation to the poetic elements of the novel. This element is composed of those familiar expressions more rightly called idiom than either dialect or slang--expressions so familiar as almost to risk the epithet of cliché, so familiar that even on the printed page they call forth a response from the ear

¹¹Olga Owens, Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, Boston Evening Transcript Book Reviews, March 5, 1938, p. 1.

rather than from the eye. A few such phrases are "for all the world like . . ." (p. 2), "for close onto five months" (p. 10), "for hours on end" (p. 5), "have small patience with such goings-on" (p. 15), "before he and Ellen had ever seen the light of day" (p. 30), "the black-birds . . . singing their throats out" (p. 24), "would be sure to lay at Ellen's door" (p. 57). Expressions like these may be calculated to draw the ordinary reader into a kind of participation in the story. There are other expressions which plague the ear of the American reader to know whether they belong to the locality of the setting or whether they are just chance occurrences to the invention or the observation of the author. Such a one comes in the speech of the hotel manageress: "Better read than run to cinemas, I say, as though sixpences were sea-pinks" (p. 63).

The most formal strand of language is, of course, the bits of the Tristram and Iseult story--sometimes simply a sentence, sometimes a longish paragraph--which are brought into the present-day story only at those times when the thoughts of Ellen make it natural for her to recall them. That they are quotations is justified by the fact that she has read the story so often that when the professor says to her, "You must know it by heart now," she answers, "I do know a good bit of it, sir. The words, they stay in my mind" (p. 36). Miss Chase has explained: "The quotations used are taken from various versions, both medieval and modern, of the Tristram romance," and she has selected and adapted wisely, for although there are a scattering of archaisms and a mannered style which create the impression of the long ago, there is a great simplicity of structure and vocabulary and a concreteness of picture which belie the criticism of the Times Literary Supplement reviewer who found a cause for wonder that "the

fish-girl from St. Ives, risen to become a waitress . . . would have been so stirred and held by the prose version of the Arthurian Legend."¹² As a matter of fact, such fairy-tale qualities which most imaginative children respond to so eagerly are what the reader can readily believe that a girl of Ellen's background would also respond to. Miss Chase's use of prose for these selections is more convincing than poetry would have been. In contrast to the doubting reviewer, this present reader can recall the experience of taking an Irish nursemaid, only recently come to the United States, to a public library in a good-sized American city. The only books the Irish girl showed any interest in reading were Irish fairy tales. This brings us again to that aspect of Miss Chase's thesis that the past, historical or imaginative, which is related to one's own background can be especially meaningful. That the language of the stories she read had its special significance for Ellen is implied in her reflection, ". . . the glowing stories and the words that no one said nowadays even when they were about to be married had become lodged for all time in her head and in her heart" (p. 32).

This last quotation is an example of the way in which the author handles the thoughts of Ellen, who is the only character in the story about whom she allows herself omniscience. It is the poetic element of Ellen's thoughts and also of her observation of the physical world about her which the author explains to the reader this way: "Ellen Pascoe in her high tower knew things without knowing that she knew them" (p. 13). The author, instead of using the techniques peculiar to the modern novel,

¹²Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, London Times Literary Supplement, August 13, 1938, p. 529.

stays within the framework of traditional writing to accomplish her own special ends. This she does throughout her writing, and it explains perhaps why she has remained so popular with the general reading public.

That her writing is popular does not mean, however, that there is no complexity to it, for the very way in which she handles the thoughts and feelings of Ellen Pascoe, particularly those Ellen doesn't quite know she has, is proof of complexity. The quotations which come to Ellen's mind and the idiomatic, oral qualities of the language in which her thoughts are expressed have been mentioned, but the poetic element of this language, joined as it is with the atmosphere and setting of the story, is what gives the book as a whole its most articulate quality. What Miss Chase is saying is that this native girl of Cornwall has always had a strong sensitivity to her environment, a sensitivity not particularly unusual in those who live where contact with that environment is so often as strong as, if not stronger than, one's contact with people. Even the slight variations in the different periods of Ellen's life when she has lived at Land's End, in St. Ives, and on Bodmin Moor have moved her to different responses. These responses had not been satisfying or happy ones, but the author's skillful poetic description of these places of Ellen's past as she recalls them is used not to display an articulateness on Ellen's part but to intimate that she had the sensitivity of perception to see and recall them this way even if she lacked the facility of speech to so translate them.

The first scene she recalls in her early morning wakefulness is not really a scene at all but a composite of remembered bits, unified not only by the place, but by the prevailing tone. One technical way in which this

tone is produced, in this opening portion, is by the key use of the word black; here are "black cliffs," "heaving black waters," "winter blackness," "black jagged land," "strong black tea," "the black stubble of his beard," "and his black eyes." All this is heightened by a single contrasting reference to "the wide, white flashes of the Lizard Lights like gashes of sheet lightening" (p. 2). And we learn of the keenness of Ellen's senses, as she hears in recollection "the Atlantic wind whistling in the interstices of the slats, hurling her father's oilskins on their peg beside the door smack against the door itself with slaps and cracks like pistol shots," and "the thunder and crash of the Atlantic itself, and the resounding roll of beach stones caught in the receding drag of the sea" (p. 2). Certainly language like this, which prevails at many turns throughout the book, is what caused Helen MacAfee to refer in her review to "the author's fine, vigorous prose."¹³ The black referred to above indicates among a number of other things the absence of visibility which heightens sound, as the inability to use one sense often has a compensating keenness in the use of another. In the midst of this poetic description we are reminded more than once that these are Ellen's recollections the author is describing by such references as "the knowledge of her father's boat bobbing about somewhere on heaving black waters, the fear, the dread, even sometimes (God help her!) the awful hope that it would be missing" (p. 2). Such a suggestion as this deepens, of course, the complexity of Ellen's character.

It is not only Ellen's sense of hearing that is alert during her

¹³Helen Mac Afee, Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, Yale Review, XXVII (Summer, 1938), viii.

early morning wakefulness. From another setting, "the small, unplastered room above the baker's shop in the lower town of St. Ives," she recalls "the stale smell of many forgotten bakings, of saffron cake and pasties, yeast and fat and raisins" and "the ache in her back as she twisted upon the lumpy bed between the tough, unironed, brownflecked sheets" (p. 3). Thus feeling and smell are blended with more of sight and hearing.

In ways like these, Ellen's keenness of feeling is impressed on the reader's awareness, which thus becomes, in spite of the girl's implied slowness of mind and simplicity of education, prepared for Ellen's response to Tintagel with all its romantic implications. Before she came to Tintagel, then, the reader has learned by recollecting with her, she has had a sharp sensory awareness of her surroundings, but "In that past world . . . people, their faces and hands, had been the only security she knew" (p. 4). Both of these factors serve to make credible her experience at Tintagel. Her sensitivity makes her capable of awaking to a new awareness; the lack of fulfillment created by the long postponement of her marriage, Derek's withdrawal, and Susan's difference of temperament contributes to her welcome readiness for the experience of reading the Tristram story and associating it with the physical aspects of the very place in which she is now working. No doubt her present absence from both friend and betrothed, as well as the romantic feelings stirred by the approach of the wedding date, prepares her too.

It is with artistic justice that after the reflections on the black movement of Land's End and the black stillness of Bodmin Moor, Tintagel is approached in the full brightness of summer daytime. Here is the little stone cottage and all it represents of what Ellen hopes for from the future,

and within hearing distance is the cave behind the waterfall, which fits so smoothly into the Tristram story to bring the past and present close together. Miss Chase's presentation of Ellen's sharp consciousness of this place recalls her debt to Thomas Hardy in her first novel, Uplands, and the relationship of that earlier novel to Dawn in Lyonesse. She is more her own master here, for her own philosophy could never allow her to be comfortable in a pessimistic interpretation of anything, let alone of environment.

A strong handling of setting is characteristic of practically all of Miss Chase's fiction and of much of her non-fiction as well. If her main thesis rests on the value of the past, rightly realized, to the present and the future, it must not be forgotten that past and place are often inextricable from one another. This is more true, if possible, of Dawn in Lyonesse, than it is of Miss Chase's Maine books. In fact the very relationship is important to the story, for without the setting to objectify the past, the past might have eluded Ellen Pascoe's comprehension. Furthermore the setting is also closely associated with Ellen's emotional state. If the British reviewer who objected to wind and rain in conjunction with fog during the funeral scenes and those following¹⁴ had been more imaginative, he might have considered that at least they all three together served to intensify the confusion in Ellen's mind and heart, of which she was very conscious: "If it were only clear and warm like yesterday, she thought, she might straighten out the botch within it, try to see things as they had been and were, try to think of some way she

¹⁴London Times Literary Supplement, p. 529.

might penetrate Susan's terrible silence" (p. 95). The importance of this point is emphasized by its reiteration several pages later in a slightly different connection: "If it were only clear, Ellen thought, like yesterday, she could more easily remember and picture to herself the things which the gentleman from America had told her . . ." (p. 97).

Earlier in the story, mainly on her trip from Tintagel down to Land's End for the funeral, a careful observation of the country she is driving through covers the grief which we understand she feels but which her reticence does not allow her to show. Only when the char-a-banc driver, not knowing of her association with the situation, tells her of a suicide the day before in Land's End, does she realize that Derek's death has not been accidental. Then the author uses imagery for which emotional connotations have already been established to express her reaction to this: "Then she was all at once adrift on a limitless sea with no land in sight, lost at night in the wind and blackness of Bodmin Moor, lifting her feet, the one after the other, through miles of heavy sand" (p. 73). The mixed images serve to indicate her emotional response to this distressing news. Their confusion suggests her own. The separate elements of her incoherent mental picture bring together different unhappy connotations.

The use of flowers is often an important facet in Miss Chase's treatment of setting, although it can usually be noted that this treatment almost always has more than the superficiality sometimes associated with such details in "local color" writing. Whenever the author has moved her setting away from her native Maine coast, an especially full use of natural setting seems to indicate her own acute observation of its details.

In her very early girls' book Virginia of Elk Creek Valley she makes ample use of the Montana setting, particularly of its flowers; in her first collection of essays, The Golden Asse and Other Essays, there is a similar abundance in such essays as "On Kitchens and Cloisters" and "Wormwood For Thoughts." Her regard for English flowers, made most explicit in several of the essays in This England, becomes in Dawn in Lyonesse transformed into an artistic function which contributes to what one reviewer refers to as "the golden mist of true romance."¹⁵ In Ellen's dream of an especially remembered day with Derek at Helford village, the extraordinary pleasure of a rare excursion is portrayed in the flowers they have seen in the place, and the feeling of a relationship between these flowers and their love which is used later in the story is first created in passages like this:

There were late primroses, splotches of pale yellow here and there, like bags of gold, Derek had said with his hard laugh (though less hard that day than was usual with him), cowslips in the meadows, the white blossoms of the may on and above the hedges, and in one place beneath the trees a whole carpet of bluebells. There were flowers, too, about the Helford cottages, fuchsias and wallflowers and snapdragons, such flowers as they never saw for the lashing of wind at Land's End. (p. 23)

Now it is this unarticulated need to get away to a place where both flowers and their love can thrive in less hostile setting than that of Land's End that makes her choose the small cottage at Tintagel as a future home for Derek and herself. In her thoughts she knew, "Flowers would grow here in the sun of the cleared space by the brook" (p. 46), just as it is later revealed in her grief for Derek that she had hoped

¹⁵ Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, The Catholic World, CXLVII (May, 1938), 252.

. . . that she might have told him all that she had learned, so that she might have lightened for him the darkness of labour in a dark land For now that she could never tell him all those things which she had feared to tell, all those thoughts and fancies which might have given depth and breadth and height to their life together, the telling of them in the cottage within sound of the waterfall seemed suddenly easy and simple enough. (p. 69)

Flowers also appear in this complexity of relationships, for when Ellen approached this waterfall "along the damp path through the hart's tongue and campion and meadow-sweet," they were there to help prepare for the remembered bit of the Tristram romance: "'Twas in this grotto that Tristram and the lady Iseult were wont to resort secretly for love. Their courtiers were the green trees, the shade and the sunlight, the streamlet and the spring, flowers, grass, leaf and blossom" (p. 51). And so flowers are linked with a happy day with Derek, with the cottage where she hopes to make him happy, with the waterfall which supplies a tangible survival of the old story, and even with the story itself.

There remains one further functional use to be made of flowers when Susan tells Ellen of her love with Derek in his awakening in the spring: "' Once at night in the spring 'e brought me primroses that 'e'd gathered 'imself from the little field above the cove. 'E laughed different, too. 'Twas like 'e 'ad come from out a prison"' (p. 106). Also, with a gentle touch of irony on the author's part, Susan tells Ellen that she had gone with Derek to the same Helford Ellen had visited with him, "'We went to 'Elford River where it's sunnier than 'ere. We was 'appy there. We laid in the cowslip fields by the river . . ." (p. 108). The confusion of mind which has settled over Ellen and driven away all of the new emotions and visions which brought her happiness, now breaks away, and it is in

terms of the old romance that she is able to understand what has happened. She sees that "Derek and Susan had for a brief moment lived an old romance They had not been dull and silent. They had walked ankle-deep in primroses and blue-bells" (p. 110). Thus it can be seen that the author has used flowers here, not for mere decoration, but to give emotional tone and texture to the total experience of the story as a whole.

There might be added here one single further evidence of the author's skill in using bits of the setting to touch an intended emotional response in the reader. The little titlark which flew before Ellen and whose kind she had known all her life sang "a bell-like tinkling strain of faint fairylike music" (p. 52). This sound is echoed later in an imaginative sound which Ellen had known nothing about until her acquaintance with the Tristram story: "Sailors . . . had sometimes on the stillest of moonlight nights and on sunny days as well when there was no wind heard from beneath the sea the echoes of the bells of Lyonesse sounding up clear and undisturbed through fathoms of water" (p. 99).

Time as an element in life to be comprehended and occasionally even transcended is a particularly pertinent factor in this story. It is, of course, closely related to any consideration of the particular significances of the past. What Miss Chase has to say here of time comes, as does so much of the substance of the book, through the thoughts of Ellen. This special consciousness of time looks ahead to her treatment of the Hebrew conception of it in Life and Language in the Old Testament along with that of history and place. Time to the Hebrews was something quite different from what it has become to a very time-conscious twentieth century. And man, having learned about clock time and calendar time, now in

this twentieth century has sometimes sought to escape, and literary art has often been concerned with this escape. Miss Chase, like others of her contemporaries, probes into the relationships of the life of man with time. This is what she finds:

It is in this earliest hour, this dawn before dawn, that life is most fully lived, life unworried by time, life before which time creeps, submissive and humble, shorn of its power. Life now is not time, nor time life. In this one hour out of the twenty-four they are distinct, one from the other. Years and months, days and hours, become only the brittle, empty shells of life from which its glowing radiance is freed to lighten the darkness of time itself, to confound it with wisdom and understanding. In this one hour time is salvaged, the imperishable taken from it and seen without disguise. Only when the whirl and hum of approaching day cuts the stillness does time again stand upright and resume its measured pace, secure in the knowledge that only they who do not sleep are aware of its defeat and subjugation. (pp. 12-13)

All this was part of what Ellen realized but could never have expressed in words like these. After Ellen has lain awake and thought her thoughts and then fallen asleep again and finally waked to face the activities of the day, it is an alarm clock, symbol of a more prosaic kind of time, which awakens her. Surely nothing could epitomize time's usual control of life more decisively than "the sharp insistent clamour of the alarm clock" (p. 22). In spite of the alarm clock and the necessities of daily tasks, Ellen's new consciousness of the past which is associated with this place in which she is now living is what conquers time for her and is what makes her later realize that Susan and Derek in their love had overcome not only poverty and labour but also time. For a while Ellen has been caught by the events of the present, by the funeral and by Susan's tragic revelation after it, so that she can no longer escape time's dominion, but she knows that later on she will, and that the past which helps it live

will again in other dawns to come enable life to transcend time for her.

This importance of past, place, and time is, of course, part of the meaning of the book, and its uses of the imagination are also.

It is significant that the author, whose familiarity with the Bible puts its use at her ready command, makes little Biblical allusion in this story and then only to heighten its imaginative quality. How better to describe the power of Ellen's vision of the land of Tintagel than to compare it to the vision of St. John in the book of Revelation! This is purely an appeal to the sense of imagination and has no religious or moral implication. This is not a story of morals nor is it a social one. Although both possibilities are latent in the material of the story, they are not open for consideration in it. It is the universal need for dreams, for an opportunity to use the imagination, which governs this book. Dreams and the exercise of imagination, when joined to experience, may bring to some a wisdom and an understanding impossible to reach in any other way. The use of the word dawn in the title exemplifies Miss Chase's joy in words, for this word with its double meaning gives a double pleasure. Dawn is not only the early part of the day when Ellen awakes and considers life freed from the rule of time, but it is also the beginning of understanding freed from a confining present. Even in this title, Dawn in Lyonesse, with the poetic connotations of its words and the musical fall of its syllables, there is an echoing sound and meaning from the idiomatic spoken usage of the English language.

Admittedly, as Cleanth Brooks points out in "The Heresy of Paraphrase,"¹⁶ there is no way to clarify completely by the language of analysis

¹⁶Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947).

that which exists in the language of imagination and poetry, but there is one more way of indicating what seems to be the central meaning of Dawn in Lyonesse. That meaning is one which a teacher of literature like Miss Chase well understands: among the many needs of the mind and spirit of man is the one that can be satisfied by such exercise of the imagination as is required by participation in the experience offered by the best in our literature. This is one of the ways in which the past supplies the needs of the present. It is, of course, appropriate that Miss Chase presents this thought in a story which required imagination on the author's part for its creation and makes an equal requirement on the reader's imagination for full participation.

What might have been a common story of sin and tragedy has been elevated to something far less common, and Ellen Pascoe, like Isolt of the White Hands of E. A. Robinson's Tristram, has gained wisdom with the dawn. "The interwoven story of Tristram and Iseult gives depth and perspective, uncommon in such a tale,"¹⁷ in the opinion of Miss Owens. Theodore Purdy, Jr., notes the "narrative progressing on two planes at once," but concludes that "Miss Chase does not overwork the parallel or make it too obvious." Only Ellen, among the characters, could have any consciousness of the parallel. As Purdy says, "Her friend Susan unconsciously plays the part of the other, the Irish Iseult in the drama that follows."¹⁸ Miss Chase must certainly have intended to suggest the parallel, however, for, before beginning the story, she quotes from

¹⁷Owens, p. 1.

¹⁸Purdy, p. 6.

Robinson some of the words of Isolt of Brittany:

I am not one
Who must have everything; yet I must have
My dreams if I must live, for they are mine.
Wisdom is not one word and then another,
Till words are like dry leaves under a tree;
Wisdom is like a dawn that comes up slowly
Out of an unknown ocean.

This, of course, identifies the title.

Although several reviewers have suggested the initial problem of belief on the reader's part in the plausibility of "the heroine's odd infatuation with the old Tristram legend,"¹⁹ all agree about the beauty of Dawn in Lyonesse. Percy H. Boynton finds even more than beauty, but in "Two New England Regionalists" he can only mention this: "This deftness in narrative and characterization is exercised to its highest degree in Miss Chase's beautiful Dawn in Lyonesse, which, however, is not . . . germane to this discussion."²⁰ Miss Owens calls Dawn in Lyonesse "a deeply poetic story,"²¹ and in the judgment of May Lamberton Becker, "Compact as a pearl, it is one more earnest of Miss Chase's apparently effortless command over the brief, all but nameless form of fiction we call the long short story."²² Olive B. White notes "its rich, restrained simplicity,"²³ and Purdy finds that

There is beauty in this slight book, beauty of a sort

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰"Two New England Regionalists," College English, I (January, 1940), 294.

²¹Owens, p. 1.

²²Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, New York Herald Tribune Books, March 6, 1938, p. 3.

²³Review of Dawn in Lyonesse, The Commonweal, XXVII (March 18, 1938), 585.

we are perhaps inclined to neglect nowadays, since it springs neither from action nor from outward sentiment, but from inner emotions roused by a contemplation of the past.²⁴

This is not the first time that Miss Chase has found emotional value in "a contemplation of the past."

Four years after the publication of Dawn in Lyonesse, Collier's printed Mary Ellen Chase's short story "A Candle at Night." While it was not difficult to understand the way much of the substance of the short story "A Garment of Praise" later became portions of the novel Uplands, the paring down of Dawn in Lyonesse to fit the length of a magazine story suggests no obvious rime nor reason to the reader who seeks to understand the transformation from an artistic point of view. And this is, especially in its total effect, a transformation. The pearl which May Lamberton Becker called Dawn in Lyonesse²⁵ has become a lusterless pebble. It would be too fanciful to think that Merlin, perhaps, had cast a spell down over the years to take away the poetic charm of this idyll as due retribution for so much subtraction. The only favorable result that can be seen is a possible object lesson for critics, and it is not likely that this is what Mary Ellen Chase intended. None the less she, no doubt unheedingly, unknowingly, followed the suggestions implied by some of the reviewers of Dawn in Lyonesse. The English reviewer who objected that "towards the end the invocation of very unseasonable weather to heighten the sense of tragedy only succeeds in provoking our criticism" would note, if he read the American magazine story, that not only have all the fog, most of the

²⁴Purdy, p. 6.

²⁵Times Literary Supplement, August 13, 1938, p. 529.

wind and rain, and even the earlier sun disappeared in the short story, but the sense of tragedy has diminished as well. Here we may add to the primary meaning of sense as feeling, the secondary meaning of reasonableness. The emotional quality which is developed with such care and also reticence in the longer version is very largely cut out, and some of the slight changes in the actual story itself are significant to our understanding of the tragedy of its events. The Ellen who in the book version wished so keenly for her betrothed to share in the awakening of emotional perceptions which the old Tristram story has worked for her, becomes the Mary in the condensed story who has neither any such desires nor any particular feeling of loss at the death of her betrothed. In fact, his suicide seems quite pointless when we learn that Mary had been looking forward to her marriage with some reluctance, and would have given Jared up quite willingly. We are never given cause to think this of Ellen in Dawn in Lyonesse, who, for all her restraint and confusion, knew that she loved Derek. We wonder if the rather selfish Mary of "A Candle at Night" who begrudges the cost of the trip to Land's End for the funeral is deliberately given one pound less in the total of her hoard than is the "open-handed girl" who left a pound note in the hand of Derek's mother and another in that of his trembling old grandmother.

The English review in the Times Literary Supplement also condemned the title Dawn in Lyonesse as having a "romantic artificiality" and diagnosed "the real fault" in the book as lying "in Miss Chase's failure to blend the modern world . . . with the dead romance that once no doubt enlightened the gloomy shores of Tintagel. For the old ideals resolutely refuse to come alive."²⁶ Would this critic be better pleased with the shrinking of the

²⁶Ibid., p. 529

title to "A Candle in the Night"? Of course, after cutting out all references to Lyonesse, robbing dawn of all its particular significances, and reducing the number of quotations from the red book to only two, the author had to change the title, but this new one seems more artificially contrived, less meaningful, and, unfortunately, less romantic. As for the blending of the modern world with "the dead romance," it seems more likely that Miss Chase intended to contrast the two worlds rather than blend them. The lack in the shorter story is that the older element has been cut to so little, only a few paragraphs here and there, that there is no convincing development of the emotional quality left. The reader is not allowed to feel it for himself but must take the author's nearly bare statement of it. Gone is most of what gave the book its beauty, "beauty," in the words of Theodore Purdy, "of a sort we are perhaps inclined to neglect nowadays, since it springs neither from action nor from outward sentiment but from inner emotions roused by a contemplation of the past." Gone is most of the appeal "for those who," again in Mr. Purdy's words, "are not too earth-bound to command the necessary resiliency of mind."²⁷ If Mr. Purdy read the later story, he must surely have realized that "the initial machinery" he implies a disapproval of takes with it when it goes from the story the beauty and challenge of mind which he commends.

Many other things have gone as well, things which gave the earlier work its richness of texture, complexity of thought and feeling, and high order of literary artistry. The least part of the story, the action of the two days, remains somewhat altered but essentially the same. On the other hand, most of Ellen's personal past is omitted and with it her

²⁷ Purdy, p. 6.

only-half-understood feeling for it. The American professor with his friendly manner and teasing talk, with his contribution of the geological and archeological past of Cornwall, and his matching of moods with Ellen has disappeared, as have Derek's old grandmother and the woman who owned the Cornwall cottage. Gone are the "bits o' black" and the robin indoors which suggest the superstition of the Cornish people. Gone are Bodmin Moor, Helford village, and the cave behind the waterfall, which Ellen "set a great store on" (p. 48).

One of the few things to remain is the original theme. The reader is given to understand that it is the new emotional insight which Mary's reading has given her that enables her to understand what has happened to Jared and Susan and to look ahead to a future with some meaning to life. There is, however, but little to make the reader understand with mind or feeling just how this could have happened to Mary, because most of the poetic signals to the reader's understanding have been removed. The author has stifled most of what Purdy referred to as "an exceptional imaginative impulse."²⁸ Perhaps Miss Chase decided that the reader of a Collier's story might enjoy the tale told in Dawn in Lyonesse but would not appreciate the slow development in the artistic terms of the story. If this is so, there remains the possibility that she underestimated her own power. Certainly the emotional level of meaning in Dawn in Lyonesse is strong and true enough to bring response even from those who may have no concern to abstract any higher meaning from it.

Most of the changes in language made from Dawn in Lyonesse to "A Candle at Night" are those naturally demanded by the foreshortening of

²⁸Purdy, p. 6.

the story, but there are others as well. There is a general tendency to lessen the amount of dialect, particularly in the speech of the main character. More than this there is the changing of individual words which exemplifies the author's lifelong fascination with words, the beginning of which she explains most fully in an essay on "Words," in the collection The White Gate. Some of the changes show the poetic quality of Miss Chase's mind, even though she has always written in prose. A few examples of Miss Chase's changes may not lead to any valid generalizations about her methods of literary composition, but it says something that such changes are noticeable wherever overlapping of material in her published writings makes it possible to trace them.

The phrase "and had paid a cobbler one shilling to take the creak from her shoes" (p. 66) in Dawn in Lyonesse becomes in "A Candle at Night" "had paid a shoe shop to take the squeak from her shoes"²⁹; "brief and reticent" (p. 64) becomes "stodgy and inarticulate" (p. 17). "Gorse and bracken began now to usurp the hart's tongue and feathery ferns of the glades and glens, the heaths and moors to usurp the meadows" (p. 72) changes to "Gorse and bracken began to usurp the hart's tongue and asmund of the glades, the moors to usurp the meadows" (p. 74). This last illustration shows more than a word change; it shows a rhythm change as well. The new briskness of movement is more appropriate to the shorter story, and furthermore the change in rhythm seems to have been demanded by the word substitution. The change as a whole is a general improvement, for it saves the final word, meadow, from having to bear such a heavy burden of paired words piled up before it in the sentence. While the author could

²⁹Mary Ellen Chase, "A Candle at Night," Collier's, CIX (May 9, 1942), 17.

only have made the word change deliberately, the rhythm change was probably dictated less consciously by the sensitive ear which usually influences, if not completely controls, the flow of Miss Chase's writing.

Changes such as these, whatever the reasons for them, give some hint of the author's efforts to excell in her craft. Her view of the importance of such efforts is expressed in her most recent book, The Psalms for the Common Reader, 1962:

All honest writers know that art is artificial rather than "inspirational," that effects are carefully planned and designed, that words are sifted, scrutinized and meticulously chosen, that sentences are studied and weighed before they are set down on paper. When the Latin poet Horace wrote just before the beginning of the Christian era, Ars est celare artem, or "Art conceals art," he was but telling the truth about all who deal in words. He meant, of course, that the simplest and seemingly the most natural and spontaneous of literary expression is, nevertheless, most carefully prepared, that although the reader is impressed, as the writer hoped he would be, and perhaps even disarmed by apparent artlessness, the art, or the craft, is there, concealed though it often is. (pp. 105-106)

The study in this chapter of Miss Chase's use of language and of her materials, particularly of the details which produce her imagery, has been an effort to understand something of "the art, or the craft," which it seems obvious she is attempting to practice in her writing. It remains for her later years, the nineteen fifties and sixties, to reveal her best achievements in artlessness--in such a book as The White Gate, for example.

CHAPTER VII

BEYOND REGIONALISM

With the writing of Windswept, 1941, and The Plum Tree, 1949, Mary Ellen Chase's most substantial novel and her slightest, came her chance to reach full maturity as an American novelist. If there were reasons for considering all her earlier novels as regional novels of Maine--except, of course, Dawn in Lyonesse, which belongs to her brief English period--there are other reasons for considering these two, her only novels of the forties, beyond regionalism. To take the matter literally, The Plum Tree has a generalized setting of "a fair-sized American town; and yet it might equally well be placed in London or in Amsterdam, in Rome or in Reykjavik, in Calcutta or in Jerusalem."¹ Windswept, unquestionably committed to a Maine setting as it is, lacks much to make it a regional novel and has much to make it something more, as comparison of it with Mary Peters and Silas Crockett makes clear. Rose Field has rightly said in her review of Windswept, "To call the book a story about Maine is to give it scant stature."²

In spite of the validity of this judgment, the sense of place is the strongest component of Windswept. There is reason to believe that Miss Chase has always named her books with care. Virginia Smith Hall in her

¹Mary Ellen Chase, The Plum Tree (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 1.

²Rose Field, Review of Windswept, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 16, 1941, p. 1.

thesis "Down East Today" has told us that Miss Chase refused to change the title of Mary Peters in the face of a publisher's wish,³ and it is easy to see, since much of the meaning of the book centers on the relationship of the early experiences of Mary Peters to the rest of her days, that, simple as the title Mary Peters might seem, it was the most fitting one. There is a rightness to all of Miss Chase's titles: for example, His Birthday for an occasion, Silas Crockett for two men who were three generations apart, The Silver Shell and The Plum Tree for things (things frequently have a special importance in Miss Chase's stories) which to certain characters and so to the readers become symbolic.

The word windswept, as noted earlier, had been a favorite with Miss Chase long before the writing of this novel. She seems to have been enchanted by the freedom of movement suggested by the verb swept in its various meanings and by the sights and feelings suggested by the variety of adjectives compounded of it--sunswept, surfswept, fogswept, sandswept, sprayswept, windswept.

Windswept as a name was chosen within the context of the story:

Although some days were calm and soundless, and the dark, brooding land seemed asleep, on most the wind was strong and ruthless. It swept over the promontory with such might that they [Philip Marston, his son John, and Jan, their Bohemian friend] lay face downward in the grass and blueberries to escape its full, relentless force. It seemed the breath of the land, the evidence of its life and its power.

"We will name this place Windswept," said Philip Marston one morning as he bent over a pad of white drawing paper on the uneven ground before him. "Both the land itself and the house shall be called Windswept."

.

³See the unpublished honors thesis (University of Maine, 1938) by Virginia Smith Hall, "Down East Today," p. 120.

"That is the right name," said Jan. "There could be no other name for here. This is an old land, like my country, and the name is old. I heard the wind last night while you were asleep. It filled our house with sound. At once it made me think of the great wind which was the Holy Ghost of God. You remember, at Pentecost, like the Bible says."⁴

This was the beginning of Windswept on the far eastern coast of Maine. The plot of its story is slight, but there are in it dramatic moments, a variety of appealing characters, provocative thoughts, and innumerable experiences of pleasurable sensory perception. When Philip Marston was accidentally shot on the day he became the legal owner of "Windswept, its hundreds of rough, unkempt acres, its miles of high, rockstrewn coast, its one precipitous headland, cut by the fierce tides, into almost a semi-circle"--all this land and his plans for the house became the inheritance of his fourteen-year-old son, John Marston. Windswept, land and house and even a way of life as it comes to be, is the real protagonist of the novel, but it can achieve its identity only through the characters with whom it has interacted. Only John Marston and Jan Pisek, the Czeck immigrant friend and servant of the Marstons, span with their lives the sixty years of its story. The other characters belong to Windswept either for a shorter time, or less fully, or only indirectly. To say that the more completely a character was at one with Windswept the finer person he was would be not to speak the entire truth about the novel, but it might be to speak the essence of it. One of the few thoroughly unlikeable characters in the whole book is John Marston's grandmother, who made a laborious and futile journey from her Gardiner, Maine, home to New York to oppose the

⁴Mary Ellen Chase, Windswept (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), pp. 46-47.

building of the house at Windswept after her son's death. Her opposition did more than anything else to influence John Marston's guardian, James Lassiter, to consent to its building.

Julian Lassiter, the son of John's guardian, spent the summers of his college years at Windswept with John, but after he went to California to represent his father's firm, its influence on him weakened. In fact, his one visit back at the end of the book showed him caught in some of the unpleasant facets of the modern way of life that John Marston avoided by choosing the scholarly work of a translator--"This could be done at Windswept as well as anywhere else, with a few winter months spent in the libraries of New York or elsewhere" (p. 220). Actually John's wife Eileen, Julian Lassiter's sister, seemed to need those winter months elsewhere more than her husband did. In the early years of Windswept Eileen had been sent by her mother to spend the summer under the good influence of Mrs. Haskell, one of the most distinctive characters of the book.

Mrs. Haskell, the housekeeper found by Mrs. Lassiter and Windswept's native builder, Caleb, was one of the few local people who took part in life at Windswept. Mrs. Haskell's New England virtues qualified her for her job as did the fact that "She was used to the sea, having never in her life been out of sight or sound of it, and the wide land at Windswept was never lonely to her" (pp. 149-150). When she made a late second marriage after ten seasons at Windswept, she left the spirit of herself behind her in the family idiom. To the Marstons the verb haskell meant "to tidy up . . . to clean something, to clean up anything at all" (p. 158).

Eileen and John Marston brought up their children at Windswept, letting them attend school with the Heron Cove children until the time came at the

beginning of their teens for them to go away for further schooling. Thereafter they returned as often as they could. These children were Philip and Ann born in the early years of the Marstons' marriage and Roderick not born until they had entered their fifties. Rod did not grow up quite alone at Windswept even though he was born after his brother's death in World War I, for when he was ten, Julie Chartier, of the same age, came to Windswept to become one of the family. She was the grand niece of Mother Radegund, the French-born superior at a Catholic girls school in New York State, who had had a long-time literary correspondence and friendship with John Marston. At the close of the book World War II is imminent and with it Rod's joining of the R.A.F.

It is necessary to go back to the beginning to bring in the small group of immigrant characters who are an important portion of the novel. Long before he discovered the land and planned the house at Windswept, the first Philip Marston had taken into his care and friendship two Bohemian boys whom he had met on a ship coming from Europe. He helped them to establish a shoe-shining business in New York, but after his death Jan devoted his time more to John Marston and Windswept, leaving the shop to Anton and Anton's unscrupulous brother-in-law, who was to involve Anton in the dishonest dealings which led him eventually to a prison term. Because of his early friendship with Jan, Anton remained part of the novel, but he never became part of Windswept. Jan's twin sister Philomena, however, became part of Windswept when Jan fulfilled his long dream of having her with him and sent her money to come to America to replace Mrs. Haskell in the house at Windswept. The knowledge and wisdom Jan brought to Windswept from his Bohemian past matches in its way the knowledge John Marston acquires in

his years of study of languages and literatures. But both had to be the kind of men they were to be able to flourish at Windswept.

There are other characters who were briefly but individually important, to the story, or in some other wise to the book itself. There was Sarah, Ellen Marston's maid, who was kind to the boy John Marston on his uneasy visits to his grandmother and who could say from the experience of forty years with Ellen Marston, "It's a great grief, Master John, when there's no grief worth grieving for" (p. 132). There was Dan Perkins, John's early friend at Windswept, who fired the shot accidentally responsible for the death of John's father, and whose few troubled years after that shot are depicted by the author with a sensitive understanding of human nature. Then there was Adrienne Chartier, niece of Mother Radegund and mother of Julie, whose summer stay at Windswept the year she was sixteen was so disturbing to the others there--to each in a different way. There was Peter Osinski, the Polish farmer in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts, who gave work to Anna Karel and later to Anton in those years when Anton wished to be "always dead to Jan Pisek" (p. 184), and who reenforced with his words that view of immigrants in America which was exemplified in the life of Jan and understood in the advanced thinking of Philip Marston. Peter Osinski said, "But a man must not forget his old country. To forget good things does bad things to a man" (p. 368). Jan had remembered good things, and they had done other good things to him and, therefore, to Windswept. And there was also Cyril Cobb, who, as a teacher at the Heron Cove school for a year, was "a surprise and pleasure" (p. 248) to the children, including Philip and Ann Marston. All these and others too became a part of Windswept if only through an indirect chain of relationships and experiences. In fact,

it is the contacts, however remote, which Windswept in one way or another has with the world beyond it in both time and space that help to make this novel something more than regional. It is the limited involvement of the Windswept household with the lives of their Maine neighbors which keeps it something less.

Just as the character Silas Crockett in the novel Silas Crockett was a somewhat symbolic character, so the place Windswept with all its palpable and impalpable variations sometimes gives way before a transcendent conception of place. Windswept is important not just as itself but as a place where a person can be free to be himself and to respond fully to his physical surroundings, to his own thoughts, and to a lesser degree to others. It is this freedom which was a problem to Julie when she first came to Windswept, as it might be to many from even less restricted worlds than a French convent school: "It had been easy to do as one was told; it was hard to do as one wished" (p. 390). There is even a Rousseauistic strain in the upbringing of children at Windswept. Mother Radegund and John Marston touched on this when Julie was first brought to Windswept. Mother Radegund said of Julie:

"She sees things, and she somehow knows that there's more to them than just what she sees. And you'll know enough to let her alone. If we could only find the right places for children and then let them alone, we wouldn't need all this nonsensical talk about education."

"I believe this is the right place," he said. (p. 388)

This was not, however, the first time John Marston had thought of the importance of place to education. His thoughts on education seem to be very close to Miss Chase's own:

Education was the constant, often unconscious, rescue within oneself of life from death, beginning

long before one was aware of it in the associations made possible through the places in which one found oneself, through the persons one knew, and, as Dr. Johnson had well said, through the books one read and loved. And among all these sources of life, John Marston, sitting among his books at Windswept, was inclined to think that the very accident of place loomed largest, either with its gifts or its denials. (p. 241)

But the gifts of Windswept had not come to the Marston family as an "accident of place," for the first Philip Marston had been quite aware of their possibilities when he chose the land. Many realizations about it came to him as he waited there to make it legally his own:

Contentment here became a veritable excitement. . . . It was strange how this new place seemed old and familiar almost from the moment of their setting foot upon it The very absence of trees, the swarthy monotony of its mounds and hollows made by the clumps of blueberry and alder scattered upon its shaggy surface, gave to it a grave and solemn simplicity, a naked reality which struck upon the mind as well as upon the sight of the sensitive observer. There was mystery in its severity Events could not pass here into the nadir of forgetfulness. . . . Here, even sadness must be sharpened and refined to understanding and acceptance; here, Earth was still the ancient life-giver, increasing joy. . . . For this was an old and a wise land. . . . Here, Philip Marston thought, one could, if he would, catch something of that wisdom which life in most places and under most circumstances leaves unfinished, even undiscovered. (pp. 43-46 passim)

This is Miss Chase being more truly herself in regard to the sense of place than she was able to be in the novel Uplands when the influence of Hardy was close to her imagination. Here, without personification, the land is kinder and friendlier to man than Hardy usually saw it--more beneficent, to use one of Miss Chase's own favorite words. She is now following more fully "the tradition of romance" which Richard Chase finds still in the American novel but not in the English,⁵ for the reader knows that

⁵Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Traditions (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1957), p. xii.

for all the fidelity of detail Windswept can not be quite literally true. It is really not Windswept a sentient being, but John Marston's feeling for it, which the author described after John had first seen the framework of its house: "Now awakened from its long loneliness, the place itself had become eager and alive, beneficent, filled with human expectations, mellowed and hospitable by the very presence of death within it" (p. 118). Another reality of Windswept is its existence as memory in the experience of those who belong to it. As a matter of fact, this is the way it is first introduced to the reader in the Prologue of the book. Windswept is to those adults who have known it as children much as her childhood life on ship-board was to the later years of Mary Peters. In the Prologue to Windswept the author has some things to say which the reader cannot quite appreciate until the book is near its close and the portrait of Windswept has received its final brushstrokes. Windswept not only drew together those who knew it, but so strong was its identity of place that it conquered time.

Time as a reality has always provoked the attention of Mary Ellen Chase as it has of many other novelists. The special consideration she gave it in A Goodly Fellowship and in Dawn in Lyonesse has been pointed out. In Windswept it is under the spell of place that time becomes something other than ordered, chronological sequence. In the Prologue the ten years during which Ann has known Julie "had been woven so closely, so inextricably with knowledge and experience common to both, with persons and thoughts and places, and, above all, with one place which was not merely a place, that they lost all identity with years" (p. 4). Especially in memory place conquers time. The same incident in Germany took both Ann and Julie back in memory to Windswept but in different ways. Julie consciously recalls her past there "as one turns the pages of a book of

pictures" (p. 10). With Ann it is something different; memory not only brings, unbidden, persons, scenes, and perceptions of Windswept, but it gives her a new awareness of them, a new understanding of them that she has never known before. It is here in the special kind of memory of Windswept which Ann Marston experiences that we get one of the author's intimations that Windswept is in some ways symbolic rather than unique. Ann thinks of her returning experiences in the general terms of the experiences of many other people:

They had their counterparts in countless thousands of places, she thought, in countless thousands of minds, out of sight and anchored in the dark pool of the past, unapprehended in the quick stream of the present, unable to make themselves known through conscious memory alone, through the quick passage of circumstance or even through the love they engendered. They waited, she knew now, for some means of revelation, for some momentary experience in the present, some quick sense of grief, some realization of transcending pain or pleasure, some long-forgotten sight or sound, smell or touch (p. 14)

It is consistent with Mary Ellen Chase's feeling for the past that among the individual glimpses from "the dark pool of the past" which identify Windswept in Ann Marston's memory there is one that had become real to her not from her own direct experience, but an older one that she knew through frequent family retelling.

Although place is the thing in Windswept, Miss Chase lays some emphasis on a past broader than the personal and family past apprehended by Ann Marston in the passage above. The difference in the nature of the past which is part of the substance of Windswept from that which forms the whole structure of Silas Crockett and a large portion of Mary Peters is another cause for seeing Windswept as a non-regional novel. Rose Field in her review of Windswept found its drama not in "personal conflict and

clashes" but "in a man's choice between one way of life and another."⁶

Although the most important thing about the way of life John Marston chose was that it allowed him to live so much at Windswept, the nature of his way of life is significant too. Miss Chase might have written a stronger novel if she had made John Marston's scholarship a more distinct part of the story rather than the diffuse, unrelated bits it is. Some of these bits, however, do at least shape themselves into a justification for what he is doing and also into another sector of Miss Chase's total view of the value of the past to the present. Once, having made a pleasing discovery, John Marston reflected, "The scholar . . . was . . . like the Angel of Ressurrection, gathering from the four corners of the earth what else were but dead things and infusing them with life" (p. 272). As John Marston saw, and, one feels quite certain, Miss Chase also, modern man would not be able to adjust satisfactorily to the changes brought by science or technology without some concern for the past. If old faiths are rejected, "man . . . must build his own faith merely in order to keep faith with himself. And for this building, John Marston felt sure no entirely new world could suffice." (p. 244).

Miss Chase, as well as John Marston, is perhaps more like other thinking people of our age in feeling the necessity for a new faith than she is in her determination that the new faith have its roots in the past. She would no doubt approve this view of Adlai Stevenson's:

Over the centuries scores of great men have laid down a mosaic of ethical concepts treating with almost every aspect of human life. Yet strangely enough in 1961 millions of persons the world over appear to be groping for new ethical guide lines as if they had never before

⁶Field, p. 1.

been traced, or as if the old ones were no longer relevant . . . It is no wonder that this is an anxious age and that we want an ethic--an ethic for survival.⁷

John Marston, also like Miss Chase, realized that the most obvious way of knowing the past which gives life to the present was through books. In an earlier essay, "Abundant Life in Books," Miss Chase had written, ". . . within the covers of books is a more abundant living than most of us can gain through our actual experiences in our own smaller worlds."⁸ John Marston sees this in terms of the thought of one he has met in books: "Between the lettered and the unlettered man, the dishevelled old doctor [Samuel Johnson] had written, there is as much difference as between the living and the dead" (p. 240). Yet John Marston knows that there are other, if rarer, ways of keeping in touch with the past, for he has seen this in Jan: "Yet Jan was a lettered man too, in his way a poet, his books the perception of centuries behind his daily labor" (p. 240). Jan's special sense of the past seemed to come from a combination of his close associations with the land and an awareness of the traditions of his native country.

It is clearly one of Miss Chase's intentions to emphasize the past in the immigrant characters in Windswept and to show, as in the case of Anton, that letting go too easily of the past can be not only a loss but sometimes a harm. (What Miss Chase has to say on this score has, of course, been said in more direct ways by sociologists, by Margaret Mead, for example.) As a boy John Marston had met the Czech past of Jan and Anton and Philomena

⁷Quoted on the program of the Annual Meeting of The Society for Social Responsibility in Science, September 9, 1961.

⁸Mary Ellen Chase, "The Abundant Life in Books," Ladies' Home Journal, LIII (September, 1936), 19.

at the Narodni Budova, the National Hall of the Czechs, in New York, and found in the entertainments and meetings there something alive as well as old: "There was something old there, stretching back through the centuries, seen in the tears which sometimes ran down the faces of the aged, in gestures and in the rhythm of voices in hatred and homesickness, grief and memory" (p. 30). This emphasis on the Czech past is objectified not only in the character of Jan, and to a lesser extent in his sister Philomena, but also in the stories Jan tells both of his own early experiences and of legend.

Jan has a special sense of oldness too, which is a somewhat different thing from a sense of the past, and the author blends this with the sense of oldness which belongs to Windswept itself--"a stretch of country, old from the beginning, yet in a New World" (p. 9). Yet the historical past of Windswept is slight. The only evidence in its story of an historical past is the discovery of some old French coins by the children Rod and Julie. (In a footnote the author cites the incident of a similar actual discovery on the Maine coast.) This experience made Julie feel at home at Windswept in the way that associations with their own past often make people at home:

This point of barren land, these surf-swept rocks, other trees like this fallen one, had once heard French words spoken by people who came from France, from Brittany, perhaps, where sailors lived, from Provence where her mother had been born and spent her childhood. This Windswept, then, was not a foreign land. It was hers as well as Rod's. Long before his grandfather had found it French people had known it, anchored their ships beyond this point, walked in these woods, buried their money against the time when they should return to it. (p. 400)

The complexity of the past, or of a variety of pasts, is like the complexity in earlier books by Mary Ellen Chase, but the pattern it forms

is different. It is perhaps just because there is so little history, local or beyond, attached to Windswept that its identity as a place stands out and that such evidences of the past as are involved with it can represent man's need within the present for some contact with the past.

If Miss Chase did not quite fulfill the possibilities inherent in the novel Windswept, it is, in part, what she fails to do with the character of John Marston which is responsible. Philip Rahv in his essay "The Cult of Experience in American Writing" says, "The intellectual is the only character missing in the American novel."⁹ The reader of Windswept is given to understand that John Marston is just that kind of a character, and yet somehow Miss Chase does not bring the reader to a complete realization of him as an intellectual. Philip Rahv also states, "Everything is contained in the American novel except ideas."¹⁰ Whether or not one can agree with the judgment of Sister Mariella that Windswept "is, however, concerned first and foremost with ideas,"¹¹ these ideas appear fragmented and separate rather than a related commitment to life. As interesting as some of them are in themselves, they seem almost to be Mary Ellen Chase's rather than John Marston's. Sometimes these ideas are stronger in their negative aspects than in positive ones, and on John Marston's part there is an aloofness from any involvement in life beyond Windswept which the

⁹ Philip Rahv, "The Cult of Experience in American Writing," in John W. Aldridge, Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-51 (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1952), p. 233.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 234.

¹¹ Sister Mariella, Review of Windswept, Commonweal, XXXV (January 16, 1942), 323.

ideas of a thinking man of his day might be expected to bring. He lacks in a sense the completeness of the non-intellectual Jan, although his completeness would have had to be more complex.

Sometimes the attitudes of the novel seem even more distinctive of our age now in the 1960's than when they were first written twenty years ago. One attitude toward modern science is expressed in Mother Radegund's fear: "When I read of big dams being built to harness more power and of all these new motor cars, whenever I turn on all these electric switches, I wonder if some day all this control of power isn't going to turn on us and control us to our hurt" (p. 286). And there are the questions which John Marston asks himself about science:

Was science, then, seen in its new application to the means of life and living, certain to deliver men from hardships? Might it not be a tyrant as well as a saviour, reviving old evils, trampling ruthlessly on the good promises latent in its beginnings? Might it not exact a heavy payment in return for its mis-named freedoms? Under a smiling mask of civilization might it not destroy simplicity, darken men's minds, harden men's hearts, becoming less the friend than the remorseless enemy of mankind? Was the dream which sometimes beset him by day as well as by night nonsensical and absurd--that terrifying dream of vast conflicts, of blood and cruelty and chaos, brought upon the world by this very mechanical skill, this power of invention, which promised so much to men and women, but which held lurking within itself dangers which few were foreseeing? (pp. 243-244)

There are other ideas about the modern world which Windswept is not too remote to consider, but there is little it can do in the face of them but offer a retreat or supply its children with fortifying memories. But the value of memories, like the value of place, is always high in Miss Chase's view. The novel begins with Julie and Ann caught separately and together in memories of Windswept at a time when they are far away from it.

At the close they are both caught again in memories, but the author is then using a somewhat different technique, one, in fact, which she seldom uses. With only the free associations of reverie and with no other order, least of all chronological, snatches of past conversations and incidents blend with the experiences of the present to create the feeling common to us all, which Robert Penn Warren, speaking of an experience of his own, once called the "doubleness of living in a present and in a past."¹²

Mark Schorer in analyzing fiction as a literary art,¹³ employs in 'Fiction and the "Analogical Matrix"' a kind of examination of the language of fiction which can with some ease be applied to Windswept. It is this ease, in fact, with which one can apply his type of analysis to a novel not of his selection which gives one some faith in Schorer's suggestions about the added meanings revealed in this process--meanings which the novelists themselves are not quite conscious of. The element of language he selects for examination is "the dominant metaphorical quality . . . intending not only the explicit but the buried and dead metaphors, and some related traits of diction generally, that whole habit of value association."¹⁴ What he discovers through his study is

. . . the inevitability of the individual imaginative habit, the impressive fact that every mind selects its creative gamut from the whole range of possible language and in thus selecting determines its insights and their scope, in short, its character and the character of its creations. . . .¹⁵

¹²Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959), p. 640.

¹³Aldridge, p. 83.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 86.

It would be pushing Schorer's theory too far to claim a single dominant metaphorical quality for Windswept. But there is no doubt that the language of the book is strongly metaphorical in ways which are more or less deliberate on the author's part. Some metaphors persist through the book, appearing to assume thematic significance. Mary Ellen Chase's fascination for the word swept and its various adjective combinations has already been mentioned. The verb sweep itself is used sometimes to indicate personal movement, often, as might be expected, to describe nature, and frequently in a way Schorer must have been thinking of when he mentioned the dead metaphor, to indicate some emotional feeling. It is surprising when one counts them up to find the number of times swept is associated with intensity of feeling--"This terror which had swept seemingly from nowhere" (p. 9)--"Incredulity had for the moment swept the anger from her face" (p. 94)--"some faith . . . swept those whom it seized from the humdrum of existence into new and fervid life" (p. 102)--"swept by dread" (p. 127)--"Then he suddenly remembered what this present excitement had completely swept from his mind" (p. 196)--"the sickening rush of remembrance which was now sweeping through his own body" (p. 410). It is doubtful that Miss Chase had any very deliberate artistic intention when she made use of sweep in its uncombined forms, and perhaps there is no profound significance in its use. It may just be a strong thread binding together the pleasures of freedom in physical, emotional, or imaginative movement. As for her use of the word in combination it seems usually to be conscious, even self-conscious, and never to penetrate very deep in a metaphorical sense.

The kind of image which does pervade the novel with analogical significance has appeared in her writing before, in Mary Christmas, for example, but has not been used so extensively in one book. In fact, it is quite

likely that the author was not quite aware of the extent of her use of it here. The memories at the beginning of the book, which have already been mentioned, assume a metaphorical pattern that is pleasing but not startling or unusual:

. . . a thousand hours of sun and storm and wind, a thousand fleeting memories merging with one another, a bright tapestry, a magic carpet, woven of the reds and blacks, gold and grays, of returns and farewells, of noise and silence, anger and remorse, laughter and resentment, tears swift and painless, tears slow and never really quenched. (p. 10)

This designates the Windswept which is a way of life. A similar image caps a more literal description of Windswept the place in its September splendor at the close of the book. This also illustrates the lyrical quality which Miss Chase sustains through so much of her writing:

Tiny sea-asters, pale lavender, growing even in the sand;
the last pale pink bind-weed; a solitary blue iris here
and there; the rich burgundy of the wind strawberry,
three tiny brilliant leaves flat against the ground.
Cranberries ripe and red; the leaves of the blueberries
crimson, purple, rust, bronze, so that whole patches
of the long land flamed like some rare Eastern carpet.
(pp. 420-421)

There is a whole cluster of metaphorical images which involve ways in which single threads can be worked by one method or another into whole fabric. This seems to have a definite relationship to the more literal attempts of the book to suggest a satisfying way of life. As has been mentioned, Jan Pisek and John Marston most fully represent this way of life. Perhaps because his is the simpler way, Jan's achievement is more fully demonstrated than John's. The analogies are not unduly organized, but left to take their own turns of meaning.

The figure of a tapestry appears again in the first Philip Marston's view of the place of the European in America:

Contrary to most of his contemporaries and associates, he believed honestly and ardently in the manifold contributions which northern and even southern Europe were making to the tapestry of American life, its manners, its colours, and its thought. (p. 23)

There are a few images which lie on the outer fringes of the cluster but are part of it all the same. There are "the quiet sea with its fragile lace-work of surf" (p. 61) and "the button-holing of the rabbits, the featherstitching of the mice" (p. 20) and "the milk streaming into his pail in straight white threads" (p. 121) and "some vast sheet of pale gray satin" (p. 56). Not necessarily meaningful metaphors, these share in the same "metaphorical quality." The important analogy, however, uses the figure of weaving, accented by that of knitting. While these two might be considered mixed metaphors, they seem to function as reinforcing metaphors. When Jan left New York to live in Maine,

Here his life slowly returned to its old continuity which his years in New York had broken, spanned those years, stretching across them the broken strands of the past, knitting these securely to the stout threads of the present. Now warp and woof could once more be woven into an invincible fabric, old days, old years, new hours, new sights and sounds, old and new thoughts. (p. 214)

Just half a page before this figurative passage there is a brief preparatory scene of more literal imagery:

"He's a good feller, that Bohunk man," the fishermen said, mending their nets around the corner of some shack out of the wind, splicing the ravelled spaces of their trawls, pulling on their clay pipes. (p. 214)

There is an interesting paradox in the fact that when Philomena, Jan's twin sister, comes to Windswept she works in the afternoon in the field in preference to the easier sewing or knitting suggested by Eileen Marston, but at the same time, "To Jan Philomena completed the now un-

broken fabric of his life" (p. 226).

Jan had worried about Anton: "It would be hard for Anton, if not impossible to bridge those long years in prison, hard to knit up those dark threads with the brighter ones of the past of his boyhood, to join them with the difficult present and the inescapable future" (pp. 233-234). But when he visited the Connecticut farm where Anton spent the last years of his life, Jan saw the possibility that in this place one might "knit that past once more to the present and the future" (p. 239). The necessity for anyone to do this is, of course, a key thought in all of Miss Chase's writing. Another related metaphor presents an important corollary in her thinking which is also a part of her art. She writes of the young Philip Marston: "Here within the walls of the chapel outward and inward things met, merged, were woven together, lost their separation one from the other" (p. 261). This process of experience has been illustrated in earlier works by Miss Chase--in Mary Peters and in "Wormwood--for Thoughts," for example. A small example of it in Windswept is Philip's experience when his dog Billy Bones had to be shot "because he could never be taught to stay away from porcupines":

On that warm July evening the fireflies were lighting the fir branches with tiny sparks of light, and when he went inside the chapel to escape them, there they were in the green trees behind the altar window, like so many tiny, flickering candle-flames. He never forgot them, how they gleamed and glowed on his way home in the dark, becoming thereafter to him always associated with sudden heartbreak. (p. 260)

There is another metaphor here, buried it might be called, which draws the one just discussed--of the thread, woven or knit or embroidered or stitched as it may be--to the one which Miss Chase was trying consciously, but less successfully, to impose on her material. Before the title page

she quotes from Urn Burial by Sir Thomas Browne, "Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us." The flame appears in several places, and Dr. Coit, the headmaster of St. Paul's, the school of the first Philip and of John Marston, is a man "consumed and nourished alike by the same glowing fire" (p. 102). He is also marked, like Huldah Crockett in Silas Crockett, by a strong, convincing religious faith:

And yet behind his passion for righteousness, his reliance upon the Word and the presence of God as the one thing necessary for the well-being of man in this world and for the assurance of his better being in the next, was something deeper and greater, some apprehension, mystical perhaps, of that Life which is within life, and yet which is so tangled and ineradicable, or so lost and out of sight, in the debris of daily existence. (p. 103)

The word here which draws this into the metaphorical cluster just discussed is, of course, tangled. It relates in a hidden manner to the conventional image of the "thread of life." It is noteworthy that the word tangled with its suggestion of a lack of pattern relates to experience apart from Windswept. At Windswept, whenever this particular metaphorical quality is used, there is always the suggestion of thread being worked into some kind of a pattern as opposed to its existence in a confused or even "tangled" state. Life at Windswept could not be real and be perfect, but the author could by her choice of words, even by her unconscious choice, contrast it favorably with what lay beyond it.

This contrast appears as some evidence at least of one of Schorer's conclusions: "Metaphorical language expresses, defines, and evaluates theme."¹⁶ Although, as was said at the outset, the very title of Windswept indicates the author's intention to emphasize place, this novel represents

¹⁶Ibid., p. 98.

only a part of Miss Chase's search in all her writing for the good life for the individual. The metaphorical language in Windswept seems to reveal her belief that such a life must have some form--different but right for each person. To reiterate what has now been stated a number of times, there are certain basic tendencies in her thinking which make place and thing, memory and history, word and idea all contribute to this form. In Windswept it has to be place which is foremost, and the metaphorical suggestions help to underscore this, even though the author may have been quite unaware of the related use to which she was putting her selection of language.

One final aspect of the theme should be touched on. It is not an exceptional concept, but one which indicates that in the final analysis, underneath her love of beauty and her glorification of the somewhat romantic appeal she gives to nature in her word-reveling descriptions, there is an honest reality to her meaning which can't be obscured. Even at Windswept, perhaps especially at Windswept, there is, for all the affection and mutually satisfying human relationships, the consciousness of life alone. Any writer concerned, as Miss Chase is, with the identity of the individual must recognize, as she does, that one cannot be an individual without being, sometimes at least, alone. This double-edged significance of the need of each of us to be an individual is demonstrated all through the story, but is perhaps best symbolized by a small incident toward its close. On the morning after his mother's death young Rod Marston awoke early to see against the clear, dark sky the flight of a white heron. His inability to awaken his father to share the sight with him seems to stand quite simply for the part of experience, sorrow or joy, which has to be endured alone. The question he feels is asked but not answered:

He should call his father, he thought, while there was yet time. This was what his father had been waiting many years to see. Why was he suddenly unable to speak? Why did he suddenly know that this was his, to hold and keep? Why was this moment something that one could not share, this sight of a solemn bird floating from out the purple sky? (p. 411)

The answer is perhaps implied through the whole book. If a good way of life is made possible by a place like Windswept where a person can live fully as an individual, then a quality of aloneness is a necessary part of that existence. It might be mentioned parenthetically that if the white heron reminds the reader of Sarah Orne Jewett's "White Heron" the reader may also remember that coincidentally the bird in both cases holds a child alone and separate from another person.

One of the weaknesses of Windswept is the failure of the lives of the characters, particularly John Marston, to demonstrate fully the proof of what has been indicated as the theme. Still the large group of characters, the largest in any of Mary Ellen Chase's novels, stand in their varying degrees of completeness and in their varying individuality, quite solidly against a fear expressed by J. Donald Adams for the fate of modern literature, and likewise for modern life: "Never before has the race been so acutely conscious of mankind in the mass; never has our belief in the importance of the individual been so sorely tried. And that is a condition which strikes at the core of the novelist's art."¹⁷ Although Miss Chase meets the modern literary problem with a point of view that can be considered traditional, her concern for the problem and even bits of her technique place her novel Windswept within the modern trend of fiction. If she is more optimistic in the hope she offers and in her unwillingness to allow

¹⁷J. Donald Adams, Literary Frontiers (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951), p. 138.

defeat to the individual than many of her contemporaries, perhaps she is doing a service to the literature of her time by carrying the values of the past to the Frontier--to use a term from Adams's title--no matter how conventional her general procedure.

A recent study of the history of American literature opposes to Adams's fear a theory well suited to explain the theme of Miss Chase's next novel, The Plum Tree. As inadequate as this theory may appear for bearing the burden of such a broad study as Literature and the American Tradition, Leon Howard's conclusion would certainly justify, if it needed justification, the placing of The Plum Tree within the American tradition. Howard finds among such writers as Wallace Stevens, Hemingway, and Faulkner "a belief in the creative power of the human spirit to endure and prevail and to exist in the meanest and queerest of individuals." While none of the important characters in Windswept are among "the meanest and queerest of individuals," the converse is true of The Plum Tree. Miss Chase's interest lies in the "human spirit" of the characters of The Plum Tree not in the clinical analysis found in some recent fiction.

This belief stated by Howard comes so close to one of the enduring themes of Miss Chase's writing that it may be worth quoting his summary of its history:

This is the belief which budded beneath Puritan orthodoxy, found its way through eighteenth-century reason to a declaration of independence, transformed the symbols of European literature into something new, and became established as an American tradition which could survive the impact of an almost overwhelming materialism, the disillusionment of false hopes and the charms of new dogmatisms. Tacit rather than rational in its pervasiveness, its expression has been shaped by so many intellectual contexts that it refuses to become a part of any system or orthodoxy and exists only as a sort of intangible national quality in American

literature and an under-the-surface source of that power which contemporary literature--perhaps America herself--derives from the past.¹⁸

The Plum Tree, this slightest of her novels, or "short story, for it is hardly more than that,"¹⁹ was, when it first appeared, diversely characterized by its reviewers as "a small Classic,"²⁰ a "gem-like short novel,"²¹ "a bitter little tour de force that masquerades as a gentle piece,"²² and "a capsule of compassion made memorable by Miss Chase's almost unbearable awareness of the human heart."²³ Interestingly, it came at a time when Miss Chase was writing no other fiction. She had stopped writing short stories; Windswept was eight years behind and The Edge of Darkness eight years ahead. It is probably the subject matter of The Plum Tree which accounts for one reviewer's opinion that Miss Chase is here assuming a "new role" and that she "can scarcely be recognized as the author. . . ."²⁴ This can be disputed, for there is more of the familiar Mary Ellen Chase than of the new in this story, which in its action covers the hours from nine to four of just one day, but retrospectively and even prospectively,

¹⁸Leon Howard, Literature and the American Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), p. 329.

¹⁹Margaret Williamson, Review of The Plum Tree, Christian Science Monitor, October 27, 1949, p. 15.

²⁰Joanna Spencer, Review of The Plum Tree, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 27, 1949, p. 4.

²¹Nona Balakian, Review of The Plum Tree, New York Times Book Review, October 16, 1949, p. 4.

²²Mary Sandrock, Review of The Plum Tree, The Catholic World, CLXX (December 1949), 313.

²³Catherine M. Brown, Review of The Plum Tree, Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII (December 17, 1949), 26.

²⁴Williamson, p. 15.

encompasses the life of Emma Davis, nurse at the Home for Aged Women, whose matron is Emma's best friend, Angelina Norton. This day is a critical one in the routine of the Home, for three of its old ladies who have become mentally, though not physically, beyond its care must be committed to the State Hospital. With sympathetic cajolery, tact, and inflated merriment, the nurse and the matron carry all the ladies of the Home, particularly the three who are to depart at four o'clock, through the difficult day without disaster, or even unpleasantness. There is a special dinner at noon as well as a strange tea party at three. Everything is in some way attached to the small plum tree blossoming on the front lawn. This little tree is designated by the author as "the protagonist of this fleeting drama" (p. 2).

The Plum Tree, like The Silver Shell, focuses with its title on the element of imagery. Again the imagery comes from nature, and again it represents beauty. Windswept showed the influence of place in the lives of its characters; The Plum Tree shows the influence of a thing, an object of nature, here all the more powerful because of the transitoriness of its beauty, and because of its suggestiveness to the imagination. The plum tree is seen most fully through the imagination of Davy (Emma Davis), although it is assumed to have a similar effect on her friend and associate, Miss Norton. When Davy frequently calls its beauty to the attention of the old ladies, one feels it is because of her instinctive understanding that a thing of beauty such as this has power even over the imaginations of the old and "addled." And there is the complementary experience of Davy's observation of two little girls looking at the tree and her instinctive knowledge or fear of "a new world, or perhaps the understanding of an old one,

opening before their eyes" (p. 29).

The tree also has for Davy the effect of striking into memory, especially through "some magical transformation of itself into a girl in a stiff white uniform like Emma Davis' own" (p. 9). Just this experience of memory treated so often in Miss Chase's writing, and made as significant as we have just seen it in Windswept, should have been one clue to the reviewer, Margaret Williamson, that the author is not playing a completely new role here. A single statement gives very clearly one of Miss Chase's reasons for her continued fascination with things all through her works and also a tacit admission of that fascination:

Just then the plum tree, careless of Emma Davis' anger, performed one of those sudden and mysterious acts which blossoming trees and, indeed, countless other things, beautiful or ugly, wholesome or distasteful, are forever accomplishing both to the bewilderment and to the understanding of life. (p. 8)

In this case the particular mysterious act it accomplished was to precipitate memory: "It snatched forty years from the consciousness of Emma Davis" (pp. 8-9). Time after time, beginning with His Birthday, Miss Chase displays an interest in the place of things in people's lives and their unexplainable ability to provoke thought, emotion, understanding, and even action. In The Plum Tree she has given such a thing predominance. In one instance, through memory, the tree is tied to an early period of experience. Later on, with what seems almost an irrelevant whim, the tree is related to another thing: "It's a lovely tea set, white, like that little tree with tiny pale green leaves, and fragile, as it says on the box" (p. 35), but it is one of the results of brief contemplation of the plum tree which enables Miss Davis to put to good use this object which has been only pleasing and desirable before. It becomes a fictitious gift from the scapegrace

nephew of one of the departing ladies, and is made the pivot of the final tea party. This is just one manifestation of the way the author through the character of Emma Davis seeks, as Robert Penn Warren says all writers do,²⁵ to make sense of experience. Emma Davis "had been able, though quite unconsciously, to transcend experience itself into the meaning of it" (p. 15), and Miss Chase devotes this little book to trying to give the reader at least an inkling of how this can happen. The plum tree has been a useful aid to her.

Like many a useful symbol in writing, or in living for that matter, the tree becomes almost protean in its meanings. In spite of the commonly acknowledged impossibility of repeating through discussion what an author has accomplished through art, there may be some use in looking at some of the varying ideas of the tree. Going back to the Bible and to mythology, the author reminds the reader (for this is a story in which Miss Chase takes the old-fashioned privilege of a writer to comment directly) that "Trees in the long past have often impelled men to action and to thought, invested them with strength and with vision" (p. 2). This particular tree is at different times "young and gay" (p. 97), "able to exert some strange power . . . some mysterious force or essence" (p. 77), "every spring . . . symbolizing eternal youth, desire, and hope" (p. 84), and paradoxically suggesting the effervescence of time: "'Time is always short for all of us, isn't it?' Emma Davis said, staring from the window at the little tree, which just then in a gentle whiff of wind tossed a few more petals on its shadow" (p. 58).

So quickly and so easily does the story move that the various implica-

²⁵TV Series, Writers at Work, Channel 2, Boston, Summer 1962.

tions of the plum tree blend together to create its total impression. Hasty judgment may cause one to share the feeling of Mary Sandroek that "its symbolic force is rather obscure."²⁶ It is true that the first impression of the "multiplicity of meaning" or effect provoked by the plum tree might appear to be obscure. More careful consideration reveals, however, that it is just this multiplicity which is the real force of the plum tree and inclines one to agreement with Joanne Spencer about Miss Chase's "talent for creating intelligible symbolism."²⁷

When Miss Chase explains the individual symbols of the plum tree, she is almost too explicit for artistic effectiveness although not necessarily for meaning. It is when she makes clear without explaining that the special power of the tree is to be many symbols that she is most effective in creating symbolic meaning. The tree is even significant in its absence, for it is only from the room of Mrs. Christianson, the most hopeless of the three on their way to the State Hospital, that it can not be seen.

Important among the many meanings is the key one which marks the work the two women, nurse and matron, are doing at their Home for Aged Women, to which they have given thirty years of their lives. Their devotion has been to bring as much joy in living as possible to those in their care. With wisdom "grounded on practice and experience" (p. 7), they "had transformed their Home for Aged Women into something quite unlike too many of its counterparts" (p. 6). That this wisdom, like all human wisdom, is never quite enough to keep them from searching for more is another meaning

²⁶Sandroek, p. 313.

²⁷Spencer, p. 4.

attached to the plum tree:

Angelina Norton and Emma Davis were wise women, after the saying of that ancient poet and prophet who wrote that all who seek after wisdom must forever hunger and forever thirst. Those two were always hungering and thirsting after Something, of which at the moment the little tree on the lawn was a symbol. (p. 7)

In The Plum Tree there is the kind of commitment to the welfare of others, to the good, in however limited a way, of the society one lives in which is largely absent from Windswept. That this dedication to others is what these two women, Emma and Angelina, have desired most in their lives is obvious. There is no indication that they have any real desire to escape it. In all the possible readings of the plum tree, there is none which justifies one reviewer's interpretation, ". . . there is only the silent taunt of the tree outside her window, suggesting what life might have been or still could be."²⁸ When Emma Davis plans Geographic-inspired travels and a reading of The Complete Shakespeare, she does not show any wish to give up at the present the way of life she has worked so hard to establish for herself. On the contrary the author seems to be showing by the contrast of these very commonplace plans the real value of Emma Davis's work and also the achievement of her individual identity through it. Certainly such accomplishment is appropriate subject matter for an American novel of the time. That the author treats it without sentimentality is part of her achievement. One might well question the author's own statement that the time and place could just as well have been different. Even a story such as "The Town Poor" by Sarah Orne Jewett or "Sister Liddy" by Mary Wilkins Freeman shows a difference on the American scene just a few

²⁸Balakian, p. 4.

generations earlier. The modern Japanese short story, "The Hateful Age,"²⁹ portrays a far less sympathetic attitude in a culture which has traditionally revered its aged. This is not Miss Chase's first interest in the old and "addled." Mr. Levinsky in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, Foolish Tom in The Silver Shell, and Ursula Trundy in the early short story "Upland Pastures" were all examples of such characters sympathetically treated. The interest is to be carried somewhat further in The Lovely Ambition.

There is a kind of paradox about this concern of Miss Chase's, however. The fact that she has it places her within the contemporary scene, but her attitude toward the use of the discoveries of modern psychology in connection with the treatment of the old has some of the same hostility that she has always shown toward the application of psychology to education and child care. She appears to be afraid that the objective use of scientific principles will take away from the values of individual human wisdom and love. This attitude is reflected, slightly to be sure, in the conversation between Angelina and Emma:

"I don't need to tell you . . . that those psychiatrists or neurologists, or whatever else they call themselves up there in the State Hospital haven't a high opinion of you and me, Davy. . . . They think we've been sacrificing the safety of the many for the comfort of the few. In other words, they don't think we've been very ethical."

"I don't give a damn what they think," Emma Davis said. "Ethics just don't work in a home for old ladies, or at least what most people call ethics." (p. 30).

Just what does work in a home for old ladies, on this day at least, has something of a madcap quality befitting the departure from reality of

²⁹Niwa Fumio, "The Hateful Age," in Modern Japanese Stories: An Anthology, ed. Ivan Morris (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), pp. 320-348.

the three old ladies. Bits of conversation Emma Davis has with the three old ladies and especially the tea party remind one faintly of Alice in Wonderland. The logical lack of logic, the clichés--even the double-meaning one of "house of cards" (p. 57)--, the incongruities and the ironies, and most of all Miss Davis's frantic need for inventiveness, all partake of this quality. Mrs. Rust confides to Emma Davis:

"About that four o'clock," she whispered. "People sometimes steal notions from others, that is if they get queer and notional like Mrs. Christianson and Annie Tiddle. Perhaps--I don't like to think they would--but just perhaps--they've stolen four o'clock from me."

Emma Davis, like Alice a representative of the real world, replies, "Stuff and nonsense" (just as Alice once did in the interest of common sense), and goes on to explain soothingly with more logic of manner than of thought:

"Your four o'clock is yours, and their four o'clock is theirs, and it's all quite clear and simple. Now, dear, if you'll lend me that key, which I'll be careful to return to you, I'll get along." (p. 47)

Keys and timepieces are also faint echoes from Alice, and often as useless as there. In the middle of the morning, in Miss Tiddle's room:

Emma Davis' nervous scrutiny instantly revealed a silent alarm clock on the bare mantelpiece with its stopped hands pointed to four o'clock. . . . (p. 52)

Then when Miss Davis stopped outside Mrs. Christianson's lock door she

. . . heard a key being slowly turned in the lock. The key made a high, querulous, ragged circle of sound, which instead of terrifying Emma, had the odd result of bringing back her strayed senses to her, complete and unimpaired. (p. 62)

It would be impossible to say there is anything more than sheer coincidence between this and Alice, but it is interesting that Miss Chase's means of establishing the madness of the old ladies have these chance reminiscences. Indeed, the whimsical reader may even imagine that in all

Emma Davis's urgency of action on this special day she shows some slight resemblance to the White Rabbit. But Miss Davis is a sane woman and the reader can understand perfectly, if not completely feel, the tension she is enduring and her state of near hysteria, which, through a bit of self-inflicted therapy, she is able to relieve in a good cry.

Besides the beauty of the plum tree, it is the humor, the pathetic whimsy of the old ladies' disordered imaginations, and the frequent ironies of the story which save the book from grimness. For instance, to Emma Davis, who is in her fifties, Mrs. Rust whispers, "I don't want to tell you because you are young, and you shouldn't hear such things" (p. 44).

With all their differences, there is still enough in The Plum Tree to reveal Miss Chase's literary inheritance from Sarah Orne Jewett. The comparison in subject matter with "The Town Poor" was noted earlier. Miss Chase, of course, takes the reader into the characters' inner thoughts while Miss Jewett depends largely on external talk and actions, and on general observations. The native speech which Miss Jewett reproduces so beautifully has never been one of Miss Chase's skills--perhaps because she has spent so much time away from it, or because it doesn't exist for the hearing so much any more, or finally, as has been observed before, because she just is not able to handle it, being basically too bookish in her interests. There is, however, a concern for the individual welfare of the old and also for those concerned for them, which is common to both writers and which reflects the conclusion of Leon Howard's, quoted above, that the American tradition is "a belief in the creative power of the human spirit to endure and prevail and to exist in the meanest and queerest of individuals." It is perhaps because they both, Miss Jewett oftener than Miss Chase, have

chosen to write of such individuals that one finds in their writing an air of condescending objectivity. This attitude is more noticeable in The Plum Tree than in most of Miss Chase's other fiction. It is quite absent from Windswept, for example. In general this attitude of some condescension is a concomitant of humor in both writers. Miss Chase shows an interest in characters similar to the old ladies of The Plum Tree when she gives Parson Tillyard an interest in the inmates of the state hospital at Augusta in The Lovely Ambition. Granville Hicks compares the two women writers in his review of The Lovely Ambition:

Now, of course, Miss Chase is really on home ground, and she writes tenderly, as she has often done before, of the Maine countryside and the Maine people. Her work has sometimes been compared with that of Sarah Orne Jewett, and with this book the comparison is inevitable. Miss Chase not only knows and loves Maine as Miss Jewett did; she has the same sort of feeling for character. Miss Jewett, I think, would have enjoyed the descriptions of the three mentally disturbed persons.³⁰

Perhaps Miss Jewett would have enjoyed the ladies of The Plum Tree, too, even without the Maine scene.

³⁰Granville Hicks, Review of The Lovely Ambition, Saturday Review, XLIII (June 11, 1960), 13.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO BIOGRAPHIES

The two autobiographies already discussed and two biographies have been Mary Ellen Chase's contribution to life-writing. No evaluation of her literary achievement which overlooked either would be quite complete. The two biographies, published within two years of each other, have some points in common in spite of the fact that the author could hardly have found two more different subjects representing two more different ways of American life than Jonathan Fisher and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Each, however, appears, as presented by the author, to have lived life as honestly true to his or her ideas of how life should be lived as is humanly possible. Perhaps this explains Miss Chase's willingness to undertake their biographies. It is also true that the two ways of life deserve significant places in any comprehensive view of the history of American social life. Miss Chase has caught with integrity the essence of these ways of life, although in the case of Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, 1948, she has taken more pains to underscore and to develop the socially significant aspects of the life than she has with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, 1950. Some of the reasons for this lie in the differences between the two lives.

The facts of the life of Jonathan Fisher have been so well summarized by Mary Ellen Chase herself in a little four-page leaflet published by the Jonathan Fisher Memorial, Inc., of Blue Hill, Maine, that perhaps it may justifiably be quoted here in its entirety:

Jonathan Fisher, born in 1768 in New Braintree, Massachusetts, and educated at Harvard College from 1788 to 1795 both in liberal arts and in divinity, came to Blue Hill in June, 1796, as the first settled pastor of the Congregational Church. By September of that year his original house was completed by the work of his own hands, aided by those of his parishioners. This first house, which was in use for 100 years, was unfortunately torn down by a Fisher descendant in 1896. It formed the ell of the present house, which was built in 1814, again largely by the parson himself. His skill and taste as a builder and designer are evident in its rooms.

The Reverend Jonathan Fisher, Master of Arts, a degree and title in which he took much pride, was a most unusual and remarkably gifted man. When at the close of the 18th century he came to Blue Hill, then a frontier village "in a wilderness," he was seemingly leaving behind him all those intellectual and artistic pursuits and resources in which he delighted. Yet, instead of leaving these in the "seat of the Muses," which was his name for Harvard College and Cambridge, he transported them to his lonely, far-flung parish and, with no little success, grafted many of them upon the people and upon the pioneer institutions of his new charge.

A student of languages all his life, he did not neglect his Hebrew, his Latin, or his Greek. In his study on the right of the entrance to this old house he read his Hebrew Bible at five o'clock each morning, in winter by the light of his "blazing logs;" his Latin and Greek he taught to four or five young men, who usually boarded with him and his own large family. Devoted to drawing and painting, he somehow managed to pursue these arts even in Blue Hill. Industrious almost beyond belief and possessed of an unflagging physical vitality, he relieved his omnipresent poverty and increased the few hundred dollars of his meager salary by farming his own acres, concocting medicinal remedies, weaving numberless straw hats, sawing out buttons from the bones of farm animals and even of dead household pets, painting names on vessels or painting sleighs (at \$2.50 each), making pumps, chairs, chests, hair-combs, tables, bureaus, bedsteads, cradles, even drumsticks for the local militia (at .25 a pair), and by repairing much of the shaky furniture in Blue Hill. And, with all these labors, he found time to write many poems and several books!

Nor were his activities confined to his parish. Although he nurtured its library, was the power behind its Academy, founded in 1803 (in which he encouraged "the fine arts" as well as the study of classics and mathematics), and watched over the minds as well as the souls of its

people, he went on long missionary journeys, "always on foot like my Master," was an active Trustee of the Bangor Theological Seminary (and an untiring beggar for its needs as well!), was an ardent speaker and writer in the cause of Emancipation, and sponsored from its beginning the American Society for the Colonization of Liberia.

Through these and other labors both at home and abroad he added immeasurably to the cultural dignity of this village for more than half a century. Blue Hill still respects and honors him.

These are the general external facts of Jonathan Fisher's life, but Miss Chase's biography fills them out with details and considers his thoughts and personality as well. Some of the facts of the life of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller may be more familiar to the general reader. The second daughter of Senator Nelson Aldrich, she grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, where she received her early education from a family governess, later went to Miss Abbott's school, and at eighteen came out. Breaking somewhat the unity of the biography, the author shifts in the second chapter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who met Abby Aldrich while he was a student at Brown University and married her six years later. After her marriage Abby Aldrich Rockefeller made her home in New York City, although travel, vacations, and good works often took her out of it. She had one daughter and then five sons. In the Foreword of the biography Miss Chase has placed a thumbnail sketch of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's character which is developed more fully through the details of the book:

This book is the story of an American woman, whose generous years in terms of time were generously spent in terms of service. Singularly endowed with personal gifts of wit, charm, and gaiety, with a rare understanding and love of people, with keen intelligence and a quick sense of values, she lived her life with an intense and eager awareness of what life may mean when it is regarded as a loan and not as a mere possession. The pages which follow attempt to portray her as she quite simply was: the center and the security of a large family, brought up under circumstances

requiring peculiar tact, humor, sanity, and wisdom; the patron of American culture in many forms; the constant friend of countless men and women; the disciple and apostle of all things just and true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

There were a number of factors which made Miss Chase's task quite different with each biography. In the first place, the biography of Parson Fisher was written a hundred years after his death and the life of Mrs. Rockefeller less than two years after hers. A century can add perspective to the perception and interpretation of social values. A century can also remove living friends and relatives whose remembrances may add to the biographer's materials or who may be closely touched by what is written of the subject. But other differences nearly as great as a century separate these two subjects of Miss Chase's biographical efforts--differences of poverty and wealth, of felt responsibilities, of outlooks, of nineteenth-century rural and twentieth-century urban living, among others.

While Mrs. Rockefeller was of Miss Chase's own time, Mr. Fisher was of her own place, that is Bluehill, Maine. In fact, he is part of her goodly heritage and as such was given considerable space in the autobiography A Goodly Heritage. John Garraty in The Nature of Biography has said, "Frequently, the subject chooses the biographer."¹ Certainly Jonathan Fisher could have made no better choice than Mary Ellen Chase. He had a claim on her that couldn't possibly have been equalled by Mrs. Rockefeller. Although Miss Chase is a remarkably self-effacing biographer, she does at several points make explicit Jonathan Fisher's claim on her, which is also quietly implicit all through the book. She ends her Foreword to the book with this

¹John A. Garraty, The Nature of Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 156.

memory: "When I was a child at the close of the last century and went, fifty years after his death, with my playmates for strawberries to that long unused graveyard, seemingly an incomparable place for their nurture, we never ventured to gather them on Father Fisher's grave"²; she closes the book itself with a memory of her grandmother's: "My grandmother, who in 1847 was a girl of twenty, sang in the choir at Father Fisher's funeral. She never forgot that Sunday afternoon or ceased to tell us of it" (p. 280).

Jonathan Fisher's life was thus a very real part of Mary Ellen Chase's life, even though she never knew him in person. Into the writing of his biography went not only the "years of often irritating labor" (p. x) referred to in the preface, but almost a whole lifetime of preparation, for the book was not completed until Miss Chase's own sixtieth year. The complexity of the materials used and her own professional sense of scholarly discipline must have delayed the completion of a task which she had no doubt contemplated long before. Yet Jonathan Fisher has gained from the fact that his life did not appear until its author had matured into a competent, experienced writer. It has been pointed out that frequently Miss Chase's writing emphasizes the value of the past for the present, but so completely does she give this book over to Jonathan Fisher himself that she rides her own thesis here only in her choice of subject and in this simple statement in her foreword: "My book is written also in the hope that the time and the society which it may reveal, even within a relatively small compass, may prove of value to the knowledge of American life and particularly to that of rural New England of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (p. xviii).

²Mary Ellen Chase, Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. xix.

This feeling for the value of the past which Miss Chase sometimes explains explicitly in her essays and even in her autobiographies and which she develops artistically in her novels, is used here in this biography only as her own guide in recreating the life by the use of that biographical process of writing which Leon Edel designates as "understanding, sympathy, and illumination."³ Her accomplishment exemplifies a further observation of Mr. Edel's: "It has been said that what distinguishes man from beast above all is his historic sense, his capacity for remembering rather than living wholly in the present, in other words his deep sense of life as a continuum, no matter at what moment he happens to have arrived on this earth. Writers have this sense in the greatest degree" (pp. 103-104).

Before discussing just how Miss Chase has accomplished the biography itself, it seems appropriate to explain her own personal part in it a bit further, even though, as we have already mentioned, her part in general is one of self-effacement. In fact, it is a tribute to the way in which she has made Jonathan Fisher dominate the pages that reviewers of the biography discussed his life and had little to say of the biographer. Perry Miller in the few remarks he makes on her achievement accords her high praise, saying that her "self-effacement . . . should be a model for biographers." His praise, interwoven with his general evaluation of the book, is not hard to agree with and, as the judgment of an authority on that part of New England history to which Jonathan Fisher belongs, seems well worth quoting: "What his story does make clear--or rather what Miss Chase's tact in presenting it exhibits--is the depth and intensity with which Calvinism was rooted in rural, hardscrabble New England. Miss Chase makes comprehensible

³Leon Edel, Literary Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 104.

how and why the creed gave meaning to the lives of thousands in Fisher's time. In and by itself the story is, thanks to Miss Chase's handling, a fascinating narrative, but it is something beyond: It is a tangible re-creation of an episode of central significance for American social and intellectual history."⁴

On the whole, Miss Chase has fulfilled the biographer's function here very nearly as Dana K. Merrill has described it in The Development of American Biography: "The biographer must in greater or less degree be an interpreter and he cannot escape his own temperament in sifting, molding and explaining the material of his subject's life. In general, the less the personal equation of the writer appears, the more effective is the biography."⁵ The personal equation of the writer appears very little in Jonathan Fisher and always seems justified, usually for honesty's or art's sake. If she cannot prove, even from the abundance of her material, what her general understanding of it leads her to speculate, her regard for accuracy demands that she tell the reader so, and yet to refrain from well-founded speculation would be to deny her work the "illumination" mentioned earlier as one of Edel's requisites for the process of biography. That she gives the Calvinism of Fisher's day the comprehensibility that Perry Miller claims, is obvious to the perceptive reader; yet it is doubtful that she could achieve this without the twentieth century point of view which makes even those New Englanders of today who have received through inheritance substantial nurture

⁴Perry Miller, Review of Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, New York Times, Book Review, November 7, 1948, p. 4.

⁵Dana K. Merrill, The Development of American Biography (Portland, Maine: Southworth Press, 1932), p. 9.

from this Calvinistic way of religion, of thought, and even of life, most critically aware of its shortcomings. Perhaps it has been Miss Chase's occasional critical remark on the score of Jonathan Fisher's thoughts and actions that makes the twentieth-century reader ready to accept with her own sympathy the total picture of him. Both her innate honesty and her deep interest in her subject demand this much personal intrusion into the story. Several illustrations may make this clearer.

For example, she presents the dying of Jonathan Fisher's eldest son at the age of seventeen in this manner:

To one reading today in the Diary those brief entries which chronicle this boy's illness and death, there is much about him which seems distressing and pitiable, even harsh and shocking. At first they are mere statements of a steady decline, sandwiched in among details of household work and parish duties. . . . As the boy's mounting fever and painful cough make their inevitable inroads upon his father's consciousness, and recognition of his approaching death grows clearer, his father's grief seems actually little in comparison to his fear concerning the state of his son's soul. (p. 146)

The author, like her twentieth-century reader, must interpret Jonathan Fisher's attitude as harsh, but her reiteration all through the book of the fact that he considered the after-life of supreme importance helps the reader at least to understand his attitude even as she herself does.

Once, the author cannot but allow her own interest in the English novel, a course in which she taught for many years, to prompt her comment on certain intellectual inadequacies of Mr. Fisher. In noting the influence of his reading on his poems, she cites authors and books he has listed as having read during his college years. Among them was Tristram Shandy: "The last named, it is hardly surprising to note, did not please him; indeed in one of his early poems he warns his readers against 'books

like Shandy.' The delicious subtleties of Sterne would hardly appeal to a mind like Jonathan's save as admonition" (p. 41). If this is an intrusion on the author's part, it is also an interpretation. Leon Edel has said that as a biographer he can paint the portrait only from the angle of vision he has and from his time and its relation to the time he seeks to recover (p. 103). This is what Miss Chase also is doing, with the successful results Mr. Edel looks for. She uses her angle of vision and her time to help her understanding and her interpretation. Pushed down as far as she keeps it, her angle of vision rises frequently to offer to her subject that sympathy which has been observed to accompany, paradoxically, her criticism. Certainly she adds to the emotional quality of the book and to the reader's pleasure when she allows herself to intrude enough on Jonathan's breaking of his resolve to deny himself one of his earthly pleasures---that of trout-fishing--to add to her summary, "He caught 8 in the one [brook] and twelve in the other. 'It was a happy afternoon,' he says. Let us sincerely trust that it was quite free from the faintest shadow of self-reproach!" (p. 167) Thus does the author enter the narrative of Jonathan Fisher's life only when her own irrepressible understanding, sympathy, or enthusiasm is useful in whetting in the imagination of her reader a responding understanding, sympathy, or enthusiasm.

It has been said that Jonathan Fisher had the best of choices in Mary Ellen Chase as his biographer. It might conversely be claimed that she did not decide unwisely in taking him as a subject. As John Garraty has reasoned, "Far better to write of a forgotten person of some significance than to add to the mass of works on a relatively small number of constantly rehashed 'names'" (p. 165). Miss Chase's hope in regard to the historic value of

her work has already been quoted; she has urged in her Foreword the parson's own character as another justification for the biography's composition, ". . . Jonathan Fisher was one of those rare souls possessed of an almost incredible vitality and a consuming sense of the value and use of life itself. Such qualities, it has seemed to me, deserve, indeed almost demand, preservation for themselves alone" (p. xvii). The fact that Miss Chase, whose own accomplishments have been the product of considerable vitality, marvels frequently at what Mr. Fisher was able to do is a double indication of this unusual aspect of his life. One of the values of the biography is that this sense of vitality and multiplicity of accomplishments is successfully vitalized for the reader.

Garraty has said that the biographer "is bound by what he has. He can bring great artistry to the selection and interpretation of his evidence, but if he is to perform his proper function, the sources must be there and all the relevant sources must be considered" (p. 11). Not only Miss Chase's work, but the numerous acknowledgements in her Preface give evidence of just how carefully the relevant sources were used in this biography. She has modestly called herself "but its scribe" (p. vii), and quite obviously part of her task has been to make good use of all the assistance which has been made available to her. Certainly the organization and blending, the assembling and the selection, and, above all, the interpretation of the material could hardly have been managed so successfully without a good deal of professional competence, to say nothing of artistry. It is more than likely that the author felt a special responsibility to all who aided her to make the final work as close to the ideal as possible.

The thought that the biographer is bound by "what he has" is especially significant in this particular case, for the sense of the reader that he knows Jonathan Fisher better from the inside looking out than from the outside itself is due largely to the fact that most of the author's material has been Fisher's own writing. As her occasional footnotes indicate, Miss Chase has, of course, been at considerable pains to consult such writings from and about his times as touch significantly the life of Jonathan Fisher. Yet most of what affects him closely or personally comes in his own words. There is very little to give the view of his contemporaries toward him except what comes of his own recording. There is practically no one to tell how he appeared in his pulpit, or how he acted as a neighbor or as a fellow-minister, except himself. Still there is much of his own record--letters, diaries, sermons, even printed writings--enough, in fact, to make selection and arrangement a large task. Another, perhaps greater, task, one in which Miss Chase had help, was that of decoding:

All these documents, except certain of the letters, were originally written, or later transcribed, in a shorthand code, which he devised in 1792 when he was a student at Harvard College. Since nearly every source upon which the book is based had to be carefully decoded by the use of a key which the parson thoughtfully left behind him, a vast expenditure of time in this task alone has been inevitable. (p. vii)

Miss Chase has used his many writings to give the biography a strongly autobiographical flavor. As was pointed out in the discussion of her own autobiographies, the focus of autobiography is often away from rather than toward the central subject. This is the effect the autobiographical tone sometimes gives to this biography, although there is always the objectivity of Miss Chase's interpretations, which Jonathan Fisher's own nature and perspective would never have allowed.

That Miss Chase has allowed the Parson to speak for himself as much as possible (and yet for the benefit of the reader has at the same time adroitly cut off his longwindedness) makes her method that of the most traditional type; and yet she has at the same time managed to extract the essence of character and to impart the excitement of interest which some modern biographers have aimed at by less orthodox means. Her overall organization is a skillful combination of chronological and topical arrangement which gives a three-dimensional aspect to the life. This method fulfills quite adequately Garraty's demand of the biographer: "Every effective biographer has had to combine materials topically in order to reduce the complexities of existence to understandable form. . . . The thread of development is vital if reality is to be approximated" (p. 257). While the early and final chapters are predominantly chronological and the middle ones topical, there is even in the middle chapters a sense of moving forward, and always, whatever topic is being developed, the author moves freely backwards and ahead in time to use whatever enlightening information is available to her in order to emphasize traits of character or the related events of Fisher's career. For example, she records the date of his birth at the opening of the book in this way:

The date of his birth, October 7, 1768, was never allowed to pass unnoticed or, indeed, unchronicled in the day by day Diaries which he kept for forty-five years. Always it formed the occasion for thanksgiving to God in prose or in verse for creation and preservation, and not infrequently for misgivings on the "wretched state of his immortal soul" while the "ruthless passage of cruel time" brings him hourly closer to his "blessed reward or everlasting punishment." (p. 4)

This same quotation also illustrates the way in which she weaves bits of his own expression into her framework. This device is commonplace through-

out the whole book. About the only pages which don't contain at least a few of these bits are those devoted completely to longer quotations from his writings. In the case of the excerpts from his sermons at least, these longer quotations serve to illustrate the great service the author has done the reader with all her judicious selection, as she herself is willing to point out: "At the risk of boring the readers of this book so that they forsake the parson before they learn of the lighter aspects of his nature, I quote, as briefly as possible and omitting many paragraphs of explanation and argument, from a typical sermon, apparently a favorite of Mr. Fisher's. . . ." (p. 113)

Not only does the author move with freedom within chronological dimensions, but she strengthens significant relationships among topical factors as well, as in the following comment: "An understanding of Parson Fisher's intimate and cherished connection with 'the school of the prophets' at Bangor, which will be described in the next chapter of this book, makes more clear the 'great shock' which he sustained upon learning that his penniless son at twenty-two was not only bent upon a college education before beginning his theological studies, but was repudiating the Maine seminary in favor of Andover" (p. 158).

In spite of the fact that she quotes the Parson a great deal, she does not shirk the biographer's responsibility for interpretation. When he is concerned over what seems to be his own lack of religious feeling she analyzes this as no contemporary of his, even one close enough to know of his feeling, could have done:

Morbid and unhealthful as such despair seems today, its reality to him was a tragic one, and the tragedy was neither dispelled nor even alleviated by time, as his later writings in both Diary and letters prove beyond

a doubt. There was no psychological knowledge in his day to explain to him that he was temperamentally not one framed to experience that ecstasy, real or imagined, of the saints, or yet of those ordinary mortals who claim to have mystical and revelatory assurance of the influx of Divine Grace. Such assurance, such illumination, was obviously denied him. (p. 45)

To offer the reader this understanding of the inner Jonathan Fisher, she needed both the "perspective and access to records seldom available to contemporaries."⁶ She uses this perspective and access to records not only to analyze, but also to characterize. Although she presents Fisher to the reader often enough in both thought and action of a certain type for the reader to draw his own conclusions concerning the type of characteristic displayed, she does not hesitate, early or late, to make the characterization herself, always, however, simply and unobtrusively. She does this when she refers to his "writing with the honesty always characteristic of him" (p. 45), and to his forbearing "with a sympathy not always characteristic of him" (pp. 84-85). Such frank, direct, and unhesitating summaries of the facets of his nature fall thick and fast throughout the book to add to the reader's enlightenment. From just a random few the reader learns that "the abundance of his nature allowed no halfway measures" (p. 136); "that he gloried in hardships and welcomed perils by land and sea. Nor was he, either, indifferent toward recounting them, even to boasting about them upon occasion" (p. 172); and that "His way was always to meet a situation or to tackle a subject head on; he spurned any circuitous approach" (p. 112). The justification for such generalization is laid often enough before the reader's eyes to inspire confidence in the author's judgment, but not so persistently as to clutter

⁶Garraty, p. 27.

the pages distractingly. While discussing his writing and engraving, she writes, "He must have worked with amazing rapidity" (p. 206), and follows this with some of the exact figures he so dearly loved to record. The author is also alert to any indirect evidence, to add to the direct evidence, of the kind of man he was, for there are some things a man will not say about himself and, it should be remembered, there was little at the author's disposal that others had said or thought about him. This lack the author repairs as best she can by occasional use of circumstantial evidence, such as this by-product of a controversy within his church: "That such a report was for seven years not carried to the parson by some troublemaker in either camp and that during so long a time no use whatever was made of it in fomenting dissension and strife, provide at least negative evidence of the regard in which he was held by his dissenting brethren" (p. 101). Even such a hint of an external view of Jonathan Fisher is welcome balance to the more constant interpretation of him from his own words.

It may seem that John Garraty's pronouncements on biography have been referred to with overfrequency in this discussion, but so well do Miss Chase's procedure and achievement coincide with what he sets forth in The Nature of Biography, one of the most recent analyses of this type of literature, which has by no means been overburdened with critical clarification up to the present, that it has seemed both interesting and valuable to consider his criteria from point to point. Another of these is this: "Scrapbooks, collections of all kinds, portraits and photographs, old clothing--anything which the subject owned or used or influenced has a potential value for his biographer" (p. 177). Most of the carefully selected illustrations of Jonathan Fisher represent this kind

of material, and the one most compelling of attention has been most rightly used as the frontispiece. This is a copy of Fisher's self-portrait, which the author's occasional reference, the reader's curiosity, and the portrait's own strength do not allow to go unstudied.

Old clothing was mentioned above as being of potential value to the biographer. This brings to mind not any still existing old clothing, but better still a memory caught up from Jonathan Fisher's financial records by Miss Chase and used by her as effectively as a novelist might use a compelling symbol. The first reference comes early: ". . . one is glad to see that at his Commencement he apparently throws prudence to the winds and buys 'A beaver Hat' for \$8!" (p. 37) The second reference follows long after:

Vacationing again by himself in 1822 and without the restraining hand of Mrs. Fisher, who was apparently always "an economist," he buys himself "a new Beaver." One imagines that upon its purchase he may have recalled the thirtieth anniversary of a similar hat, bought at his Commencement. The price was the same, \$8, seemingly a stupendous extravagance, like the first. (p. 185)

Its symbolic significance to Mr. Fisher himself might be drawn from the diary comment which records the loss of the hat, not long after its purchase, in local waters. "He recovered it at last, 'filled with salt water and in a sorry condition.' 'I put it on my bald head,' he writes, 'with fear of ague as the water ran in streams down my face. Lord, let me never again be proud of anything I possess! Lord, it is well!'"

(p. 186) But Miss Chase emphasizes a different significance of the beaver hat, when, towards the close of the book, she ends her account of a last happy vacation he particularly enjoyed with this imaginative bit: "One wishes only that, alone and unfettered by any advice, he had bought for

himself in Boston a last 'new Beaver!' But that pleasant extravagance he does not record!" (p. 273)

This wish is expressive of the growing sympathy and understanding which the author develops for the subject as the book progresses not only towards the close of Jonathan Fisher's life and career but towards a fully rounded realization of the man himself. Perhaps this may merely reflect the fact that Fisher, like many another man, himself felt the mellowing influence of advancing age. Or perhaps it may also suggest the author's growing affection for her subject, which could hardly help but result from the intimate understanding engendered by her task. Certainly the author's own disapproval, which would probably be any twentieth-century reader's disapproval, of the subject's Calvinistic thoughts and actions becomes less apparent in the latter part of the book than it is in the first.

Important as the understanding of Jonathan Fisher's character is to his biography, there is also a value in the very making of a record of the facts and accomplishments of his career and of his place in the social community which surrounds him. All the things in his career which are typical of the life and thinking of his time constitute a contribution to the history of New England. Miss Chase's novels contain little of the phase of New England life which is here. Only Silas Crockett goes back far enough in time to encompass any of the same years, and these are but briefly overlapping years, with few of the same aspects emphasized. As the chronicle of Silas Crockett began, Jonathan Fisher's career was coming to a close, and Silas Crockett was a seaward-looking story while Jonathan Fisher, with a few exceptions, is quite landlocked.

The fact that none of Miss Chase's novels attempt to portray the life of the period of Jonathan Fisher only makes the biography a more valuable addition to the sum of her writings as a whole. It is perhaps only the peculiar combination of her own sympathetic understanding and the availability of a wealth of primary material that has enabled her to make this contribution to twentieth century American knowledge of this particular area of the past. Something of what Harriet Beecher Stowe created in the social, religious, intellectual, and even physical life of New England in Old Town Folks and The Minister's Wooing from her more fertile imagination and closer contact, Miss Chase has recreated with her scrupulous care and instinctive understanding.

Certainly it is not unreasonable to claim for Jonathan Fisher some of the same value that Charles H. Foster claims for Mrs. Stowe's New England novels:

But the final claim for Harriet Beecher Stowe must rest on her ability to give us a balanced and immediate sense of the vital and complex Puritan past. It is here that she made a permanently significant contribution to American culture, for it is only as Puritan New England comes to life in our imagination and our emotions as well as in our understanding that we can discover how "usable" a past we actually possess.⁷

With many differences, among them those which necessarily separate fact and fiction, there is in Jonathan Fisher and the New England novels of Mrs. Stowe a similar extended, concrete embodiment of many aspects of the Puritanism which remained in New England thought and behavior as it moved from the eighteenth to nineteenth century. It is by now reiteration to point out that the chief impetus of much of Miss Chase's writing

⁷Charles H. Foster, The Rungless Ladder (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1954), p. 242.

has been to discover what is "usable" in the past, especially our own and her own past.

The increasing remoteness and yet lingering reality of this New England past make such books as Jonathan Fisher necessary to its sustainment in present-day consciousness. Any native or visitor attending New England "old home" and centennial celebrations, which may increase, if only for economic reasons, rather than disappear from New England parishes and communities, will be likely to enter more imaginatively and comprehendingly into such celebrations if he has read books like Jonathan Fisher. Any present-day New Englander who has inherited, or any visitor who views exhibitions of, examples of the arts and artifacts of such earlier days as those of Jonathan Fisher will, from the reading of this biography, be more understanding of the interest and industry which produced them.

Among other critical writers who, like Mr. Foster, attempt to appraise our "usable" past, is Van Wyck Brooks, who theorizes in From a Writer's Notebook that modern Americans chose to work with an ax in preference to a saw as a result of unconscious memory of the use of an ax in frontier days. Perry D. Westbrook feels that this unconscious memory, or inheritance, or what you will, needs to be understood today to be of value to us: "When we do begin to understand it, especially as its inherited potentialities operate in the frontierless America of today, we may better understand why contemporary Americans behave as they do."⁸ If we are either to keep the best of unconscious memories from fading completely and if we are to understand American inherited potentialities of today, we can do these things best through such vivid contacts with the past as Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, which presents not only the

⁸Perry D. Westbrook, Acres of Flint (Washington, D.C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1951), p. 3.

past of Puritan New England, but also that of the frontier, of which the Bluehill of Jonathan Fisher's time was a very real part.

The typicality of Jonathan Fisher does not, of course, consist in the total accomplishment of his career. His prodigious labors would make him typical of no day. Yet his ways of thought and the actions motivated by his thought typify many characteristics of his day--the straitness of Calvinistic thought and religion, the respect for ancient languages, the devotion to serious causes, the constant toil with one's hands, the Yankee ingenuity, the necessity for economy. All these traits of character Jonathan Fisher translated into multifarious actions during his long and busy life. Such actions, as judged by Henry Steele Commager, make further claim for the designation of typicality: "Miss Chase calls him a frontier Benjamin Franklin and even mentions Leonardo da Vinci, but it is clear that he had industry and curiosity rather than genius and that he differed from his neighbors rather in degree than in kind--it is this that makes him so fascinating."⁹

There is not much in the book to indicate that Miss Chase intended to create any other impression than the one Mr. Commager has drawn from the book, in spite of his implication of the contrary. Her own evaluations do not present Father Fisher as a genius in any qualified sense. But her treatment certainly marks him as an unusual man. It is perhaps that he is typical of his place and time in so many respects that he is unusual. It is characteristic of the scholarship employed by Miss Chase on this book that when she tries to weigh the achievements of Fisher per se she looks to several specialists on the several areas in which his

⁹Henry Steele Commager, Review of Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, New York Herald Tribune Books, October 24, 1948, p. 3.

accomplishments fell, reserving to herself the judgment of his literary endeavors. Even here appreciation is a better term than judgment, since her general self-effacement in the book keeps her from assuming to any extent that "privilege of pronouncing judgment" which Dana K. Merrill considers "debatable" in biographical writing (p. 102).

The numerous acknowledgements in the Preface make one aware not only of the thoroughness of her task but of the skillful integration she has effected. In this integration she has been more successful in Jonathan Fisher than she was to be in her next biography, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, where the reader is often conscious of the shifting from one source to another as the biography progresses from the Tetlows to Mrs. Rockefeller's last day. This may be because the source material is different in the two cases or more likely because Miss Chase had lingered longer over the work with Jonathan Fisher than over that with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, thus allowing the integration to take place in her own mind before she put it to paper.

Some of the most definite evaluation of the career of Jonathan Fisher appears in the chapter entitled "Mr. Fisher and His Times," a chapter which, Miss Chase acknowledges, owes much in background and even in "the original writing" to her brother, Newton Kimball Chase, a teacher of American history. Whatever the indebtedness may be in this chapter, it is not discernibly different in style, method, and essence from the other chapters. The author's own interpreting summaries bring together the various words and actions which reflect Fisher's stand on the larger public issues of his day. These words and deeds are shown to be in consistent relationship to what the reader has been shown is the very nature

of the man himself, and to the religious background of which he is never forgetful. In regard to some issues of his period Miss Chase concludes:

Parson Fisher's interest in these matters and his opinions concerning them were primarily those of an intelligent and thoughtful citizen. . . . In the two great and growing questions of his time, however, the questions of temperance and of slavery, he not only played a leading local part, but he made also a not inconsiderable contribution to their development on an even larger scale. His attitude toward these problems and his efforts on their behalf are interesting and significant, both because they were typical of many New England Congregational clergymen of that period and because they reflect the early development of the temperance and the abolition movements in New England. (p. 240)

Once again the typicality of Fisher's career is underscored. Again actions are interpreted as manifestations of the essence of the man himself. Jonathan Fisher had not been unaccustomed to the use of alcoholic beverages, nor did he believe their use forbidden by God. Miss Chase makes clear that the reason for his conversion to the cause of temperance had a larger cause than that of temperance itself: "His position was grounded simply on the assumption that any practice or example which caused one's brother to offend must needs be sacrificed by all true Christians for the common good" (p. 245).

Fisher's devotion to the Liberian Colonization scheme is shown to indicate his concern over the problem of slavery and, more pointedly, his desire that the problem be solved gradually and peacefully. Miss Chase points this out with the apt Scriptural reference which is so characteristic of her style generally and so especially appropriate in this particular book: "Mr. Fisher was by nature no extremist. He hated and suspected violence of all sorts. He believed firmly in those rules laid down in the First Epistle General of Saint Peter which command all men to submit themselves to the ordinance of their rulers and which condemn

those foolish ones who use their liberty 'for a cloak of maliciousness'" (p. 249). After she has presented all her carefully selected evidence to prove his part in this vital issue of his time, Miss Chase closes the chapter with an appraisal which raises his actions above typicality to individuality:

One must recognize also his early awareness and keen foresight of what the question of slavery must finally mean to a united nation, nor criticize too severely his staunch and unwavering stand against immediate emancipation. Perhaps, indeed, he foresaw more clearly than many others what proved to be the tragic and even, in many cases, the disastrous consequences of an Act so inevitable and in itself so just and imperative--consequences which, had he lived to see them, would have wrung with pity his always warm and human heart. (pp. 259-260)

Thus she places squarely before the reader the essence of this man whom, so near to the close of the book, both she and the reader with her have come to feel a close understanding of.

Perry Miller has praised her book in this manner: "Miss Chase's achievement is the more remarkable because in only one respect was Fisher exceptional."¹⁰ This one respect Mr. Miller considered his art work--paintings and engravings. Although Miss Chase doesn't make such a broad judgment as Mr. Miller, she does pass on to the reader the opinions of several experts, such as Professor Oliver Larkin of Smith College and Karl Kup, Curator of Prints of the New York Public Library, emphasizing on her own part descriptions of the individual paintings and her subject's own enjoyment of his art work. Nonetheless, such phrases as "an intricate and charming design of leaves, flowers, and berries" (p. 227) and "in delicate and lovely tones" (p. 228) record her own enjoyment. Her suggestive speculations, as on other occasions, give life and art to her

¹⁰Miller, p. 4.

whole treatment of the topic. Of twentieth-century interest in his work she says, "One's imagination takes delight and satisfaction in the thought of how the parson would relish this surviving interest in him and in the work of his never idle hands and his always teeming mind" (p. 230). The appeal of Fisher's art is conveyed to the reader in the best possible way, through the carefully selected illustrations of the book. It might be added that the end pages of the book display a map of Bluehill redrawn from one originally executed by Jonathan Fisher.

The opinions concerning Fisher's literary output, which Miss Chase reserves to herself, are both generous and just. Here again it is the quantity of his output which astonishes even the productive Miss Chase: ". . . and the extraordinary number of literary works of one sort or another which he left behind him would leave the busiest person today astounded, on the one hand, and, on the other, apologetic for his own relatively idle existence" (p. 212). Yet, on the whole, profusion and the care of preservation seem to be the most distinguishing characteristics of this portion of the parson's labors. When it comes to his poetry she prefaces her own succinct judgment with the corroborative view of one of Fisher's own contemporaries: "According to Rev. Mr. Pomroy, the parson 'was not a born poet, and never could have made one, although this was the point on which, if anything, he prided himself.' No diagnosis could be more accurate. Parson Fisher dearly loved 'to tune his lyre'; and there is no indication that he ever realized how tuneless it remained" (p. 214). Much of his poetry deservedly remains in manuscript only. After summarizing its contents, Miss Chase confesses, "If amusement did not come now and again to the reader of these innumerable pages, they

would be difficult if not impossible of perusal" (p. 215). She offers no evidence that the quality of the prose is any more distinguished than that of the poetry.

More interesting than meritorious from the literary point of view are two broadsides which Parson Fisher composed on the occasions of two Maine hangings and also had printed and earned some profit from, mainly as a result of his own peddling. The works themselves show the literary quality of his poetry, the strength of eighteenth century influence on it, and the lugubriousness of subject matter which often appealed to him. The particulars of their composition and sale show his Yankee ingenuity at acquiring even small amounts of much needed cash and the accompanying life-long impetus to sell the products of his mind and hands.

Perhaps the best tribute to the power of Miss Chase's re-creation of Jonathan Fisher is that those who reviewed the book have done just what was done in the preceding paragraph--that is, have discussed Jonathan Fisher with ideas of their own, forgetting the biographer's hand in the matter. That she has drawn him so vividly that others must judge him independently only speaks of her greater success.

To return to her evaluation of his literary achievement, she gives highest praise to the book which combines that art with his engraving art: "Mr. Fisher's last book, Scripture Animals, was his major literary accomplishment and, in fact, no small achievement. There is a liveliness about it quickly sensed by one who turns its pages today, for its author, consciously or unconsciously, is more clearly within it than in any other of his books" (p. 222). She points out the charm of the prose descriptions and the brief poems which accompany each engraving, the art of which she

allows Karl Kup to describe. Fisher's delight in his own work she attributes to the fact that he combines his love of the two arts and his love of nature with the performance of the duties of instructing the young and glorifying God. Fisher had long loved nature and reproducing it in art, particularly animals.

In this connection, Miss Chase uses a quotation from his diary, too brief really to be an anecdote, to throw light on the whole man in a way which would surely be commended by Garraty who has written, "In a biography anecdotes are worthless unless they are typical and true" (p. 84). Coming, as it does, in Fisher's own words, this following occurrence must be true. Comparison with other instances in the book shows it to be typical: "He loved the sight of wild animals, as his many careful and beautiful paintings of them prove; and there is a pathetic note in his renunciation, on July 14, 1825, of an opportunity to look at 'a caravan' of them on exhibit in Bluehill. 'My family and boarders went to see the caravan of wild animals. I denied myself this sight to be more able to assist in the missionary cause!'" (p. 139) Not only is this typical of Fisher, but the sympathetic understanding displayed by its selection is typical of the author's treatment of her subject even when complete approval of his action does not accompany her understanding. If, as Garraty says, "biography is to be compounded of career and character" (p. 23), how better could Miss Chase have shown the two irrevocably blended than in the choice of such details of the life as the foregoing represents?

That life was once lived in Parson Fisher's way and that such a man lived it would alone seem to be sufficient justification for the under-

taking of her task. That Miss Chase skillfully mingles the vivacity of her style with thoroughness of study and scholarship, against a background of familiarity and interest, all with a seriousness of purpose and a complementary lightness of touch, is responsible for the success she achieves in bringing to life Jonathan Fisher and that part of the past he represents. The undertaking itself is token enough of her belief that this is "usable" today, for certainly one who usually writes in more creative forms of literature must have found the necessary restraints of this performance rather irksome at times. In fact, it was not out of keeping with her method of re-creating Parson Fisher to express her impatience on occasion, not only between the lines but quite directly in them. All this is not to imply that her capabilities were not adequate to the work, for the contrary is quite the case. It is only that the supposition that had not the subject chosen her as author with such an undeniable compulsion, the chore might not have been exactly to her literary taste. Her fulfillment of her task seems quite beyond reproach, for all its very traditional biographical framework. Indeed, one could hardly imagine Parson Fisher coming to twentieth-century life in any other guise.

When Miss Chase turned to the biography of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, scarcely two years later, she was faced with quite a different piece of work, but one necessarily limited in the ways all biography is. Whereas it was completely understandable how she came to write the life of Parson Fisher, there is no clue offered as to how Mary Ellen Chase came to paint this portrait of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. There was certainly no irrevocable choosing by the subject of an author as in the case of Jonathan Fisher, although it is evident that those who may have chosen for Mrs.

Rockefeller chose well. Miss Chase's skill and grace in writing, her inherent tact and good taste, and a certain kinship of temperament between Mrs. Rockefeller and herself qualify her well to this particular kind of a life story. It is mainly a portrait, not a self-portrait like the one which serves as the frontispiece to Jonathan Fisher and to the spirit of which the author remained quite faithful throughout that book in spite of its added interpretative qualities, but a portrait more photographic in nature, executed to be hung before the public eye. Whether written with commemorative intent or not, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller is undeniably commemorative in result.

It is most likely that, in addition to this, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller falls into the category designated by Garraty: "Other biographies are written frankly for a market" (p. 160). One evidence of this in the present case is that the story appeared with some deletions in two installments in Good Housekeeping during the same year that it came out in book form.

Even though Abby Aldrich Rockefeller may be commemorative or even written "for a market," it seems not to have been without interest for Miss Chase. Her interest, however, is content not to analyze or to probe very far. The research assistance she describes in her Acknowledgements suggests that this may be the kind of work described by Leon Edel:

Thus a commemorative biography or an authorized biography will, by its nature, tend to be envisaged quite differently from a biography written as a result of the biographer's own deep interest in the subject he has selected.¹¹

The involvement which no doubt added trial to joy in the case of

¹¹Literary Biography, p. 82.

Jonathan Fisher's biography seems to have been lacking in "this pleasant work of writing." The Acknowledgments give the only external suggestions as to what her methods must have been:

I have received more assistance than it is possible for me to acknowledge. Over one hundred and fifty people have talked with me personally or have written me of their association with her Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, both as friends and as fellow-workers in the various interests and projects to which she gave so freely of her time and vitality. But I must especially thank the members of the Aldrich and Rockefeller families, who have, on the one-hand, been cooperative in every particular, and yet, on the other, have insisted on my complete freedom to write this book in my own way.¹²

She closes the Acknowledgments by expressing appreciation to two persons, one "who has selected the most pertinent documents from a vast amount of material, published and unpublished," and one "who has been my research assistant in the preparation and use of this material."

There are several respects in which these acknowledgments throw light on the biography itself. It was noted that with Jonathan Fisher there was a dearth of source material about the subject from those who knew him, which resulted in a somewhat limited external view of the man. With Abby Aldrich Rockefeller the point of view seems too externalized. It is probably this outside view, together with the particular nature of the source material coming from Mrs. Rockefeller's own pen, which caused one reviewer to write, "Miss Chase's account keeps pretty much to the surface of things."¹³ One would hardly expect the outgoing, happy Mrs. Rockefeller to have indulged, even in her own diary, in the soul searching

¹² Mary Ellen Chase, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950).

¹³ Review of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, The Christian Century, LXVII (September 27, 1950), 1137.

of a Jonathan Fisher. That Miss Chase makes her subject seem so faultless as to cause another reviewer to say, "This is a book about a woman who seems to have had no faults except she couldn't spell,"¹⁴ is probably due, in addition to other reasons, to the fact that Miss Chase must have talked with those one hundred and fifty persons very shortly after her subject's death. Certainly one would have expected only the most favorable of judgments at such a time, particularly from those who had loved and had received kindness from a woman in whose biography they themselves might very well expect to be quoted. To say that the outcome is in one sense a memorial tribute is not to overlook the fact that it may have been in part Miss Chase's intention to have it so.

The use of assistance which Miss Chase had in the preparation of Jonathan Fisher seemed not only necessary but desirable and enhancing to the value of the work as a whole. The value of the research assistance she received in the case of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller is less certain. She might have understood Mrs. Rockefeller better if she had done her own research.

Regardless of the way in which she came by her materials, Miss Chase has put them together with a characteristic fluency and effectiveness. What seems to be an outstanding weakness of the work as a whole serves nevertheless to emphasize an important facet of the subject's life and character. It was significant to her life that many people and much activity were important to her. Yet, in including these people and activities, Miss Chase sometimes allows the center of attention to slip away

¹⁴Edith Mary Chute, Review of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII, (October 21, 1950), 20.

from Abby, when it might to better purpose have stayed on her. This is much more acceptable in the engrossing chapter, toward the end of the book, called "Art in Our Time," which presents her activities for and in the Museum of Modern Art. The opening scene, however, with Miss Asenath Tetlow pinning on her brooch, the picture of John D. Rockefeller drying his chocolate cups on dishtowels hemmed by himself, and the one of Lucy Aldrich captured by Chinese bandits, for the very interest they attract in themselves, only draw attention away from Abby since the situations that they relate to only remotely concern her. Her relationships with these three people, and with many others, are of course very important, as Miss Chase takes care to make clear in more pertinent instances. For example, she illustrates "a relation rare even among sisters" with this observation before quoting a letter: "Nor did she hesitate to dump her discouraged moments upon her sister, sure of her understanding and her amused sympathy" (p. 71). Although Miss Chase does seem to give "Young Mr. Rockefeller" too much space in the relatively brief biography, she does give John D. Rockefeller, Jr., exactly the right place in Abby's life from the time of their marriage on. Frequent brief, but significant, details place him in an important but subordinated position in the book with the emphasis firmly on the relationship between them. An instance of this is his attitude toward his wife's interest in modern art: ". . . and his generous willingness to provide the financial means for this particular adventure into fields mysterious and eccentric to him, was but one of many evidences of that sympathetic understanding and tolerance which marked their years together" (p. 83).

On the whole, the author mingles the variety of her sources to bring

the reader the essence of this somewhat remarkable life. Mrs. Rockefeller's own diaries and letters are freely quoted as well as letters written to her. A few of the numerous people who talked and wrote to Miss Chase about her are quoted directly, although more often their contributions have become a part of the general digest or "melting down," as Leon Edel would call it,¹⁵ which modern biographical criticism particularly demands. The reader becomes acquainted with the kind of person Mrs. Rockefeller is, occasionally in a generalized interpretative statement, more often through varying details which reiteratively stress predominating traits of character. One generalization tells the reader: "All her life she possessed the vitality and the buoyancy of youth" (p. 73). Nothing in the book illustrates this more strikingly than the few paragraphs in which the author uses a novelist's skill to give enduring life to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's last day "on this earth." That all her gaiety and love of fun had been the surface of true seriousness is stated in the discussion of the fundamental differences and similarities between Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and her husband: "They shared a profound sense of the responsibility which one human being bears for the welfare of another and a genuine desire to fulfill that obligation; they respected the minds of others; they held tenaciously to what they believed to be right in human behavior" (p. 33).

All the acts of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's career as Miss Chase presents it are in line with this generalization. And she did have a career in a true sense of the word--a career as mistress of several large homes, as mother of six children, and as a woman as concerned with the affairs

¹⁵Literary Biography, p. 83.

of the world as time would allow. Every evidence is given that she acquitted herself well in each of these areas, but it is always the character and the personality which are shown to be responsible for this success. Except for the few instances discussed earlier, it is the spirit of the woman which prevails in all details of relationships and actions. It is no doubt Miss Chase's own zest for life and optimism of spirit which have made her most sensitive to these qualities in her subject.

It may well be that because Miss Chase wished to keep the spirit of this life to the fore that she has seemed in the opinion of several reviewers to have neglected the broader background of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's life. Agnes Rogers has called this background "partly conventionalized and partly ignored,"¹⁶ while Elizabeth Janeway has pointed out the lack: "What she has not quite done is to focus Mrs. Rockefeller's life as a reflection of the social history of our times and of the developing problems of American life."¹⁷

Could Miss Chase, one wonders, have focused her work in this way and still have maintained her emphasis on her subject's individuality? This biography is obviously intended to be of the portrait type; although it proceeds in a chronological direction, there is as much care, if not more, shown in the selection of events which reveal character as there is to celebrate events of great import in a career. Of course, as was noted earlier, the career is not overlooked, but to expect a "life and times" biography when the author did not intend to write one is to offer only a

¹⁶ Agnes Rogers, Review of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, New York Herald Tribune Books, September 24, 1950, p. 4.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Janeway, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, New York Times Book Review, October 1, 1950, p. 33.

meaningless criticism. In a sense, there is a certain value to social history which might not have existed if the book had been written differently. If a reader comes to the biography with a firmly established knowledge of its social background, he can certainly find here a richer understanding of that background from seeing how one individual lived her life within "a tradition of principle, of obligation and of service"; if not, he can at least see how a good woman lived a happy life gaily and courageously. Nor is the background completely neglected; Mrs. Rockefeller is shown involved in various social service and cultural projects of her time; she is shown as an individual influenced, like others, by the dislocations of World War II; but she is also represented as unaffected by many of the passing periods and phases which she lived through.

One of the most significant aspects of Mrs. Rockefeller's life, and one which Miss Chase very clearly brings out, is that in the midst of wealth which might today be designated by that over-worked adjective "fabulous," she lived no life of "fabulous" luxury, but one of activity and duty, circumscribed as it may have been. But whose life is not in many ways circumscribed? As a representative of the "deserving rich" (p. 54), to use Mrs. Rockefeller's own phrase, she may, in times to come, stand out as one of a group whom our country might have been less well off without. Certainly a sense of responsibility and a regard for the individuality of others are admirable on any social or economic level.

It is of course natural for those of us whose way of life has been materialistically and socially less secure to feel an edge of resentment and irritation at even the tact and kindness of such a woman, whether we meet her in real life or in a book like this, no matter how much we admire

or respect her in principle. The fault may be ours more than hers, but this does not change the feeling. The only evidence of this problem, however, which Miss Chase includes in the book is an exchange of letters, through the pages of The Atlantic Monthly, between Mrs. Rockefeller and one of her Maine neighbors. More of this kind of material might have added substance to the book, but at the risk of creating some misunderstandings for people still living. Since the case just mentioned had already been made public, there was no such risk involved. Above all, it must be remembered, as reviewers have agreed, that "Mary Ellen Chase has accomplished a rather delicate undertaking with considerable skill,"¹⁸ and "with punctilious taste . . . and grace."¹⁹ Another accomplishment of a biography like Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, brief and imperfect as it may be, is that it portrays an individual not out of touch with her times, but not overwhelmed or subdued by them either.

In spite of something conventionalized in the author's interpretation of Mrs. Rockefeller's life and in the way Mrs. Rockefeller lived the life, the individual still prevails. One reviewer has interestingly and appropriately noted the similarity between Abby Aldrich Rockefeller as she emerges here and the heroines of Henry James.²⁰ Although Mrs. Rockefeller receives none of the psychological treatment which James spends on an Isabel Archer or a Millie Theale, and is not called upon to sustain the tragedy of either, one feels certain that she would have been capable of their endurance, coming as she did from a tradition like theirs. She even seems, like them, almost too good to be true, but is not like them con-

¹⁸Christian Century, LXVII, 1137.

¹⁹Rogers, p. 4.

²⁰Janeway, p. 5.

trasted against a background of others far less good. This goodness, apart from its belonging quite rightfully to Mrs. Rockefeller in the present biography, is typical of an accent which Miss Chase frequently enunciates in her writing. Goodliness is the theme of her two autobiographies, where one feels that it is upheld not by New Englandness alone, but by just a speck of Victorianism added to that quality. Yet, it would be difficult to find a place in her writing, after the first books for girls, where either goodliness or goodness ever descends to goodness. Goodness clings closely to a number of her fictional figures, including particularly Sarah Peters and her daughter Mary, although like the James heroines they have their goodness tested by the trials of life. One almost wishes, perversely perhaps, that Mrs. Rockefeller had encountered some tragedy, some bitterness, or even some penetrating sadness to have deepened her draught of the life she loved so well just a little more than the responsibilities and irritations had.

Miss Chase, however, does not allow her subject, for all her goodness and all her happiness, to become dull. The spirit of the woman is delightfully sustained, remaining keen throughout, even without the sharpening flint of tragedy. Humor, vitality, love, resourcefulness, determination, impulsiveness, frankness, and honesty keep her alive on Miss Chase's pages. It is surely Miss Chase's belief that the world needs to look occasionally at a good and happy woman who is also very real, whatever her station in life. Obviously she wrote from at least two of the motives which Merrill lists among "the chief incentives to the art as a whole": "Oldest is the desire to commemorate. This exists fundamentally today as it did in the time of Cotton Mather, although the

twentieth century biographer has a different conception of a memorial from his eighteenth-century predecessor. A second aim has been to teach, to present the example of a good life for the edification of the reader."²¹ The fact that Abby Aldrich Rockefeller became a Christian Herald's Family Bookshelf Selection-of-the-Month points to Merrill's second point as a result for the biography if not as a motive.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller is a much slighter biography than Jonathan Fisher both in length and in substance. For all the material put at her disposal Miss Chase has not used enough of it to make the reader feel well acquainted with Mrs. Rockefeller. Too often the focus has been on people around her rather than on Mrs. Rockefeller herself. Likeable as Miss Chase makes her appear, Mrs. Rockefeller emerges with a bland personality. If that is what she had, Miss Chase cannot be blamed.

Except for such already mentioned general points as her acceptance of her subject, the favorableness of her attitude, and her discriminating tact, Miss Chase herself enters very little into this biography--less so than in Jonathan Fisher and even there her self-effacement could be noted. In practically every book Miss Chase has ever written, however, there is some clue to her familiarity with and fondness for the Bible, although this facet of her writing is always kept in appropriate control. The familiarity of both Mrs. Rockefeller and her husband with the Bible makes the few allusions in the biography quite fitting. This is most true of the quotation, a favorite of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's, which stands before the opening of the book:

And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly,
and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah 6:8

²¹American Biography, p. 11.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIBLE

In an early essay "The Saints in Maine," Mary Ellen Chase expresses regret that her religious background had denied her a childhood acquaintance with the saints which would have been pleasurable to her. In all practicality, it may be conjectured that an acquaintance with the saints would have meant a sacrifice of that elemental contact with the English Bible which has been so important to her life and writing, for the church which has taught its children most about the saints has not encouraged the familiarity with the Bible which was Mary Ellen Chase's lot as a child. The opening sentence of her most recent book, The Psalms for the Common Reader, makes a simple statement of what this familiarity was:

When I was a child in a small village of the coast of Maine at the turn of the present century, the Psalms played an important part in my life, not only in church on Sunday, but at home and in school.¹

It would not be wholly wrong to read Bible for Psalms, for her purpose was undoubtedly one of emphasis suited to the nature of her book rather than an intention of exclusion.

To this should be added the obvious fact that the Bible is important to anyone who uses the English language, especially one with the New England heritage of Miss Chase. When Robert Frost in the poem "From Plane to Plane," commenting on the dialogue of a young hired farm hand to an old one, writes

¹Mary Ellen Chase, The Psalms for the Common Reader (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), p. 15.

at two different places, "Pike said, innocent of Milton," and "Dick said to old Pike, innocent of Shakespeare," he is saying about the often unrealized relationship of these two writers to English thought and speech, what might be said generally about the Bible. "Innocent of the Bible" would similarly apply to a great deal in New England thought and speech, for many who use its thoughts and phrases in their everyday speech are unaware of their source.

Not only has the English Bible through the King James translation inserted itself into all English, including American of course, everyday speech and thought, but it has had a large, more recognizable influence on literature. Even the casual student becomes aware of the innumerable and unending ways of this influence. Miss Chase as a professor of English has naturally understood it better than most. In 1937 she contributed a chapter to The Bible and Its Literary Association by Margaret B. Crook and Other Members of the Faculty of Smith College.

Miss Chase begins her chapter:

Few readers of the best nineteenth-century prose need to be reminded that countless words and images, phrases, figures and allusions, ideas and incidents, all of which give light, meaning, and security to their pages, have a far older origin than their own time, possess, in short, one common source--the English Bible of 1611. Nor is this influence relegated to one sort of prose. Rather is it present in both essay and narrative, in all types of essay and in all forms of narrative from biography to fiction.²

Indeed, she excludes poetry only because it is not part of her assignment. After touching on a few outstanding illustrations, she confines herself to the subject of her chapter: "The King James Version in the Work of Two

²The Bible and Its Literary Associations (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1937), p. 363.

Masters of Nineteenth-Century Prose." She finds a good deal of contrast in these two:

. . . the one, the most unique, if not the greatest essayist of the century, Thomas De Quincey; the other, its inimitable novelist in scope, style, thought, or in one word, in art, Thomas Hardy. The one begins the century; the other in his best work closes it.³

Her own statements are the best summaries of the Biblical influence which she finds in each of the two. Of De Quincey she says:

If the influence is not discernible in the imagery, the diction, the similes, the style, then it should be sought for in tone, in atmosphere,⁴ or in the attitude and personality of the author.

Her judgment concerning Hardy is even stronger: "Indeed, without a fairly adequate knowledge of the Bible, a knowledge and understanding of Hardy as a novelist is impossible."⁵ Miss Chase's study of Hardy in her published doctoral dissertation, Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel, is an assurance that she herself has close knowledge of his writing as a basis for her opinion.

This one chapter is the only place in Miss Chase's writing where she devotes herself exclusively to Biblical influence, but all of her books about the Bible itself show her awareness and understanding of it on many occasions. The enthusiastic appreciation which she is always to show for the Bible is more apparent in this chapter than is the fluent style in which she later expresses her enthusiasm, particularly in Life and Language in the Old Testament and The Psalms for the Common Reader.

³Ibid., p. 366.

⁴Ibid., p. 370.

⁵Ibid., p. 371.

Her contribution to The Bible and Its Literary Associations is not Mary Ellen Chase's first use of the Biblical in her writing. The imaginary story of Biblical inspiration which she called His Birthday had been published in 1915, and the Bible in one way or another must surely have had its effect on the writing she describes herself as doing shortly after that when she had just been accepted as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota:

I had the vaulting notion that what I lacked in money I would earn by writing, and, as it happened, that is precisely what I did do.

Since the better monthly magazines of the country had one and all failed to appreciate my wares, I turned to humbler fields. In the spring and summer of 1917 I began avid composition for all manner of Sunday-school papers upon all manner of uplifting subjects. Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Unitarian publications for the young became grist to my mill; and by September I had induced a syndicate of certain of these to purchase an inspiring weekly article on some book, old or new, for their young readers at ten dollars an article. I should never have subsisted my first year in graduate school without the American Sunday-school, and I now accord it my grateful thanks.⁶

Knowledge of the existence of this writing experience, and not an investigation of it, seems all that is necessary here. That Biblical influence played some part in it will be assumed merely as a possibility. But it must be taken as an actuality that the Bible, its language, its imagery, its thoughts, its events, in some way small or large, entered every book, and more besides, which she ever wrote.

The manner of this appearance varies. Often the exact words of the Bible appear directly. A firsthand quotation is inscribed before the beginning of the biography Abby Aldrich Rockefeller:

⁶Mary Ellen Chase, A Goodly Fellowship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 199.

And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly,
and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6:8

An even briefer secondhand quotation closes The Fishing Fleets of New England. Describing the fisherman's monument in Gloucester, she writes, "The pedestal on which he stands bears the words of the Psalmist:

They that go down to the sea in ships.⁷

One of her favorite quotations appears before the beginning of A Goodly Heritage, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. Psalm 16:6." Among the adaptations she makes of this to her own uses is one from This England: "Truly English lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places!"⁸

It is very easy for bits of Biblical language to become part of her own text. Sometimes this is not identified, but in the later books it often is. The White Gate, for instance, italicizes clearly but not obtrusively phrases unoriginal to the author. Among these, family expressions, colloquialisms, and others, are a few which are easily recognized as Biblical. Sometimes one is just a phrase as familiar to the ear as to thinking--from generation to generation;⁹ sometimes a particular expression increases the connotations of imagery:

Sugar Pear [Island] grew slowly, yet I had no fears for it after its first precarious year of life. Every spring more drifting grasses, leaves, and twigs enlarged its boundaries and, I felt sure, more grains of sand increased its firm

⁷Mary Ellen Chase, The Fishing Fleets of New England (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 180.

⁸Mary Ellen Chase, This England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 22.

⁹Mary Ellen Chase, The White Gate (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1954), p. 25.

foundations. In times of flood, to be sure, when the waters of the brook roared and were troubled, it was covered with the deep as with a garment, but it always emerged when the waters, like those of Noah, were abated.¹⁰

Here she draws from the forty-sixth and the one hundred fourth Psalms and from Genesis.

Two references to New Jerusalem show how Miss Chase uses Biblical imagery in different ways in her writing. In a passage in Windswept she compares New Jerusalem to the northern lights for sensory purposes:

There were nights of northern lights streaming across the sky like the expanding wings of the seraphim, piercing the clouds with radiance, dimming the stars. With these it was impossible not to see the wind as companion, even as master, the power behind those shooting, soaring paths of flame, clearing the way, thought Philip Marston, for the streets of the New Jerusalem, blazing with topaz and emerald.¹¹

In a passage in Dawn in Lyonesse, the whole concept of a New Jerusalem is used metaphorically to suggest a new kind of experience.¹² In this case, in spite of the basic use of an idea rather than concrete imagery, there is an indirect relationship to imagery because both the Biblical New Jerusalem and the new experience compared to it are very rich in imagery.

Miss Chase makes Biblical allusions serve various functions. Sometimes they make meaning; sometimes they reenforce meaning. Sometimes they are commonplace: "He sat for hours on the deck, tailor-fashion, repairing and patching, setting at naught the Biblical warning against new cloth upon

¹⁰Ibid., p. 136.

¹¹Mary Ellen Chase, Windswept (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 54.

¹²Mary Ellen Chase, Dawn in Lyonesse (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 6.

old"¹³ describes the ship's sailmaker in Mary Peters. Sometimes they are less familiar such as this designation of one of the weights in Annie Tiddle's life "that easily beset her": "a want of humor, of that trifling nonsense which might now and again have turned even her Valley of Baca into an occasional well of water."¹⁴

In Uplands Biblical allusion is turned with some satire back on the character whose thoughts it represents. Miss Abby Wickham, feeling that "hers was plainly the gift of exhortation," has become dissatisfied with her work for the Bible Society:

. . . she was seized by the desire to widen the scope of her religious work. With her recognition of the gift that was hers, the mission of the Bible Society seemed suddenly to have narrowed its boundaries. It was an estimable service surely to carry the word of God to those who sat in darkness and indifference; yet its accomplishment did not in itself demand the specialist. In other words, it was a five-talent job, and there was poor economy in putting on it a ten-talent man.¹⁵

Occasionally Miss Chase puts Biblical allusion into the speech of her characters. This is especially appropriate with those characters who represent a way and a period of life in New England when Biblical language, characters, and ideas were more commonplace than today. An old man says to Reuben, the third generation of Crocketts in Silas Crockett:

"Yes," he concluded, "he's a sight like that first Reuben who never even got to the churchyard, cheap end for a man's costly life as 'tis. An' when I see him comin' along from that old house that's seen fine days, an' remember how his grandmother rode off in a coach on her weddin' day an' how

¹³Mary Ellen Chase, Mary Peters (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 41.

¹⁴Mary Ellen Chase, The Plum Tree (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 55.

¹⁵Mary Ellen Chase, Uplands (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), pp. 189-190.

his great-grandfather gave a glass o' grog an' a new dollar bill to every man in his yard, my own father included, without so much as a thought as to price, I says to myself, I says, as David said about Saul an' Jonathan, his son, 'How are the mighty fallen!'"¹⁶

No case like the one Miss Chase makes for the importance of the Bible to Hardy could be made for the relationship of the Bible to her own fiction. Except for her books specifically concerned with the Bible, her uses of the various aspects of the Bible available to her have usually been brief, casual, scattered. The unifying effect of a Biblical idea on both A Goodly Heritage and on Abby Aldrich Rockefeller has already been noted, but this use has been more of an organizational device than a deeply underlying motivation.

In the exceptional case of "The Garment of Praise," the short story from which the novel Uplands was built, fuller, more functional use is made of a Biblical idea. This idea is subordinated but not abandoned in the novel, just as the characters of Sarah and Ethan Graig are subordinated both to the younger characters Jarvis and Martha and to the place in which they live. It is to the older couple, that the child, their son's son, comes as "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."¹⁷ Perhaps even this use of a Biblical idea, as well as other aspects of Uplands discussed earlier, had its genesis in Miss Chase's concurrent concern with Hardy, for, as has just been noted, she was fully aware of the importance of the Bible to Hardy. But she put by much that she was experimenting with in Uplands, and a Biblical idea seldom becomes so closely

¹⁶Mary Ellen Chase, Silas Crockett (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), pp. 233-234.

¹⁷Chase, Uplands, p. 293.

involved in her later fiction.

The article or short story--it probably should be called a hybrid--"Mrs. Penlust on the Damascus Road" is a special case of its own, and the Biblical idea there must have come unsought to the author along with Mrs. Penlust herself, if one is to accept Miss Chase's own explanation of her. Mrs. Penlust, who succeeded in writing to publish in spite of her teacher, accounts for the idea of her story "Bleeding Hearts": "A light sort of broke in upon me--I declare it made me think of Paul on the road to Damascus--and, like him, I asked no questions. I just went and wrote as I was told to do."¹⁸ In this instance, of course, Miss Chase is using the Biblical idea, Mrs. Penlust, and also herself as Mrs. Penlust's teacher, as instruments of humor. In fact, this is one of the relatively few examples in Miss Chase's writing where the capacity for humor which she usually keeps subdued or latent, succeeds in coming forth full blown. Usually it is attached to something that she has made the most of, but not originated. Underlying the discomfort of some of the humor of "Mrs. Penlust on the Damascus Road" is the warm touch of human feeling which is an element of whatever humor Miss Chase writes, and the "sense of wonder" which pervades much more than the humorous strain of her writing.

In the willingness to laugh at the misguided religious belief of such characters as Mrs. Penlust, Miss Abby Wickham of Uplands, and others, and also to smile, in a different way, at some of the religious tenets of such figures of her non-fiction as her Great Aunt-Anna, discussed in an earlier chapter, at her Grandmother Chase, and even at "Jonathan Fisher,

¹⁸Mary Ellen Chase, "From Anecdote to Article," in Techniques in Article-Writing, ed. Robeson Bailey (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1947), p. 248.

Maine Parson," himself, there is perhaps an indirect relevancy to her clearly defined interest in the Bible as literature. Whatever the Bible may be today to others, or to herself, as a religious heritage, such is a very negligible part of the enthusiastic concern she exhibits for the literature of the Bible in The Bible and the Common Reader (1944), Readings from the Bible (1952), Life and Language in the Old Testament (1955), and The Psalms for the Common Reader (1962).

The controlling idea--one might almost say emotion--of her work in all these books is made clear from the very beginning. In the Foreword to the First Edition of The Bible and the Common Reader, Miss Chase says, "Like many another enthusiast for one thing or another, I want the fun of explaining that enthusiasm and, perchance, of inculcating it."¹⁹ This is what the four books have done. One might add that it is characteristic of Miss Chase's habits of thrift to make double use in her publishing of labor devoted to her teaching.

The first of these four books, The Bible and the Common Reader, received the most attention in the press when it first appeared. Regardless of what she has added in the later books, her dominant approach to the literature of the Bible has remained much the same from the beginning. Actually the three later books may be said to be outgrowths, or special sequels, of this first most ambitious and most inclusive of the group. Still The Bible and the Common Reader itself is admittedly selective. This is a necessity of her overall purpose--to heighten and highlight for special appreciation the portions of the Bible which she personally feels

¹⁹ Mary Ellen Chase, The Bible and the Common Reader, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. xiii.

are most beautiful and most pleasurable for study. One of her means of "inculcating" the enthusiasm of her readers, along with her careful explanation, her own interpretation, and her vigorous delight is to quote liberally and appropriately from the Bible--always from the King James Version. Sigrid Undset in her review comments on this:

The gems of sacred poetry and splendid phrases which Miss Chase offers so lavishly in the pages of her book should send her readers back to the volume from which she quoted. And this, I believe, is what she meant to achieve.²⁰

Another reviewer takes particular note of Miss Chase's skill in incorporating quotations into her text:

Perhaps no better compliment can be paid to Miss Chase than to call attention to the skill with which she has built up to and introduced excerpts of Holy Writ. The reader is often unaware of the break between Miss Chase's text and the majestic pronouncement of prophet or apostle, or even the ecstatic song of cherubim.²¹

These quotations are, of course, necessarily brief. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that The Bible and the Common Reader be followed by Miss Chase's selection of Readings from the Bible. In fact, the Readings came out in the same year as the revised edition of The Bible and the Common Reader. Again she acknowledges that she has relied on personal judgment in selection. Actually her choice of passages has followed the limitations and order of both the course she was teaching at Smith College called The Literature of the Bible and the arrangement of the chapters in The Bible and the Common Reader. While Readings from the Bible is a companion volume for The Bible and the Common Reader, Miss Chase has edited

²⁰Review of The Bible and the Common Reader, New York Times Book Review, December 24, 1944, p. 14.

²¹Willia McClung Evans, Review of The Bible and the Common Reader, The Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (January 13, 1945), 14.

it so that it can be used profitably alone.

The brief introductions to the selections and the critical explanatory notes have been written in order to clarify the reading. Those who desire fuller knowledge than such introductions and notes can give either of Hebrew history or of the background of the various passages will find both in the book named above.²²

Now one can find fuller knowledge of Hebrew history in Life and Language in the Old Testament, which was published in 1955. This book is an enlargement of and addition to a portion of Part I: Chapters in Introduction of The Bible and the Common Reader, namely the two chapters called "The Hebrew People: A Short Sketch of Their History in Biblical Times" and "The Hebrew People: Their Racial and Literary Characteristics."

Even The Psalms for the Common Reader, Miss Chase's most recent book, contains "A Short Account of the History of Israel" in its supplement, because as the author explains, "Some knowledge of the actual events in the history of Israel is indispensable to any understanding of the Psalms."²³ The chief emphasis of The Psalms is, needless to say, on the background, interpretation, and appreciation of all the Psalms in general and of a few in particular. Part of this later book develops some of the material more briefly outlined in the section on The Psalms under the chapter called "Two Anthologies of Poetry" in The Bible and the Common Reader. The development of these three later books from the first is typical of a basic pattern in Miss Chase's writing, perhaps most obvious here. More than once, however, she has re-used familiar material, with, to be sure, improvements, new nuances and turnings, and added substance. For the

²²Mary Ellen Chase, Readings from the Bible (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. v.

²³Chase, The Psalms, p. 12.

common reader to whom she is here addressing herself this carries the possibility of increased understanding and added delight in her subject. There may be some, however, even among her common readers who will experience just a taste of that kind of resentment which Theodore Goodman feels against the virtue of Thomas Mann:

I find this magnanimity basic in Mann, accounting for everything else in him, even for certain shortcomings. If, for example, one is to be so clear that readers of no great brain or culture may find one's teaching not too hard to follow, then not only must every i be dotted, and every t be crossed, but the lesson must be periodically re-stated, so that what is new in spite of all its clearness may be made to sink into the mind's confidence about it. The teacher is a little the drillmaster; but there are always pupils in the class who feel that some of the difficulties have been somewhat over-appraised, who wish that the pace might be smarter, who wonder whether the teacher may not be enjoying the routine as such simply because he knows how adept he is at it.²⁴

It must be pointed out that Goodman's gentle criticism of Mann falls amidst general high praise. Although on a different level, it would be unfair, even difficult, to withhold warm praise from Miss Chase's accomplishment in eliciting interest and pleasure in the dual cultural heritage which English-speaking people have in the King James Version of the Bible.

Beyond displaying her own joy in the Bible, Miss Chase has adopted several methods of ensuring appreciation of the Bible as literature. At the first she established her own approach by defining the Bible as "a library of Hebrew literature,"²⁵ and then indicating the literary types it encompasses. Any discussion of types in any of these books on the Bible is enriched by the author's ability to make comparative and contrast-

²⁴The Writing of Fiction (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 179-180.

²⁵Chase, The Bible and the Common Reader, p. 3.

ing references to other literatures, especially English.

In the introductory section to The Bible and the Common Reader, she traces the history of the English Bible before the King James Version and briefly attempts to account for the rare values of that translation. In her review of The Bible and the Common Reader, Sigrid Undset, by way of strengthening Miss Chase's preference for the King James Version, points out that "among non-English readers there must be a feeling of envy for the people who possess such a treasure as the King James version of the Bible."²⁶ The two chapters on the Hebrew people complete Miss Chase's Introduction, which, she feels, is "an indispensable preface to an understanding of" (p. xiv) what follows. The rest of the volume is divided into three sections, on the Old Testament, the Apochrypha, and the New Testament. The Old Testament selections are grouped partly by chronology and by type.

There is probably more substance and careful consideration in the reviews of The Bible and the Common Reader than in those of any other book Miss Chase has written. Those opinions in them which relate to religion cannot be very soundly evaluated here, but just to cite them will indicate something of the public reception of the book. The divergence of these opinions naturally reflects the religious or non-religious views of the reviewers. It is ironic that the harshest criticism of Miss Chase's view of Bible-reading by the common reader should come from the Catholic point of view, since, traditionally, of all Christians, the Catholics, at least the laymen, have been the least of Bible readers.

In so far as it sets forth the literary riches of the

²⁶Undset, p. 14.

Authorized Version, it is a splendid piece of work . . . and so we are little prepared for the steady assault upon the truth of Scripture and upon orthodox and doctrinal teaching which is carried on all through the volume . . . in fact, the words "legend" and "folklore" are repeated like a refrain through all the discussion of Jewish history. If the "common reader" is a Bible Christian, this book is not for him.²⁷

This rather unimaginative--perhaps one should say fundamentalist--response is balanced by a more liberal view of the same characteristic of the book. In fact, it is the modernity of her viewpoint which makes her work especially valuable in the opinion of several of its reviewers. Amos N.

Wilder wrote in The Yale Review:

She assumes the general conclusions of the modern study of the Bible and shows herself well acquainted with them. It is to be hoped that her forthright, yet non-belligerent presentation of the modern critical views will help to put an end to the legacy of obsolete conceptions which still persist about the Bible among hosts of readers.²⁸

This attitude is supported by John F. Davidson, who states the cases even more strongly:

In a day of vicious, yes dangerous, recrudescence of "fundamentalism," it is refreshing to think that some readers may, through this type of book, see the light of intelligent interpretation of the Hebrew-Christian bases of religion and their changing claims.²⁹

On the other hand, it is Miss Chase's complete divorcement from modern religious consideration which marks the merit of her book for some readers. Knowing her perennial insistence on the values of the past, wherever they are to be found, to the pursuit of a better life in the present and the

²⁷Edward H. Peters, Review of The Bible and the Common Reader, The Catholic World, CLXI (June 1945), 275.

²⁸Review of The Bible and the Common Reader, The Yale Review, XXXIV (Summer, 1945), 746.

²⁹Review of The Bible and the Common Reader, The Canadian Forum, XXIV (February, 1945), 264.

future, one cannot question that the value of cultural heritage which certain reviewers see as a large part of the worth of her writing is emphasized by her own intent. Perhaps it should be remembered, when reading their comments, that Miss Chase produced The Bible and the Common Reader during World War II and that she was concerned with the state of mind of her countrymen at that time. The article "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern" discussed in an earlier chapter makes this explicit. Still it would not do to consider her motive or reader response to The Bible and the Common Reader as limited to that very restricted period. The revision of The Bible and the Common Reader and the preparation of her other books on the Bible indicate a continuing response to what she is offering. The value of her work especially for those not primarily concerned with the religious aspects of the Bible is noted by Mme. Undset and by Wilder. Mme. Undset makes clear that Miss Chase's "view is not that of Orthodox Christians":

In her book . . . Miss Chase reminds us eloquently of the debt Western civilization owes to this heritage from the Hebrews.

Her beautiful and whole-hearted acknowledgement of this debt is certainly needed, now, when the supreme value of the Jewish element in our spiritual history, and even in our largely secularized civilization of today, has been minimized or even rejected by spokesmen of a new barbarism. Miss Chase is gloriously right. What would we be, she asks, without the influence of the Bible through two thousand years of cultural growth? Have the people of Europe and America a more important source of education--and of inspiration--in their thinking and living and writing?³⁰

Wilder's view concurs with Mme. Undset's:

No doubt the ultimate motive of this book is found in

³⁰Undset, p. 1.

words of the author on the contemporary neglect of the Bible as an aspect of liberal education and more particularly on its indispensability in a time of national crisis The Bible has its vicissitudes through the centuries. Our time has seen one of the low points in its esteem, so far as educated circles are concerned, and not only these circles. But there are various indications, and Miss Chase's book is no doubt one of them, that the Scriptures, including the Old Testament, are again resuming the perennial prestige even for the emancipated.³¹

It would seem that Miss Chase's work on the Bible has its greatest value not "even," but especially, "for the emancipated." The search today, by those who find in our moral, ethical, or intellectual existence the inadequacies of old patterns of control, for something more viable in the world we are becoming will be made more comfortable and perhaps more sure if accomplishments such as Miss Chase's make it possible for them to move forward without abandoning that help which can be had from a knowledge of the achievements of the past--in thought, in art, even in religion as it once was.

The subjectiveness of Miss Chase's choice of parts of the Bible for her consideration is recognized, with cheerful acceptance by most of the reviewers, as evidence of the stimulative value of her book. Those who wish to cling to some of their own favorite selections in preference to hers are willing to see in this, evidence of "the wealth we draw from."³²

Any detailed analysis of The Bible and the Common Reader from the point of view of Biblical scholarship is somewhat beyond the concern of this study. It is perhaps enough to note that there appears to be general agreement about the soundness of Miss Chase's scholarship, even though she

³¹Wilder, p. 745.

³²Undset, p. 1.

is obviously not trying to produce a scholarly work:

. . . her reliance upon recent research and criticism is apparent throughout The Bible and the Common Reader. The soundness of Miss Chase's approach to problems of chronology and authorship, and the classification of subject matter according to its derivation from legendary and factual sources, reveal more than a passing acquaintance with historical, linguistic, and archaeological investigation. The study is unique among recent interpretations of the Scriptures, I believe, in that it sets forth modern scholarly opinion with the appeal that a skillful novelist commands. The book is more, however, than a synthesis of criticism and research expressed in markedly clear and fluid prose.³³

The contribution of her writing skill which Miss Evans notes also distinguishes Life and Language in the Old Testament and Psalms for the Common Reader, but perhaps Miss Chase is not quite infallible in her scholarship. At any rate John F. Davidson points out "One slip [which] should be corrected in later printings: the Benedictus (not Benedicte) of Zacharias."³⁴ This may have been no more than an error in printing; at least it is corrected in the Revised Edition. But an insignificant error aside, it is the spirit of Miss Chase's work which is of most importance. And the way in which the spirit is expressed is in a sense a part of that spirit itself.

Although one is willing to accept Miss Chase's choice of portions from the Bible to be explained and discussed in The Bible and the Common Reader, one might still question the merit of publishing a special volume of Readings from the Bible which is also selective rather than complete. There are, however, certain advantages intended in Miss Chase's edition which she herself explains:

³³Evans, p. 14.

³⁴Davidson, p. 265.

I have taught my course at Smith on the idea and the principle that it is far better to know well the best of the Bible than to have a smattering of all of it (even if that were possible), especially in view of the recognized fact that a considerable portion of it is quite undistinguished to the modern reader.³⁵

Among the other ways by which she makes her selections enjoyable to the modern reader is the expedient device of printing the poetry in lines and the prose in paragraphs rather than in the conventional verses. Needless to say, she uses the King James, or Authorized, Version. Her comment is necessarily briefer than that in The Bible and the Common Reader, but it is both helpful and succinct. Some reviewers seem to find more religious emphasis in her selection of passages than she probably intended, although, indeed, religion is the essence of the Bible and is naturally present in most passages that are suitable for selection. One reviewer finds that the compilation "does not neglect the primary religious purpose of the Old and New Testaments,"³⁶ and another notes the inclusion of "her long-seasoned contagious appreciations both literary and spiritual."³⁷ Naturally those concerned with the religious purpose of the Bible will find this in her Readings, but Miss Chase in her "appreciations" appears to confine herself largely to the literary. For example, when she chooses the Gospel of St. Luke in preference to the other Gospels to tell the life of Jesus, she explains:

St. Luke was neither a theologian nor a philosopher, but a biographer and a dramatist, a born storyteller who, more

³⁵ Chase, Readings, pp. v-vi.

³⁶ Chad Walsh, Review of Readings from the Bible, New York Times Book Review, December 21, 1952, p. 11.

³⁷ Louise R. Miller, Review of Readings from the Bible, Library Journal LXXVII (September 1, 1952), 1395.

than any of the others, could imbue his narrative with charm and excitement. (p. 320)

She does include a brief excerpt from St. Matthew to fill out the story.

There is some pleasure, particularly for the unseasoned reader, in finding the parables of Jesus collected in one place and also in discovering a similar collection of passages entitled "The People Whom Jesus Loved." For the person who is willing to accept help in selecting what to read, this could be a valuable book. Even for the reader who already knows his way around in the Bible, Readings from the Bible is a useful companion to The Bible and the Common Reader, for it is an absolute necessity, when reading the earlier book to be able to locate easily the passages she describes. The reward for this is great, for the reader titillated by her descriptive suggestions soon learns that, on seeking the Biblical text, he will find precisely those things she says are there, but which, without her teasing influence, he might have passed over in their familiarity.

Both Life and Language in the Old Testament and The Psalms for the Common Reader deserve to be considered part of Miss Chase's own literary accomplishment as well as incentives to the appreciation of literature of others. They have both been written late in her career when her style has become simple and accomplished. The quiet intensity of emotion which she is able to evoke from simplicity of expression, exactitude of imagery, and keen but gentle realism links these two books stylistically to The White Gate and The Edge of Darkness, written in the same decade.

Miss Chase's avowed purpose in Life and Language in the Old Testament she states in her Foreword to that book:

This book, then, has to do, first, with the mind of an ancient Oriental people, who have given immeasurable

gifts to our Western civilization, and primarily with that creative and magical power of the mind which we call imagination. And, secondly, it concerns itself with the outward and visible signs of that imagination as they are revealed in the language and literature of the Old Testament.³⁸

One of her accomplishments in the book is to make these early Hebrews appear to us as a people. She is able to separate them from familiar individual ideas a reader may have about them and make them stand out objectively as a group. This experience alone may be of value to the modern reader who must in his imagination make room for the varying individualities of different peoples the world over and learn that it is not always valid to create them in his own image. This particular achievement of Miss Chase's is not much lessened by the various criticisms which reviewers have leveled at certain of the concepts she presents of the Hebrew mind. Without special knowledge of Hebrew, one cannot defend or take issue with these criticisms. One can note, however, that Miss Chase's own New England background may well account for some of her interest in the Hebraic mind. Harriet Beecher Stowe remarked more than once in her New England novels on the influence of the ancient Hebrews on early New England society. Perry D. Westbrook brings out the fact that New Englanders were themselves conscious of this relationship:

Like the Hebrews to whom they were fond of comparing themselves, the Yankees were given to seeking promised lands: a study of the map of New England will reveal a generous sprinkling of Canaans from Long Island Sound to Canada.³⁹

³⁸Mary Ellen Chase, Life and Language in the Old Testament (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1955), p. 10.

³⁹Acres of Flint (Washington, D. C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1951), p. 4.

One thing at least is certain, many of the topics which Miss Chase discusses in relation to the Hebrews have been of concern to her for a long time. A sense of wonder, the meaning of time, the identity of place, the significance of the past, the force of an image in thinking--all these have occupied her endlessly in her writing. Her own education and profession have supplied her with one effective means of outlining both the Hebrew mind and its literary manifestations; that is to contrast these with the Greek in a chapter called "Greek and Hebrew Story-Tellers."

Marvin Lowenthal assesses this chapter:

In displaying the virtues and shortcomings of the Hebrew Scriptures purely as literature . . . the author happily compares them with the Greek masters, especially Homer. Just enough simple and graphic examples are placed side by side to make the comparison fruitful and a delight for its own sake. Homer, of course, suffers in that his music has never found translators equal to those who rendered the Hebrew magic into English at the command of King James.⁴⁰

Ellery Sedgwick's comment on this same chapter is, "How joyfully she takes on Matthew Arnold and his Hellenism and fights again the battle of two generations ago, still fresh . . . today. . . ." ⁴¹

No matter what criticism reviewers make of Miss Chase's ideas about the Hebrew mind, they all pay generous tribute to her skill in writing her book. Lowenthal calls it "this engaging study."⁴² Ruth Tubby points out its "charming readability."⁴³ Louise Pettibone Smith calls Mary Ellen

⁴⁰Review of Life and Language in the Old Testament, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 6, 1955, p. 5.

⁴¹Review of Life and Language in the Old Testament, New York Times Book Review, November 13, 1955, p. 42.

⁴²Lowenthal, p. 5.

⁴³Review of Life and Language in the Old Testament, Library Journal, LXXX (November 1, 1955), 2503.

Chase "herself, an artist in words," and says that "the book as a whole reads delightfully, and satisfies a long-felt need."¹⁴¹

Such praise should have gratified Miss Chase in view of her own philosophy of literature expressed in Life and Language in the Old Testament:

To be familiar with the mere content of any work of literature is in no sense to understand it. For it is never the subject matter which confers distinction and power upon a work of art, but rather the manner in which that matter is presented. This manner includes not only the choice of words itself, but style and tone, form and pattern, various and distinctive literary devices, and even an intrinsic and often intangible spiritual quality, which Marcel Proust calls "a quality of vision, a revelation of a private universe." (pp. 141-142)

The manner of Miss Chase's writing in Life and Language in the Old Testament can not be fully conveyed either by description or by excerpts. Even more than The Bible and the Common Reader its prose is "clear and fluid." There is motion in its language all the way from beginning to end; sometimes it is sedate with dignity, more often it hastens along with delight and even sadness. Just a sentence through its own movement suggests the movement in the life of the people in what she calls the "Genesis epic or saga":

Even the most literal readers cannot fail to discover in that simple, pastoral narrative of wandering and wayfaring, of family relationships, of the time-worn tragedies, ironies, and even comedies of an ancient, tribal people, the spirit of man forever moving on in search not only for the material needs of life, but for the immaterial. (p. 39)

Miss Chase's own love of nature and of the concrete prompts her to collect

¹⁴¹Review of Life and Language in the Old Testament, Christian Century, LXXII (November 9, 1955), 1304.

in one hastening paragraph some of the images which appealed to the Hebrew poet.

The glories and wonder of the physical world astound him, from the wise knowledge possessed by the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field to the snowy heights of Hermon, the clouds that shroud the Judean hills, the thunders of God which divide His flames of lightening. He writes with awe and even amusement of the hippopotamus, which moves his tail like a cedar and can drink up a river, even Jordan itself; of the sea-serpent, with which God plays as with a bird; of the strength of the horse, the glory of whose nostrils is terrible and who cries Ha! Ha! among the battle trumpets; of the goodly wings of the peacock; and of the hawk, who, by God's teaching, spreads her wings toward the south. Trees excite his wonder, the thorn trees and sycamores of the wilderness, the planes, palms and cedars by the water's edge. Water itself forms countless of his images, more, indeed, than any other miracle of God's creation except mountains and hills, for in his parched and thirsty land it meant life and hope. He marvels, too, at the sea; but there is usually terror mingled with amazement over its vastness and mysterious depths, over its stormy winds and waves which cause sailors to reel and stagger to and fro like drunken men and be at their wit's end, or, in the original-Hebrew, discover that all their wisdom is swallowed up. (pp. 64-65)

Miss Chase has an instinct for order and balance, and a love of the repetition of sound which make her name two qualities of the Hebrew mind "the sense of wonder and the instinct of worship" (p. 59). Again and again she alliterates pairs of adjectives or of nouns: "sagacity and shrewdness" (p. 48); "objects and occupations" (p. 119); "repetitive and redundant" (p. 141); "singleness and severity" (p. 21); and, of course, "life and language." She, appropriately, uses few figures of speech in her own style in Life and Language in the Old Testament, but she makes those few count. She is vigorous when she describes the lack of modifiers in the early Hebrew sentence: "It is as though the writer were getting down to the bare bones of language, as though he neither desired nor needed more than the absolutely necessary words" (p. 152). Or she

suits her tone to what she is describing: "These many empty spaces in the Old Testament, these bare, unfurnished rooms, these uncompleted designs and patterns arouse curiosity and wonder in the reader's mind" (p. 114). She does not hesitate to take a figure from a later day than the one she is presenting when she compares the 90th to the 23rd psalm: "It is like the sound of an organ as contrasted with that of a flute. Both are undeniably beautiful; yet one solaces, and the other stirs us" (p. 197).

But the impact of the manner of Life and Language in the Old Testament gives an impression of less artfulness than this collection of passages may suggest. Perhaps the best characterization of the spirit of the whole book is Ellery Sedgwick's: "One is persuaded, never forced, to accept her conclusions, and as she goes her running comment is a perpetual exhilaration."⁴⁵

The foregoing characterization might apply as well to The Psalms for the Common Reader. The Psalms for the Common Reader is that kind of a variation on a familiar theme which can bring fresh interest and delight to the "common reader." Miss Chase says many of the same things she has said before, but her obvious pleasure and skill in saying them are still appealing. And, of course, she says them in more detail and with more emphasis on the Book of Psalms as a unit and on the particular virtues of the entity. Of the Psalms in unity she writes:

Let us think of the Psalms, then, as the spiritual epic of an ancient People, and not alone of one people or of one time, but of all people and of all time. Only in reading them in this way can we ever come to understand and truly to value them. (p. 26)

⁴⁵Sedgwick, p. 42.

Then she proceeds to take an English teacher's delight in explaining what she can of the use of the Psalms in their own time, in grouping them according to their types, and especially in analyzing their poetic structures and devices and in interpreting their emotion and meaning. She is selective in her illustrations, feeling as she always has about the Bible that it is better to know a few Psalms well than to know them all cursorily. What cannot be answered about the background or origin of the Psalms she turns to account to enhance the "sense of wonder" she attaches to them. The wonder of her whole book is perhaps again its manner, the way in which "she shares her own knowledge of the Psalms and of their literary beauty with consummate skill."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Millicent Taylor, Review of The Psalms for the Common Reader, Christian Science Monitor, May 7, 1962, p. 9.

CHAPTER X

LATER ESSAYS AND THE WHITE GATE

The essays which Mary Ellen Chase wrote for nationally circulated magazines between 1947 and 1957 are mainly all of a piece, and that piece is not especially distinguished, either of itself or against the outline of her total achievement as a writer as it now appears in her seventy-fifth year. These essays are lively, competently written, and sometimes quite timely, but they do not quite fulfill the promise of some of the essays of the earlier period. The bright images of her writing have become subordinate in many of these essays to practical and sensible moralizing. The search for a "good life" is still carried on but it seems to have become contracted. When she learned to weed out some of her exuberant flourishes of style and some of her "manifold" allusions, the texture of her writing often became more commonplace. Vital autobiographical material illustrates these articles meaningfully but still there is a warmed-over taste to it, as though, not having been able to use it before, she must take some advantage of it rather than let it go to waste. There is an occasional exception to these generalizations such as the narrative essay "Memorial Day 1900." The White Gate is also another matter.

Many of Miss Chase's essays of this period are "moral" essays which follow a long but changing tradition of both English and American literature that goes back to writers like Francis Bacon and Benjamin Franklin.

"A State of Grace," which appeared in the August, 1947, issue of House and Garden may be linked with Miss Chase's introductory section to Look at

America: New England, which came out the same year, because both show the author's appreciation of her native area. The piece on New England is more historical, more general, and, because of its very familiar subject matter, probably less interesting to the New Englander than to the outsider for whom it is intended. "A State of Grace" does not share the moralizing tone of most of the other essays of this group but is largely given over to an enthusiastic appreciation of the natural wonders of the State of Maine. Such an essay does not go so far back in essay-writing traditions as the moral essays do, but one can tell from an earlier essay "Time to Oneself" that Miss Chase knew the writing of the American naturalists Audubon, Muir, and Burroughs as well as what the nineteenth-century writers Emerson, Hawthorne, Lowell, and Thoreau had to say about "the trees, birds, and flowers."¹ The writings of other Americans, however, are not necessary to inspire her appreciation of Maine weather or wild flowers or sea-birds or people or their speech or northern lights or fog. Not literary inspiration, but knowing Maine fog well accounts for her description of it:

You will be foolish to curse it because it thwarts sailing, and dampens living rooms, and even the spirits of those who have never seen beneath its clinging gray folds. And yet Maine fog is full of grace. There is mystery in the way it drifts in from the open sea, wisps of it among the spruces, clouds of it spreading over the pastures, masses of it lying close above the daisy fields and weighting the grasses with its silver mist. There are few places more silent than a Maine coast headland or country road in a fog. Time seems to have stopped there, and with it all its problems and decisions. There is healing in fog. You find yourself speaking quietly if you speak at all; you are instead listening and waiting. Just what you are listening and waiting for does not matter. It is the listening and waiting that count.²

¹Mary Ellen Chase, "Time to Oneself," Yale Review, XXX (Autumn, 1940), 29.

²Mary Ellen Chase, "A State of Grace," House and Garden, XCII (August, 1947), 89.

This quotation shows that even here where her emphasis is on appreciation, she is not above counseling her reader. But most of all, the bright images she loves so much to create, or record, abound. These reveal "the sense of wonder" which J. Donald Adams considers "an essential part of the essayist's equipment . . . but for the novelist, the poet, or the essayist in whom the sense of wonder lives the facts are valued only for what they suggest."³ Perhaps in "A State of Grace" both the facts and what they suggest are valued. Part of what they suggest is obviously "a state of grace." This borrowed phrase, "a state of grace," which refers in one sense to Maine, was probably valued by the author both for its pun and for its religious connotation.

The essays "Sorry, We Can't Afford It,"⁴ "When You Go Home,"⁵ "Must America Live in Fear?"⁶ "The Virtue of Living Fully,"⁷ "What Has Happened to Common Sense?"⁸ "Pitfalls of a Perfectionist,"⁹ "She Misses Some Goals,"¹⁰

³Literary Frontiers (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1951), p. 92.

⁴Mary Ellen Chase, "Sorry, We Can't Afford It," Good Housekeeping, CXXXI (November, 1950), 54.

⁵Mary Ellen Chase, "When You Go Home. . . ." Coronet, XXXIII (December, 1952), 23-27.

⁶Mary Ellen Chase, "Must America Live in Fear," Coronet, XXXIV (July, 1953), 19-23.

⁷Mary Ellen Chase, "The Virtue of Living Fully," House and Garden, CIV (September, 1953), 126-127.

⁸Mary Ellen Chase, "What Has Happened to Common Sense?" Coronet, XXXVI (May, 1954), 21-25.

⁹Mary Ellen Chase, "Pitfalls of a Perfectionist," Coronet, XL (September, 1956), 46-48.

¹⁰Mary Ellen Chase, "She Misses Some Goals," Life, XLI (December 24, 1956), 23-25.

and even "Are You Afraid of Snakes?"¹¹ all belie the prediction implied in the early comment of Virginia Hall Smith that "she has never become didactic."¹² That is exactly what she does become in these later essays, written, of course, after Mrs. Hall's pronouncement. These essays are written entertainingly, with spirit and with humor, but they have a lesson to give and some criticism for contemporary society which is somewhat less gentle than similar criticism Miss Chase voiced before the Second World War.

For a person like Miss Chase who was raised on New England sermons and on the frequent quotation of "precepts" at school and at home and who has spent many years teaching young people, to "intentionally point a moral" is quite understandable. She would not even need to have the essay-writing heritage mentioned earlier. It is superficial perhaps but interesting to note the comparison in theme between several of her essays and quotations from Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard. The content and style of her essays are, needless to say, quite different. In "Sorry, We Can't Afford It," Miss Chase, with her usual concern for children, emphasizes the necessity that children understand that they can't have everything they want and that they be encouraged to learn the value of money, even to the extent of earning it. She sees the family purse as a family concern and recalls the less desirable situation in her childhood when her father "held the purse strings." Although she approaches her material with a modern point of view and does not couch her advice in proverbs as Poor Richard does,

¹¹Mary Ellen Chase, "Are You Afraid of Snakes?" Reader's Digest, LXIX (July, 1956) 45-48

¹²"Down East Today" (University of Maine, 1938), p. 101.

she is primarily recommending some old-time Yankee virtues. And the words of Poor Richard are not inappropriate to her theme when he says, "But what Madness Must it be to run in Debt for these Superfluities!" or:

Great Estates may venture more,
But little Boats should keep near Shore.

There is very little inconsistency between Miss Chase's attitude in this essay and the one attributed to Franklin by Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards: "He believed that the desire for social and financial security could be a powerful force in the dynamics of society and an incitement to intellectual and spiritual improvement."¹³

"The Virtue of Living Fully" is a re-creation of her Grandmother Chase's character, a more sympathetic one than that which appears in The White Gate, and the author's own recommendations of ways in which people can live fully today. She recounts some of her grandmother's eager activities and her influence on her grandchildren's physical and mental alertness. The essay is a practical, exemplified approach to her perennial search for "the good life." Again there is an undeniable correspondence between her theme and certain words of Poor Richard: "But dost thou love Life, then do not squander Time, for that's the Stuff Life is made of, as Poor Richard says." Not far remote from Poor Richard, even though her practicality is more veiled with optimism and high ideals, are Mary Ellen Chase's references to her Grandmother's belief "that indifference to time and its gifts is the one unforgivable sin," and to her own: "To lay hold on life, to redeem time, to allow nothing of loveliness, of merriment, even of sadness, to escape one--these possible activities of the human mind and

¹³Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, Inc., 1952), p. 59.

spirit seem to me the chief virtues."¹⁴

In "What Has Happened to Common Sense?" she comes closer to Franklin not only in her inclusion of precepts "which outmoded as they seem to be in these present days, are distinctly an American heritage, rooted deeply in our history, our literature, and our ways of life,"¹⁵ but also in her readiness to criticize what she disapproves of in modern life. More specifically and more fully than ever before she voices her feeling that too many people put too much dependence on modern psychiatry instead of on common sense.

"She Misses Some Goals," the harshest of all her criticism, is aimed at American women who generally seem to her to lack the "staying power" of British women. She is deliberately presenting here only one side of the scene as she enumerates the shortcomings of American women; other writers in the same group of articles present a more positive view. Still there is no reason to doubt that she is speaking her mind honestly. The most timely of her recent essays, "Must Americans Live in Fear?" touches on a problem peculiarly vital in our lives today. In it she is still trying to point the way to a good life, but with less optimism than is usually her way. This one essay has perhaps increased in its meaning for Americans in the decade since it was written, as just the mention of the current term "fallout shelter" might suggest. "When You Go Home" gives more good counsel, this time on the matter of family relationships.

"Are You Afraid of Snakes?" is not so much a moral essay as it is an essay with a moral. It won a Reader's Digest prize of \$2500 for its "First

¹⁴Chase, "The Virtue of Living Fully," p. 127.

¹⁵Chase, "What Has Happened to Common Sense?" p. 22.

Person Award" in July, 1956. It appears to have been written with more care than most of the other essays have received--perhaps even too much obvious care, for every word in the thesaurus which could be applied to snakes seems to be here. The result is the effect of a great deal of movement. One reviewer of The White Gate suggests that the book "must be included in all collections for beginning writers."¹⁶ Perhaps "Are You Afraid of Snakes?" should be too.

"Are You Afraid of Snakes?" is narrative in construction. The author dramatizes with some power and skill an incident of her teaching experience at the Hillside Home School in Wisconsin. This school, which had a special interest in nature study, was near the Wisconsin River whose marshes and hillsides were filled with snakes, rattlers and numerous harmless varieties. On one warm September Saturday the author was walking to a nearby fair with a friend, a teacher of nature study. On the way they encountered two boys, fifteen or sixteen years of age, each with a basketful and a handful of snakes of many varieties. The other teacher told the boys she was not afraid and proceeded to examine the boys' collection. From pride and to prove her own lack of fear to the boys, Mary Ellen Chase had to follow suit and hold a snake, head between her thumb and forefinger and body coiled on her bare arm. The moral of the piece becomes obvious when she loses her fear and feels a great sense of freedom as she does this. There is also, besides the moral in this, something of the sense of wonder which J. Donald Adams considers "an essential part of the essayist's equipment." This same point is also the dramatic climax of the essay. The essay-like quality of Miss Chase's fiction has been noted several times in this dissertation. It is conversely true that she is often able

¹⁶Library Journal, LXXIX (October 15, 1954), 1885.

to write most effective narrative when she is relating personal experience.

Another essay which includes some especially successful narrative is "Memorial Day 1900." There is no moral here, just the joy of the most objective kind of reminiscence, appreciation of some true-life dramatic irony, and a particularly felicitous adaptation of one of her characteristics of style. Miss Chase is not often flawless in her work, because, one suspects, she writes too easily and rapidly. But in "Memorial Day 1900" she is almost as successful in bending her sometimes capricious style to the exact needs of the moment as she is in The White Gate, where the effect of the style is different but equally appropriate.

"Memorial Day 1900" falls in line with a long tradition of American humor, and incidentally records a bit of American social history. The author dramatizes very concretely the occasion of one of the most impressive of her father's Memorial Day speeches, from his early receipt of his invitation to his withdrawal from the Castine Unitarian Church after its dramatic epilogue. She is even able to quote some paragraphs of the speech, having recently found its manuscript among her father's papers. She includes but subordinates the family's role in the whole situation, her mother's part being large, her own insignificant. The dramatic surprise at the end hinges on a paragraph of the speech which Lawyer Chase had finally decided to omit from his oration in deference to Mrs. Chase's feeling that this was not an appropriate time to include commendatory words for the "boys in gray." When, however, the speech and applause had ended, an old man--a stranger in the church--asked: "A remarkable oration, young man! But have you no tribute for the boys in gray?" Whereupon the orator "facing the old man before an audience tense with

confusion, excitement and indignation" recited the deleted paragraph which he, happily, had memorized. In a triumphant denouement the speaker of the day, accompanied by the stranger, paced slowly down the aisle, followed by the men in blue, "two by two, and not a few in tears."¹⁷

The humor in this piece is so fragile that it tends to disappear in explanation, just as E. B. White's frog is dead after dissection. But incongruous as it may at first seem, there is something about "Memorial Day 1900" which is reminiscent of Mark Twain. A few of Mark Twain's own words may help to point this up. Mark Twain himself said,

The humorous story is American, the comic is English, the witty is French. The humorous story depends for its effect upon the manner of telling . . . The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it.¹⁸

Obviously Miss Chase's manner is far different from Mark Twain's, but in "Memorial Day 1900" it is the manner that makes much of the humor. For this one time Miss Chase has a story to tell, simple as it is. This is not always her case. Often in her fiction, and even elsewhere, she has to work for the story in order to have something on which to hang all the other things she wants to do. Invention of plot or incident does not seem to have been easy for her imagination to produce. But here the story is ready-made for her, and she makes the very most of it. This is not without precedent in her writing. Here and there are other such occurrences. Her ride on the raised drawbridge on the day of her arrival in Chicago,

¹⁷Mary Ellen Chase, "Memorial Day 1900," Ladies' Home Journal, LXXIV (May, 1957), 230.

¹⁸How to Tell a Story (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1908), p. 7.

which is narrated in A Goodly Fellowship, is probably more humorous in circumstance than this.

Another instance of Miss Chase's use of a ready-made incident which in the final relating contains a good deal of humor is "Mrs. Penlust on the Damascus Road." This was published first in The Atlantic Monthly of October, 1932, and later republished in Robeson Bailey's Techniques in Article-Writing in 1947. Although it is narrative in form, "The genesis of 'Mrs. Penlust on the Damascus Road' is not fiction, but non-fiction."¹⁹ Miss Chase seems to quibble just a little over the type of writing "Mrs. Penlust" should be called when she comments:

For, of all the stories I have written over a period of many years, that of Amelia Penlust is literally the only one which I have taken from what is known as real life. All my other stories, whether based on single episodes or situations, or written in the form of full-length novels, have been born in my imagination, assisted, of course, by what we term "experience." My characters have, therefore, been not copied, but created, as I devoutly believe the characters of fiction must and should be, and at their best are.²⁰

Without explaining the humor of "Mrs. Penlust"--the name suggests some of its satire--one can list this as another example of Miss Chase's skill in making good use of whatever "capital" is available to her. When she has the incident, she is able to furnish the manner which will make the most of it.

To return to the rather special manner of "Memorial Day 1900," there the manner of telling not only does justice to the situation, but supports

¹⁹Mary Ellen Chase, "From Anecdote to Article," in Techniques in Article-Writing, ed. Robeson Bailey (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1947), p. 237.

²⁰Ibid.

and even makes much more of it than it could be in its events alone. A good deal has been said in this dissertation about Mary Ellen Chase's style. It is a topic which most of those who review her books usually get around to mentioning even in a brief review. One of the successes of The White Gate is that her control of her style has become so complete that the reader is never unnecessarily aware of it. But in "Memorial Day 1900," however, to appreciate the humor one must be aware of the style.

In Miss Chase's early writing, there are evidences of clichés of style and uncontrolled exuberances which have been explained in part by her love of all kinds of reading and by the fact that reading was with the Chases a family experience. She came, of course, to understand this tendency in her writing and to modify it. In "Memorial Day 1900" she very deliberately uses the tendency, now focused in her father, as a device for humor. She describes his feeling for language:

For he was by nature drawn toward the eloquent use of language, and it was his habit while dressing, or descending the stairs for breakfast, or doing his chores in the barn, to declaim lines from Thucydides or Macaulay, Cicero against Catiline, Patrick Henry or Abraham Lincoln. . . . He loved rolling periods, rhetorical questions, fervent imperatives, and intricate, often mixed metaphors. He would be sadly out of place today when eloquence in its old sense has become more than slightly ridiculous and "elocution" practically banned from both the language and its use.²¹

That she is quite right that such language "has become more than slightly ridiculous" is proved by the fact that she adds to the humor of the piece by the inclusion of several paragraphs from the text of the speech. This is the opening:

"Gentlemen! Defenders of the Republic! Preservers of the Union! Two score years have well nigh sped since

²¹Chase, "Memorial Day 1900," p. 145.

you performed with dauntless heroism your sacred mission upon the hallowed earth of this nation. So swift, indeed, has flowed the ever-rolling stream of Time that he who now addresses you can but dimly recall the martial music of your homecoming."²²

The matter of practiced gestures is quite thoroughly discussed, as are all the other stages of preparation, even the dress rehearsal. The whole is given just a touch of gentle exaggeration, even of parody. The author uses enough of her father's inflated style of language in her own writing to give an amusing echo to his when she describes the applause:

. . . the applause which rose in a mighty swell throughout the church was overwhelming. We alone did not clap our hands since my mother thought it was unseemly in view of our close connection with the speaker. Then as an added ovation the audience rose, and we after some hesitation and exchange of many questioning glances, rose also. Tears were by this time visible on my mother's eyelids, and I saw that she was holding her lower lip firmly between her teeth. . . . Then . . . that moment of silence which always marks the failure to leave one world quickly for another transfixed the audience.²³

Throughout "Memorial Day 1900" some of Miss Chase's "bright images" contribute to the slightly overblown effect of the whole occasion. Lawyer Chase's accoutrements are carefully listed, and on the drive to Castine, the author had, she says, "the honor of carefully holding his gold-headed cane." But by now the frog is more than dead. If Miss Chase has by any chance been at all like Mark Twain in adding embellishments to her story, they have obviously not changed its basic authenticity. The over-dramatization that she has used is appropriate to her subject, for surely the day she describes has an importance for all those involved which could not be easily duplicated today.

²²Ibid., p. 230.

²³Ibid.

Recipe for a Magic Childhood was published in 1951 in the May issue of Ladies' Home Journal, and the next year in small book form. A few paragraphs from it were reprinted in The White Gate, and it gave the author "the original idea and the impulse for this much longer book."²⁴ Delightful as it is in its own way, Recipe for a Magic Childhood is no match for The White Gate. Recipe for a Magic Childhood is pleasant and temperate, and yet it has its thread of didactic good counsel. It is the most gentle and moderate of moral essays. It has a specific setting: the kitchen of an old Connecticut farmhouse on a snowy January day. The author combines recollection with comment on the present day. Her thesis is that at any time, now as at the time of her childhood, books are important in the life of a child, and she illustrates it with personal experiences new and old. Her usual respect for the past includes the acknowledgment that her parents would have accepted and even enjoyed both radio and television. Her attitude of good counsel makes her add:

But I am even more certain that hours for the enjoyment of each would have been strictly defined and clearly understood and that neither would ever have been allowed to usurp the place of books and reading in our common life.²⁵

Reading itself is, she feels, more important for the child than the particular books which are read. And she offers her forty years of teaching as her authority for speaking on this subject.

The White Gate, on the other hand, is in no way didactic. Both the book itself and its evolution are revealing circumstances in Miss Chase's long career of development as a writer. The White Gate is deceptively

²⁴Mary Ellen Chase, The White Gate (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1954), p. 11.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 13-14.

simple, and its simplicity is its art.

To the end the book keeps the balance of activity established by the first three chapters, "The White Gate," "Beyond the Gate," and "Within the Gate." The White Gate swings between the home in which the author was brought up and as much of the world and people beyond as could be comprehended by the imagination of a child growing from nine to twelve years old. The child is Mary Ellen Chase as recollected by herself over fifty years later. The people, the places, and the things which form the substance of the book all belong to the Maine coastal village of Blue Hill just before the close of the nineteenth century, but this is not an autobiography of social history like A Goodly Heritage, which is largely set in the same village. There is social history in The White Gate, but the development of the book is motivated by something more universal--the revelations and realizations of a child. Miss Chase is gentle and honest, sympathetic and objective toward that child. She has no obvious theme or purpose, other than to share with the reader the pleasure she has had herself in rediscovering the child.

She achieves this sharing with every skill at her command. In much of her writing, even the later writing, in which she has her style well under control, she has been inclined to the same fault that Maxwell Geismar finds in Ellen Glasgow: "Maybe the most serious fault in her style [is] simply that there is a little too much of it."²⁶ The White Gate, however, is so far from having too much style that there is almost a sparseness to it. In fact, the entire book reaches the state of clarity

²⁶Maxwell Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), p. 283.

which in the best of her later writing appears frequently but not continuously. This clarity is an aspect of style as much as of meaning. It gives the brightening but almost unnoticeable effect of looking through newly cleaned, flawless window glass on a beautiful dry day. It is as though the glass were not there. This is what Theodore Goodman, writing about fiction, says style should be: "By far the greatest contribution of the literary phase of fiction--that is, style--to the narrative phase is its ability, ideally to disappear from view, to seem nowhere about."²⁷

Perhaps one reason for the degree of perfection attained in The White Gate may be accounted for by the story of the evolution of the book. After Recipe for a Magic Childhood, Miss Chase's publishers suggested that she write a story for children set in the time and place of her own childhood. In "A Preface to the Reader" she admits: "This during most of 1953 I tried to do, but with small success."²⁸ But she did in the process of trying become very much interested in the material she had been thinking about and trying unsuccessfully to transform into fictional shape.

The effort she had been making on the book she was trying to plan was undoubtedly responsible for her ultimate success with The White Gate. First it is quite probable that the longer she considered her memories, the stronger their impact became and the less able she was to escape from them into the invention which writing a children's story would have necessitated. Furthermore, one might speculate that this delay gave her

²⁷Theodore Goodman, The Writing of Fiction (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 18.

²⁸Chase, The White Gate, p. 9.

an opportunity to consider the material she finally did use more thoroughly than might ordinarily be the case. Her own explanation of her failure might be questioned: "When I was a child, I did not know the difference between a book for a child and one for grown-ups" (p. 9). This is no doubt true, but she had done stories and books for children at the beginning of her writing career. Although His Birthday was probably considered suitable for both adults and children, the three books for girls were obviously aimed at a juvenile audience. It is quite possible, however, that Miss Chase remembers these early books with something less than complete satisfaction. Her difficulty with invention is probably just as valid a reason as the one she states for not writing a story.

In connection with her statement, it is instructive to look ahead and see that a few years after The White Gate she would be writing books for a children's non-fiction series. It might be added that those books seem to make only the most obvious of necessary adjustments for a juvenile audience and that in some respects they can be read with satisfaction by adults.

It is not beyond possibility that the experience which preceded the writing of The White Gate made its contribution to the writing of the later children's books. A statement pertinent to this idea on the writing of children's books was made by the 1955 winner of the Newbery Medal, which is usually awarded each year to "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children."²⁹ Meindert De Jong describes his own relationship with his childhood. It reveals an experience which

²⁹Elizabeth Nesbitt, "The Test of Recollection," in Newbery Medal Books: 1922-1955 (Boston: Horn Book, Inc., 1955), p. 440.

might well be shared by other writers and may, therefore, be useful in understanding what happened to Miss Chase before she wrote The White Gate.

I want to go down into childhood and into the essence and beauty of childhood as you must when writing for children.

To get back to that essence you can only go down. You can only go in deep. Down through all the deep, mystic, intuitive layers of the subconscious back into your childhood. And if you go deep enough, get basis enough, become again the child you were it seems reasonable that by way of the subconscious you have come into what must be the universal child.

. . . you reach down where the child you were still lives in you. Then you have come into the inner essence which hasn't been distorted, falsified, exaggerated--there to find the inner child, the universal child that I once was, that you once were, and that all children are.³⁰

The child Meindert De Jong was looking for seems to be the one Mary Ellen Chase found. What she wasn't able to use for a story became a book of essays. But being more than a collection of essays, The White Gate contains significance which, in a minor way, makes it comparable as a non-fiction work of art to Thoreau's Walden. The chief comparison is that The White Gate, like Walden, has an artistically developed level or levels of importance beyond the one which is immediately apparent. This kind of development is more common to works of fiction.

When Stanley Edgar Hyman says of Walden, ". . . the book is essentially dynamic rather than static, a movement from something to something, rather than simple reporting of an experience,"³¹ he is describing something which is, in a sense, characteristic of The White Gate as well.

³⁰"Acceptance Paper," Newbery Medal Books, pp. 434 and 438.

³¹"Stanley Edgar Hyman on Walden," in American Literature: Readings and Critiques, ed. R. W. Stallman and Arthur Waldhorn (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 257.

While the "movement from something to something" is almost too impalpable to be traced directly, the sense of movement in the book is strong. At no time is the situation static. Although dynamic might be too vigorous a word, there is a strong sense of real and imaginative aliveness in the book. To be alive, of course, is contrary to being static. In The White Gate each experience, person, thing, or thought which impresses itself on the child suggests forward movement, for this will be carried underneath all other experience for the rest of the child's life. There is paradoxically some movement in another direction, for at the period of life from nine to twelve some things are given up by the child, as Miss Chase implies:

Nor is a child, in those early, fleeting apprehensions of the meanings latent within images, experiences, impressions, burdened by that anxious tyranny all such meanings exact as the price of the mature imagination. (pp. 10-11)

To describe completely this movement and counter-movement in its artistic development would take more study and space than could justifiably be allotted here, but what that study could reveal would belong to childhood and the experience of plumbing it recounted by De Jong. A portion of it would relate to Miss Chase's individual closely intuitive understanding of many of the things psychology has to tell and even of some it isn't able to tell.

Many other American writers have realized and used the "capital" for writing which a person can accumulate in his early years. Hamlin Garland realized this when he wrote autobiographically about a somewhat earlier age than the one The White Gate portrays:

The emergence of an individual consciousness from the void is, after all, the most amazing fact of human life and I am going to spend much of this first chapter in groping about in the luminous shadow of my infant world

because, deeply considered, childish impressions are the fundamentals upon which an author's fictional out-put is based. . . .³²

A Son of the Middle Border, just quoted, is a longer, richer, more purposeful autobiography than the essays of The White Gate, but it is less concerned with the inner life of the child and less universal. The White Gate is as little confined by chronology as Mark Twain's early experiences of his Autobiography, but it is far less discursive. In a sense The White Gate is more objective than the early chapters of The Education of Henry Adams, with which it might be compared at least for the impression on a childish imagination of a yellow kitchen floor. The third person objectivity of Adams is focused on matters intellectual but with a detached kind of amusement which betrays more self-interest than the attention to the imagination in The White Gate, which represents the experience of any child sensitively attuned to itself and its world.

Although there is no chronology in The White Gate, there is a kind of development which functions to unify the book even more than the constant elements of family, home, and village. The different experiences are so arranged as to suggest in a general way the growing maturity of the child. In many of the experiences there is a kind of emotional learning which could be completely understood only in retrospect.

Each experience has its own complexity. The author's picture of her "Uncle Hen" is compounded of much more, for example, than the character of the kind, quiet man who worked skillfully with his hands. Related to him, there is also the concrete picture of a doll's bed:

³²Son of the Middle Border (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 4-5.

It was painted red. It had a headboard and a footboard curved like the pieces of Aunt Sa's well-bracket. It had rounded spokes in a row on its sides, and little rockers which turned up at their four ends. And, most wonderful of all, on the top of each of its four posts was a tiny polished brass knob, which proved to be a bell and which rang when it was rocked. (pp. 58-59)

This in the originality of its design makes a special impact on today's reader so accustomed to mass production. In the gift itself there is the suggestion of the attraction the lively little sister Edith must have had with her brave questions for this laconic neighbor. There is also the author's realistic view of herself with her "envious mind" and her interest in the unlovely: "My mother spent hours in opening the boils, after the application of countless hot towels, a disgusting operation which I loved to watch, while Edith screamed in pain and protest" (p. 58).

Running through the whole book is the subdued strain of an ordered way of life. Miss Chase's older sister, Mrs. Mildred Hinckley, calls The White Gate the truest of her books, and reading it one realizes that she meant something more than its factual accuracy. One reviewer sees the whole book in terms of the pattern of life revealed:

Writing with quiet humor and a fine clarity and exactness, Miss Chase conjures up a shimmering and affectionate picture of a pattern of existence whose like we shall not see again. In doing so, she arouses in us a nostalgia equal to her own, and the suspicion that the very simplicity of that pattern and its closeness to the basic stuff of life, must have made it far more nourishing to a child's imagination than the cluttered and complicated life of today.³³

Without denying the validity of that pattern of existence, one can find much in the book which could fall into the pattern of existence of any

³³Dan Wickenden, Review of The White Gate, New York Herald Tribune Books, November 7, 1954, p. 5.

sensitive child growing up. The "glimpses of reality and perceptions of wisdom" (p. 10) which the author has scattered through the book in the same random, unconnected way in which they are likely to occur to a child of these particular years must certainly be repeated in essence in many places and periods of history. At one time, for instance, she says of her mother, "For we had never seen her cry before or known that she could, and the sight of her tears made a lasting impression on me" (p. 40). The child's memory of an incident is not always what it might be expected to be. The experience, humorous in retrospect, of the family cat leaping into a soup tureen full of dinnertime chowder left an impression of the family circle:

What I remember is the instantaneous sight of the faces there, eyes widened, mouths opened, frozen into absolute stillness by horror. . . . I had never known that faces could suddenly become so stricken and still. (p. 41)

The child's experiences teach her many things about life and living, that "everyone must sometimes grow old" (p. 83), that everyone must sometimes, for the sake of others, pretend (p. 78).

One thing the child learns from a number of experiences is that some things can only be discovered alone. One of these was "that one endures, no matter at what price, what cannot be cured except at a greater cost" (p. 160). She was alone when she witnessed "The Birth of an Island." She was also alone when she saw the familiar "tracks of some creatures" as she had never seen them before.

It was their tiny footprints on the snow which held me and made me forget the bitter cold. The footprints were frail and beautiful, delicate marks in patterns of threes. They lay within the otherwise unbroken whiteness, separated, each distinct and perfect. They followed the brook for several feet on either side, then curved away at almost the same

point in a wavering arc toward the dark spruces. I must have seen them a hundred times; yet I had never seen them before. They became for me in those moments a living experience, the entire content of a day, its reality, its only meaning.

I did not, of course, interpret them in such terms or even in ideas. They were simply there as they had never been before. (pp. 117-118)

Only alone could this child, like many others, suffer the terror of a recurrent dream.

The sound of the flight of pigeons, the moving lantern light on a bedroom ceiling, fragrant wood shavings, "red elderberries against gray rocks" (p. 105) are some of the sensory experiences which have enriched the child's world. The lantern light gave her a sense of wonder. The red berries against the gray rocks became attached forever to her desire to write books, in the whimsical way that imagery often has of forming unique relationships.

Not all the child's learning is pleasant. Grasping in her hand a dragonfly which she had watched with such pleasure, she "became one day saddened by truth":

Then with a feeling almost akin to terror, I felt its body, so recently sharp flame in the sunlight, become inert and sluggish and saw that its brilliant colors were fading within the warm, moist prison of my hand.
(p. 158)

Again and again the child's growth of understanding is entangled with a sensory experience, which more than any abstraction marks her memory. Usually these experiences are passive acceptance of what befalls her, but other times they involve the active use of what she is learning. From her grandmother she learned to apply her imagination to the shapes of clouds in the sky: "It was the discovery that one at will could translate clouds

into harbors which excited me as a child" (p. 110).

These illustrations may be enough to show the variety of ways in which the child learned about her inner and outer worlds and what things sometimes drew them together. Miss Chase brings these "adventures in the imagination of a child" so close to the reader that it is easy to forget she is using the medium of words to do it. It is part of her art that she has written the book "in smooth, seemingly effortless prose that comes only from hard work."³⁴ About the total result one can agree with Dan Wickendon: "Brief though it is, and woven from the most fragile materials, 'The White Gate' is strongly evocative, not just of a particular childhood spent in a Maine coast village, but of the magical aspects of childhood anywhere, in any era."³⁵

Wickendon would certainly agree that Miss Chase had come to that universal child who De Jong felt could be found if one went down deep enough into early life. It seems that Miss Chase's unsuccessful effort to find story material there took her so deeply into her early experiences that the result was a remarkably successful work, which reveals the universal child hand in hand with young Mary Ellen Chase of Blue Hill, Maine, at the turn of the century. It is fortunate that she made this discovery of her early childhood at a time when her skill in writing had reached its greatest perfection. Even the fragility of The White Gate is a reflection of the experience it portrays.

³⁴Samuel T. Williamson, Review of The White Gate, New York Times Book Review, November 7, 1954, p. 5.

³⁵Wickenden, p. 5.

CHAPTER XI

RETURN TO REGIONALISM

Although The Lovely Ambition was to follow, The Edge of Darkness in its quiet, lovely way seems to bring a final definition of pattern to the writing, particularly to the fiction, of Mary Ellen Chase. At last she seems to have come to terms with all the interests and influences which have impelled her in various directions during a long career of reading and writing, of studying and teaching literature, and of living as she could best. The many years of relentless work and impetuous energy have finally brought her their reward in a skill of subdued intensity, of sure wisdom, of unfaltering control. She recognizes now what she is able to do. She attempts that and no more in The Edge of Darkness. It may never be considered her best book, but it is likely to be considered her best writing at least by a certain kind of reader. For the writer who is really an artist, Theodore Goodman says, must have "a reader of a certain sort," one who is "willing to submit himself to the minutely close guidance necessary for the enjoyment of an experience requiring . . . tight alertness."¹

The Edge of Darkness, according to Samuel T. Williamson, "is likely to be regarded by many of her admirers as her finest, most proficient literary performance."² There can be, however, only limited enjoyment in The Edge of Darkness for the reader whom Goodman calls "the imageless

¹The Writing of Fiction (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 207.

²Review of The Edge of Darkness, New York Times Book Review, October 27, 1927, p. 4.

thinker,"³ for the whole novel, its characters, ideas, emotions, scenes, moves on its imagery. This is the strongest element of the whole. Lewis Gannett, who has been reviewing Mary Ellen Chase's books for the New York Herald Tribune for many years, has this way of viewing her imagery:

Of all the Maine writers of the last quarter century--and what a galaxy they are!--Mary Ellen Chase writes the most quintessentially coast-of-Maine books. . . . Mary Ellen Chase just breathes Maine air, Maine fogs, Maine surf, Maine traditions, and the murmurs and the memories of the sea coast fill the pages of all her books. . . . Mary Ellen Chase's serene and satisfying book completes a circle. As a novel it is static; it is a distillation of a moment.⁴

The actual time of The Edge of Darkness is a single day, although it moves backwards quite freely to touch recent days lingeringly or days of many years ago more briefly. The day, the one of ninety-year-old Sarah Holt's funeral, is seen, especially in the first section, through the consciousness of Lucy Norton. As a friend of Sarah Holt's for thirty years and as the wife and helper of the local storekeeper, Lucy is in a position to function as the "central intelligence"⁵ in the story. But she cannot be this exclusively, because in her own words, "This funeral belongs to all of us, even the children."⁶ "All of us" refers to the people who lived in the small community known in the novel only as "the cove" although surrounding places are given more definite names.

Sarah Holt is a figure both shadowy and strong, one, indeed, allied

³Goodman, p. 214.

⁴Review of The Edge of Darkness, New York Herald Tribune Books, October 27, 1957, p. 5.

⁵Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, eds., The House of Fiction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 443-445.

⁶Mary Ellen Chase, The Edge of Darkness (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 49.

to the "vein of iron" group of Miss Chase's women characters discussed in earlier chapters here; this is clearly apparent in Sarah Holt's words and actions, and is emphasized as well in the observation of her doctor:

"That's another thing the sea did for those who sailed it.
It put iron into folks so that they could take things the
way she did and not crumple up under them." (p. 34)

Sarah Holt, when she asked to be buried on Shag Island, the now deserted place of her birth, realized that "Things won't be dull for this village on the day of my funeral, Lucy" (p. 207).

One of the unusual things about the day is that it gives the people of this tiny community and a few beyond for this once "a common and consuming interest uniting all" (p. 207). It is, however, the influence of this day on individuals, or couples, or small groups such as the children which is most important, and to this the long middle section of the book called "The Neighbors" is devoted. The funeral itself, which fills the last, brief section of the book, brings most, but, significantly, not all, of the community together in unusual unity and then separates them again to go on their perhaps slightly altered ways, after what the doctor, and then Lucy Norton, have called "the end of an era on this coast" (p. 29). The effect of the funeral on the village and the reason it is used to give at least a thematic unity to the book goes back a long way in Mary Ellen Chase's thinking, for in the novel Mary Peters she states the idea which accounts for the undercurrent of intensity in The Edge of Darkness--"A village with death in its midst is always peculiarly cognizant of life."⁷

Miss Chase has always dealt strongly in images, but she has seldom before been so infallible in her choice and in her placing of them to

⁷Mary Ellen Chase, Mary Peters (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 306.

serve the forward moving purpose of her story--for even "the distillation of a moment" must move to its natural conclusion. She has finally learned to subdue this quality of her writing so that it functions without calling undue attention to itself as it did in many beautiful but perhaps obtrusive or discursive passages in her earlier novels. She has achieved a restraint here which finds her selecting a few images and bending these to her thought and her feeling rather than reveling in the rich flow of them which has marked her earlier novels. Most of the time she is able to do what she has not always been able to do before, to use language self-effacingly. Her images stand forth as images, not as carefully chosen words carefully arranged to produce images, as they in reality must be. There is far less literary flourish here than she indulged in especially in the beginning period of her writing, but often later too.

Idiom is, appropriately, a large portion of the thoughts and sparing speeches of her characters. This is one of the author's rewards for her hard work, for she has not always been able to do this so well. Through this long study of Miss Chase's writing, it has been noted many times that her style has often betrayed the influence of other writers and has even suffered from her own whims. In other words, she has sometimes failed to heed the caution a literary artist must heed to achieve the relationship to his reader described by Goodman: "Conversely, the author's sacrifice of happy spontaneity in composition, his subordination of his own joy in creation to the demands of craftsmanship for truly economical effectiveness in the experience, is the very thing his sort of reader reads him for!"⁸ But Miss Chase's many years of persistence and practice have brought

⁸Goodman, p. 208.

to her writing in The Edge of Darkness, at least in the matter of style, that kind of craftsmanship which entitles it to be considered "modern" (again in Goodman's term). Goodman might never have read anything by Mary Ellen Chase, could not, indeed, have read The Edge of Darkness, but words of his seem appropriate to what she has achieved in that novel:

What we think of as "modern" writing is transparent substance fitted indistinguishably to the contour of thought and the color of feeling and imagery. It is not different from the everyday speech of people who speak well unaffectedly.⁹

Among Miss Chase's other recent books it seems that the writing in The White Gate is also particularly deserving of this adjective "modern." To apply Goodman's generalization to Miss Chase's writing is not to deny it its individuality, of course, for its influences can with some effort be traced and its characteristic propensities discovered. And she still affords her reader the occasional experience further delineated by Goodman:

In a moment's illumination we who have been staring at an illusion, now stare at an apt phrase, or a paragraph magically producing some climactic novelty of its demure simplicity.¹⁰

To take any of these moments out of context for purposes of demonstration is to risk the loss of both aptness and novelty, but a few examples from The Edge of Darkness may be ventured. When the reader does become conscious of Miss Chase's use of language in The Edge of Darkness (and it must be said again that this is less often than in any of the earlier fiction or in any of the non-fiction either, except such of her late books as The White Gate and The Psalms for the Common Reader), it may be just a

⁹Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁰Ibid.

simple, twisting phrase like the one she applies to the backwater people: "The shifting and shiftless ways of the backwater people had long since lost them their school" (p. 177). More often the reader becomes aware of the language Miss Chase uses to express her imagery.

In The Edge of Darkness, young Mary Carlton, waiting for her husband to return with his neighbors from digging a grave for Sarah Holt on Shag Island, reflects, in the fog-filled evening on the fact that although she herself sees in the things around her symbols of her life, her husband "happily for her did not deal in symbols or so much as recognize them" (p. 127). Among the pleasanter symbols of Mary Carlton's life is the memory of sailing with her husband and children "to some island where they would cook their supper, watch the moon rise and sail homeward through its silvery path" (p. 127).

Not all of Miss Chase's imagery is pleasant. In fact, although it is true, as Williamson says, that Miss Chase has written "a story of outstanding beauty,"¹¹ some of the imagery which makes it such does not in itself refer to what is beautiful. At the end of the long day of the funeral Lucy Norton was tired: "Her back ached from her neck to her thighs, and the calves of her legs were as taut and as stiff as anchor chains" (p. 227).

Often the imagery of The Edge of Darkness comes from the very way of life its people lead:

The cove settlement had actually changed very little in these years. Fisherman of the most stalwart breed among that calling are not by nature rovers. Having selected a plot of ground upon which to live and an expanse of water within which to labor, they are likely to cling to both like tenacious barnacles upon rocks. Well aware

¹¹Williamson, p. 5.

of the vacillating, mercurial, unpredictable ways of herring and lobsters, they wait upon these, trusting wisely to the fickleness of inconstancy itself. (p. 79)

This is Miss Chase's way of using imagery to present an idea. The more abstract kind of figurative language with which she closes the paragraph is less typical of her style, but it does indicate that she is making some demand on the reader's "tight alertness" in The Edge of Darkness.

But the foregoing illustrations may seem to separate the imagery too much from the story itself, when in reality it is wholly a part of the story. There are a number of ways, all supported to some extent by the imagery, in which The Edge of Darkness should be viewed to be fully appreciated and evaluated. For all that this is a story beautifully told, it is a story that is quite realistic in a sombre way. On hasty reading, however, the realism might be obscured by the beauty of the language.

Reading The Edge of Darkness, one is reminded of the plea J. Donald Adams makes for a complete realism in American writing, not just a one-sided case:

Today, when words are used more carelessly than ever, one feels sometimes like demanding that the critic define precisely what, in his mind, is the meaning of a word like "realism." The particular term has a multitude of connotations. One of the most confusing things about its use is that it has come to be associated primarily with what is unpleasant, as if the unpleasant were any more real than its opposite! ¹²

"Optimistic realism," a term used by Regis Michaud, seems to characterize Miss Chase's work best, although Michaud does not specifically include her as one of its purveyors. Michaud writes of Willa Cather:

She belongs to that small group of novelists who honor American letters and who are specialists of what may be

¹²Literary Frontiers (New York: Duell, Sloan, Pearce, 1951), p. 111.

called "optimistic realism": Ellen Glasgow, Mary Austin, Dorothy Canfield, and Zona Gale.¹³

Mary Peters, Windswept, The Plum Tree, The Lovely Ambition, and especially The Edge of Darkness might qualify Mary Ellen Chase for addition to this group. One reviewer's discussion of Miss Chase's honesty in The Edge of Darkness seems but another way of arriving at the conclusion that she is a realist, but in an optimistic way:

We hear so much about writers being honest these days that we get to fear that word as a reverse English cliché. "Honest" has come to mean uncompromising in one sense, and overemphasizing the nasty in another sense.

But no one writing today is more honest, in the basic meaning of the word, than Mary Ellen Chase. She refuses to find in her characters more than is there; she refuses to emphasize any nastiness, but she does not fail to see it and point to it. She refuses to overdramatize any situation she creates.

.....

The funeral chapter is perfect, not a word, not an emotion out of place or out of character.

.....

No idyll this, but something good and true--that is the wonder of it.¹⁴

Perhaps it is this something "good and true" which causes another reviewer to call The Edge of Darkness "a parable . . . a wise and lovely tale which is as bracing as Maine's coastal winds."¹⁵ To call the novel a parable is not to deny its regionalism, but to lift its ultimate meaning above the limitations which the term regionalism might suggest. The cove

¹³The American Novel Today (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1928), p. 248.

¹⁴Review of The Edge of Darkness, Boston Globe, October 27, 1957, p. 9A.

¹⁵Review of The Edge of Darkness, Saturday Review, XL (December 21, 1957), 23.

community in The Edge of Darkness represents a very small group of people as communities of today go, but for that reason it is easier to look closely at the relationships among the people in it. The very smallness and the isolation of the place make these relationships, tenuous as they sometimes seem to be, of even greater importance. The fact that there is nothing in this isolation to prevent these human relationships from representing those in all human communities is what makes it possible to see the story as a parable.

It is the parable-like character of the book which makes it appear "as a novel . . . static . . . a distillation of a moment."¹⁶ If by static Gannett means that there is no great conflict of action or emotion which is resolved within the confines of the story, this is right. Yet static does not quite allow for all the suggestion of movement, particularly of an emotional nature, which underlies the whole. One indication of the plotlessness of the novel is that instead of integrating the emotions in it Miss Chase has been able to separate them, and thereby to emphasize that this small community, united as it is on this one day by Sarah Holt's funeral, is first of all a community of individuals. With all her honesty, Miss Chase presents these individuals with the kind of tenderness that aims at understanding rather than judging. But because she separates her characters as individuals the scenes of the story may seem unrelated and each only faintly joined to the whole, like a group of separate packages which are together because they are in one place but which are not likely to be opened and assembled into a functioning whole. One could, on this score, level at Miss Chase a criticism which Heinrich Straumann makes of Willa

¹⁶Gannett, p. 5.

Cather when he notes

. . . a certain tendency towards the purely episodic that occasionally threatens the unity of Willa Cather's novels. It is the price that has to be paid for the high quality of atmosphere in individual scenes.¹⁷

It is the atmosphere of individual scenes which emphasizes the regionalism of The Edge of Darkness, but the scenes are always important because the people in them are important. Perhaps this too is an aspect of New England regionalism, when regionalism is considered a matter of heritage as well as of place. Henry Steele Commager points out in The American Mind, "Two centuries of reaction could not dissolve the Puritan inheritance of respect for the individual and for the dignity of man. . . ." ¹⁸ It is this dignity, allowed to each character, which raises the story to its parabolic dimension. Even the weakest characters have something of value. Trudy West cleans her house and makes herself attractive. Hannah and Ben Stevens know the best time to sing a hymn at the funeral. Dan Thurston cherishes his dog, and also recognizes his responsibility as oldest member of the community. Jim Randall teaches his love of nature to his little girl. All these are but saving graces of lives grim and even desperate in other respects.

As much as each individual stands out for his moment or two of clear light, it is his relationship to others which is shown to be the most vital part of his individuality. To a large extent Miss Chase has been able to show this relationship in brief scenes of action or dialogue. She has long depended on some exposition in the development of her novels, and this one

¹⁷American Literature in the Twentieth Century (New York: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), p. 72.

¹⁸The American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 165.

is not without it, but she has learned to hold her omniscient author's tongue and let her characters do a good deal to explain themselves. A simple illustration is Lucy Norton's answer to her self-posed question of whether Nan Holt would come to her mother-in-law's funeral: "When she left the bedroom and went through the kitchen for a last moment in the sitting-room, she carried another chair with her to add to the twelve already there" (p. 26).

Sam Parker reveals himself in his solitary excursion to Shag Island on the morning of the funeral to bring, for Sarah Holt's sake, some tidiness and sightliness to the old burying-ground. In doing this Sam finds unexpectedly what Commager might call "the long community of life,"¹⁹ as one of Sam's self-addressed speeches discovers:

"I hadn't reckoned until now," he said slowly, watching the frail blue spirals float upward, "that I was doing this for any one except her. I'd thought of it as a sort of token for all she's given me. But I see that I'm doing it for all who once lived here, for the fellow who set these iron pickets and for the men who dug those cellar holes and built the ships. And there's more to it than even that. I'm doing it to stir up the past and all the things it meant once upon a time, to places like this." (p. 64)

Sam Parker's realization is just one evidence of the fact that much of the action of The Edge of Darkness is within the consciousness of some one of the characters. This, of course, accounts in part for the plotlessness: "There is no breathless, swift-paced action--in fact, very little plot at all."²⁰

In the relationship between Nora and Seth Blodgett in The Edge of

¹⁹Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰Williamson, p. 4.

Darkness, dialogue is of interesting importance. In the first place, Nora is shown in her "private monologue," to use Goodman's term, preparing as she has done unsuccessfully many times before, to use speech to break through a grim barrier between herself and her husband. When he comes home late at night with the news of Sarah Holt's death, she is able to make just the slightest beginning with her planned dialogue, but this is enough so that the next day they are able to have some speech together which holds hope for her. This dialogue is of the sort described by Goodman as opposed to the classic kind: "For the sort of dialogue that treats every remark or thought as a unique event of character, we must acknowledge a powerful nineteenth century impetus outside of fiction, in Browning."²¹ In the dialogue between the Blodgetts the next day the things which are said are less important for themselves than for the communication they re-establish between the couple. It is also quite typical of Miss Chase's technique of writing that she uses imagery to absorb Nora Blodgett's emotional response to this: "A heron flew above them, the sun revealing the blue of its wide wings. She thought . . . that she had never seen anything more lovely" (p. 118). A closer connection between sensory feeling and emotion is experienced recurrently by Jim Randall in "an almost acrid sense of distaste" (p. 158) for his wife which sometimes "filled his nostrils with the curious, distasteful pulsation, almost like an offensive smell" (p. 169).

Most of the imagery in The Edge of Darkness focuses on the region in which the story takes place, and this in turn is used to suggest the character of the people who live there. If one studies the map of Maine and

²¹ Goodman, p. 220.

accepts the illusion Miss Chase creates at the same time she emphasizes the fictional character of both, one can see that the place of The Edge of Darkness is probably not located very far from the place of Windswept. When Williamson groups these novels with Mary Peters and Silas Crockett in setting, he is probably not making sharp enough distinctions between the various sections of the coast of Maine. In fact, at the very end of Silas Crockett the family moves farther east along the coast and settles in a village more similar to the area of Windswept and The Edge of Darkness than their native Saturday Cove. Similar as the settings of Windswept and The Edge of Darkness may seem to be, the author uses them quite differently. The place of Windswept always had about it the suggestion of man's escape from the affairs of men, while the place of The Edge of Darkness has the atmosphere of some kind of involvement in the affairs of men in spite of the remoteness.

Man's involvement with nature is a large part of the regional picture. It is also a large part of the humanity of the characters, for the various aspects of nature they live with supply a focus for their internal existence. There is much in The Edge of Darkness to substantiate the comment of Joseph E. Baker in his discussion of regionalism: "But men are also moulded by nature. . . ." ²² Whatever problems the kind of characters emphasized in The Edge of Darkness may suffer from their environment, there is one named by C. G. Jung from which they are saved:

People who know nothing about nature are of course neurotic, for they are not adapted to reality. They are too naive, like children, and it is necessary to tell them the facts of life,

²²"Regionalism: Pro and Con," The Saturday Review of Literature, XV (November 28, 1936), 3.

to make plain to them that they are human beings like all others.²³

The unpredictability of nature is one of the things which the children learn in their search for wild flowers for old Mis' Holt on the late September day of her funeral. One of the group knows where to find red lilies, she says, and is doubted by another, who is only visiting from the city.

"My grandma says there couldn't be any lilies now," Marilyn said. "She says they blossom in July and August, not now at all. It's much too late for them, she says." (p. 185)

But the one who has seen them has learned:

"You can't never tell about flowers," she said quietly. "They do awful queer things sometimes. Those lilies stopped their blossoms in August, an' then a big clump of 'em began to put out some more. You'll see that I ain't tellin' lies." (p. 186)

Another child has learned this also from her own experience:

"That's true about flowers," she said to Elly. . . . "Once when my father took us on a picnic out to Hardtack Island, we found a blue iris in September." (p. 186)

The small evidences of nature fill the book both in fact and in figure although they and other images as well are apt to be "dispersed and distributed." Still there are a few longer passages of more formal description which recall Miss Chase's careful writing in her earlier novels. These are undoubtedly partially responsible for Williamson's application to The Edge of Darkness of such phrases as "under the spell of Miss Chase's serene, choicely phrased prose" and "vividly, photographically real."²⁴ Certainly both of these apply to her picture of the cove beach:

²³"Jung on Freud," from C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe, Atlantic Monthly, CCX (November, 1962), 56.

²⁴Williamson, pp. 4, 42.

Directly below these makeshift shacks and across the narrow road from the village homes lay the beach, backed by the several fish-houses and by piles of lobster traps and buoys between them. The tides ran high and strong here from the open sea which pounded on the jagged rocks of the Head and against the far side of Shag Island. They had long since hollowed out the shoreline of the cove into a deep, concave basin, nearly half a mile in width. Here, before the shingle and shale began, the hummocks of hard soil in front of the fish-houses put forth intricate tangles of weeds and flowers, nettles, sea goldenrod, tansy, asters, purple thoroughwort, and the paler, more frail purple of sea lavender. The shale and shingle sloped sharply to the kelp-entangled, many-colored stones of the beach gravel, which in its turn gave way to the sand and the mud of the flats, where at low water, in the pools left by the tide, gulls struck after mussels or small crabs, herons stood, and sandpipers cast their quick reflections as they wheeled in twittering half-circles. The beach was a disneveled place, given over to hard labor as the skiffs, dories, and scows, now floating free, but twice in the twenty-four hours imbedded or atilt in mud and ooze, gave proof; and yet it had its charm especially on such a miraculous day as this. (pp. 43-44)

Such a description, for all its photographic realism, is part of the static quality of the book. Not all of the environment, however, is so clearcut, so specific, or so static. The larger, more organic forces of nature which just as definitely shape this region and the lives of the people in it have a more active part in the environment--tide, wind, fog, sun, sea are these forces. Some of the author's achievement is showing these in their varying effects, so that one realizes that they are far from constant. There was, for example, Sarah Holt's wisdom concerning the sea:

"I'm not saying the fear's just the same in places like this," Sarah Holt said, "but the sea works in much the same way on people wherever they are if they have close dealings with it. It's out there waiting to make or break you. And after it's been breaking you for weeks on end with fog mulls or contrary winds and giving you back little or nothing for all your work, you get lonesome and afraid and bitter. Men, even in outlying backwaters and on islands, don't cut trap-lines or steal lobsters because they're mean by nature all the time, at least most men don't. They just get panicky, and then the worst in them beats the best."
(p. 87)

But the sea on the beautiful day of Sarah Holt's funeral "gave back all its gifts a thousandfold to those who lived beside it" (p. 220). At the end of that same day Lucy Norton's active mind, which has increased its capacity for reflection from her long years of association with Sarah Holt, sees still other views of the sea:

On some clear day, when the sun, sea, and air were in a certain peculiar relationship, a mirage took place, during which distant points and islands moved so close to their own cove that the whole long, ragged coastline lost its isolation and seemed curiously brought together in one accord and in one place.

She thought, too, of other small communities like their own on other far-distant shores, brought suddenly into the same accord because of the unifying force of the sea and the identity of their common labor. There were remote coves like this in Norway and in Iceland, in England and in Ireland, and on those western Scottish islands where that boy had come from who had played his jig. . . .

Now with the autumn creeping on, this dark headland, this hill to the north, and Shag Island would burn with flames of color among their dark spruces. The wild geese would fly southward, their long black arrows against the sky not always bringing loneliness and dread of the winter. Even in the winter itself, when the few small houses looked unprotected and bare and the sea asserted its dominion over the shore with mighty tides and tempestuous winds, the very defiance and endurance of those who still stayed on, worked over their traps and in their kitchens, and waited, brought forth admiration and wonder that men and women were what they were, insignificant, unknown, and yet invincible in what Sarah Holt had called the circle of life. (pp. 231-232)

Even though this passage is presented as the reflection of Lucy Norton's consciousness, it does not quite escape the essay-like quality that has often been noted in Miss Chase's fiction before. There is in general more art in the essay-like passages of Miss Chase's fiction than there is in the articles she writes for periodicals. In a day when essay-writing was better rewarded, she might have been one of the best of essayists. Furthermore,

the inclusion in fiction of essay passages is not without precedent among the greatest of novelists:

Fiction employs the illusion of physical perceptibility, the characteristic mode of imaginative literature. It does not exclude presentation of ideas: it does not exclude their presentation by directly expository discourse--witness the essay passages, sometimes quite long, in novels by Fielding, George Eliot, Tolstoy, Proust, and Mann. Such sections of discursive prose has sic been made to stand side by side with those of imaginative narration; for the whole fiction, being the comprehensive reality that it is and not being rigidly compartmented from other literary forms like the essay or the drama or the lyric, has included what it has included, and the rhetoricians have had to make the best of it.²⁵

A discussion of The Edge of Darkness would not be complete without some reflection on the view of the past it presents. The whole book which Gannett has called "a distillation of a moment" is that special kind of a moment referred to by J. Donald Adams when he wrote: "The junction of past and present has always proved stimulating to writers."²⁶ Gannett himself sees the relationship between that moment and the past:

But that moment is shaped, the novel makes clear, by a long past; and Miss Chase is not one of the Maine writers who see Maine's glory as finished in the past.²⁷

The past is less pronounced in The Edge of Darkness than in Mary Peters and in Silas Crockett. The chief impact it has on the present is through Sarah Holt, and she, much as she owes to it, is not its servant. She views it realistically:

"But you don't get anywhere by always looking back to the way things used to be," she said to Lucy. "It's the way things are now that we've got to live with. This coast once offered you the earth and on fairly easy terms, too. But now it's charging a heavy price for everything it has to give. And there's some people who just can't pay it." (p. 182)

²⁵Goodman, p. 187.

²⁶Adams, p. 86.

²⁷Gannett, p. 5.

It is paradoxical that in this novel where the past is more remote and the tendency to cling to it less pronounced, there is a hint of grimness over the loss of it which is unmatched in all of the other places in Mary Ellen Chase's writing, where it is perhaps somewhat more glorified but always relegated to its useful place. One cannot be sure whether this grimness is even conscious on the author's part, so hidden is it by the beauty of her writing and the fair view she gives of her characters.

Perhaps this point could be decided by an interpretation of the title. The phrase "edge of darkness" has appeared in Miss Chase's writing before as the Maine name for twilight. Literally in the novel "the edge of darkness" is the time of Sarah Holt's burial, and the novel ends with a mention of it. Joel Norton says, "I've always noticed on this coast how just on the edge of darkness, the sky often holds a long, steady glow of light" (p. 235). Perhaps the day of Sarah Holt's funeral is meant to be seen as the edge of darkness between her life and death with its "long steady glow of light" on the lives of her fellow villagers. There is no specific hint, and the thought seems too gloomy for the tone of the story and for Miss Chase's writing as a whole, but there would be no real reason for not thinking that the end of Sarah Holt's life, called in the book "the end of an era," might mark the transition from a period of cultural light to one of darkness. But this is just a possible meaning and the author doesn't offer much help with it, for she allows Lucy Norton to conclude:

The old days, which Sarah Holt had known and which had made her what she was, had gone; but the coast remained. . . . Its present days, in comparison, were changeless and uneventful; yet they brought their gifts. (p. 231)

While the "edge of darkness," viewed from any angle, must be considered a moment in time, the "lovely ambition" is an idea or a desire of the human

heart, and the author is somewhat more helpful in pointing to its meaning. The Edge of Darkness, 1957, and The Lovely Ambition, 1960, the last two novels Miss Chase has written, present considerable contrast to each other while at the same time they both bear the stamp of unmistakable Mary Ellen Chase style and content. The Edge of Darkness seemed to represent the end product of the evolution of Miss Chase's style; The Lovely Ambition seems to be more the refinement of a style she has always possessed. The Lovely Ambition has stronger ties with all the earlier books Miss Chase has written. Its style is more bookish, perhaps because its characters are so; there is less idiom in it and more rhetoric. In other words, the style is less self-effacing than it is in The Edge of Darkness. One reviewer calls The Lovely Ambition "carefully written."²⁸ David E. Philips comments on its "gentle artistry and muted tones," having first called the author "old-fashioned (the author does seem to regard the writing of fiction as an art)."²⁹ William Hogan finds in the novel "a display of craftsmanship that might embarrass a younger, more publicized generation of novelists if they took time out to read this kind of English prose."³⁰

Not as completely a Maine story as The Edge of Darkness, The Lovely Ambition, which begins and ends in England, takes place largely in a village called "Pepperell, Maine." Lewis Gannett says with some justice that this village is "singularly like Miss Chase's native Blue Hill."³¹

²⁸Review of The Lovely Ambition, The Catholic World, CXCVII (October, 1960), 53.

²⁹David E. Philips, Review of The Lovely Ambition, New York Times Book Review, June 19, 1960, p. 4.

³⁰Review of The Lovely Ambition, San Francisco Chronicle, July 1, 1960, p. 27.

³¹Review of The Lovely Ambition, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, June 9, 1960, p. II.

The chief character of The Lovely Ambition is John Tillyard, an English Wesleyan parson, who accepts a call to a Methodist church in Maine at the very end of the nineteenth century and moves there with his wife and family of three growing children, Mary, the eldest, and the twins, the boy Ansie and his sister, who narrates the whole story fifty years later. It is difficult to summarize the novel briefly and accurately because, as Ruth Blackman has shrewdly observed, "it seems as though Miss Chase did not know where to focus."³² It is as though she had brought together a good many perfectly good ingredients--although some of them have seen service before--and proceeded to mix them quite pleasantly without ever approaching any measure of thorough blending. It is quite possible to agree with Lewis Gannett's bland praise of the book, "It is a pleasure to read and a pleasure to remember,"³³ and at the same time to savor the gentle play, or even malice, in the opening sentence of Philips' review: "The latest nosegay from Mary Ellen Chase's garden of eternal verities is destined to reach a limited and, one might almost suspect, a coterie audience."³⁴

It is strange to think of Miss Chase with a coterie audience when she has so consistently addressed herself to the common reader--and so regularly been received by a popular audience rather than by a sophisticated one. Perhaps Granville Hicks's judgment might better explain the possibility of a limited audience for The Lovely Ambition:

Plenty of readers, for reasons that might or might not be respected, won't make any extravagant claims for it.

³²Review of The Lovely Ambition, Christian Science Monitor, June 16, 1960, p. 11.

³³Gannett, p. 3.

³⁴Philips, p. 4.

It is not by anybody's standards a major novel. But it has some fine moments, some of them radiant. . . . and some of them somber enough.³⁵

Even among the novels of Mary Ellen Chase it is not a major novel--Mary Peters, Silas Crockett, Windswept, and The Edge of Darkness should rank above it.

The retrospective narrative which contains the "fine moments" is inspired by a recurrent dream of a time fifty years earlier. This is the only novel Miss Chase has ever written from the first person point of view, and the use of the narrator helps to give unity to what might otherwise be a more discursive story. After "The Dream," "Saintsbury, Cambridge-shire" portrays the life and family background of the Tillyards in England before their emigration. This, in its own more limited way, is as regional as the longer section devoted to Pepperell, Maine. In between, however, is "The Voyage," which the family makes by steerage. The scene, in this section, of a ship at the turn of the century is made as vivid as, and more realistic than, the two land settings. The phrase "huddled masses" from the Statue of Liberty is used with some humor, and on shipboard is made to include a Mr. and Mrs. Plimsoll and their fourteen children (all with Hebraic names from the Old Testament) who are on their way to do missionary work in the Dakotas. The life of the Tillyards in the small Maine village, which they reach after a journey by train through New England, is drawn against the same rich background of customs and outdoor experiences which have appeared in earlier books by Mary Ellen Chase--Mary Peters, The White Gate, A Goodly Heritage.

It is in Pepperell that John Tillyard, whose best life is within his

³⁵Review of The Lovely Ambition, Saturday Review, XLIII (June 11, 1960), 13.

within his own thinking and who has been lured to America by his love of Walden as much as anything else, realizes something of one of his lovely ambitions. Put simply by his wife: "He's always longed to help people who are unfortunate or sad or troubled."³⁶ The people he does try to help come from the state hospital in Augusta where he has become chaplain. Chief among these is Mrs. Gowan who came several times to visit the Pepperell parsonage. The story of her past is based on a short story which Miss Chase wrote in the thirties, although her character is more fully and more colorfully developed in the novel. Ironically Parson Tillyard's success in making Mrs. Gowan happy enough in real life to give up the makebelieve role of Betsy Ross comes to a reversal when Ansie, the pride of the family, is killed during haying in an accident which involves Mrs. Gowan. As Ruth Blackman wrote in her review of The Lovely Ambition, ". . . the story ends rather inconclusively with a sad accident."³⁷

As usual, Miss Chase's novel has little plot. Even the idea, which one must judge from the title is intended to control the story, is not always very clearly applied to the action. The final brief section represents the return of the Tillyard family to England. The last words in the book by John Tillyard are consistent with the character the author has drawn of him, for he is always the idealist and the intellectual, but the view they give of America belongs more to his thinking than to what the novel has shown of American life. It would probably be a fair assumption that they represented the thinking of Mary Ellen Chase as well:

³⁶Mary Ellen Chase, The Lovely Ambition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 175.

³⁷Blackman, p. 11.

"There's something in America," he said . . . "that I can't find anywhere else. . . . I think it's a kind of respect for the human mind, for what it can and must become. Perhaps hope describes it better than any other single word. I'm not at all sure it's going to last. I don't like all this wealth and prosperity. Perhaps--we can't know--the hope for all men will be swallowed up in the greed of a few. And I've been thinking of what Tocqueville wrote about the danger to a democracy: that complacency and apathy can be even more deadly than actual corruption. I hope America will never become careless and indifferent to her particular ideal of freedom. I hope she won't forget what she really has meant and can mean to countless millions of people everywhere in the world." (p. 287)

Miss Chase takes her title from a poem by Stephen Spender, "I Think Continuously of Those Who Were Truly Great." She quotes the entire poem at the front of the book, but it seems that the most important words for John Tillyard as one of those who have a "lovely ambition" are that he is also one of "those who in their lives fought for life." One way in which he fought for it could be seen in his work at the state hospital. Another evidence of it is shown in his special interest in lambing, which also symbolizes his religious calling. For Miss Chase, the lambing must recall Gabriel Oak and her interest in Hardy.

Part of John Tillyard's interest in life is his interest in the past. And this, indeed, is one more manifestation of a central theme in all of Miss Chase's work. John Tillyard was delighted by a farmer who was one of his parishioners in Pepperell because "He, too, had a feeling for tradition and the long past" (p. 250). John Tillyard, like John Marston in Windswept, is a scholar, and his narrator daughter had this to say of him in that role:

He had his books and, as in Saintsbury, spent long hours with them. All true scholars and thinkers are lonely; yet their loneliness is never that of the egoist, or the thwarted, or the cynical, whose sense of isolation is often embittered by resentment. The solitude which is the lot of the idealist or the visionary knows no anger or resentment. (pp. 138-139)

The particular respect for the human mind which John Tillyard had himself and found in America in his work in the hospital had, necessarily, to be placed in an earlier day than the present, for Miss Chase, while granting a grudging respect, has always been hesitant about accepting the impact of psychology on contemporary life. She would have had to be quite knowledgeable about mental illnesses to place John Tillyard in the present or even to bring him up to it. Even at the beginning of The Lovely Ambition the narrator says about dreams:

I am no authority whatsoever on the nature or source of dreams and am more than willing to yield to the famous psychologists who are. Even the most harrowing anxiety nightmares may, for all I know, be closely related to one's conscious or subconscious wishes and, in spite of their hideous and often humiliating distortions, be truly interpreted as a fulfillment of one's most ardent desires, whether recognized or hidden. (p. 13)

But she, paradoxically, like Miss Chase herself, has her own private understanding and intuition about such things:

I am inclined to wonder, merely on the basis of experience, if certain dreams, especially as one grows older, may not conceivably be grateful evidence of truth and reality in one's past life. (p. 14)

This attitude resembles that of the nurse Emma Davis in The Plum Tree as she follows her own instincts in the care of the ladies at the Home for the Aged. An interest in the type of character who is "unfortunate or sad or troubled" goes back to the beginning of Miss Chase's writing career. For the first guest to come to the Tillyards from the asylum has a penchant for impersonating Roman emperors which is reminiscent of Mr. Livy back in Virginia of Elk Creek Valley.

In contrast to the simplicity, even spareness, of The Edge of Darkness,

The Lovely Ambition is rich in an overabundance of material. There is almost as much of what Gannett refers to as "the variety of religious experience"³⁸ in The Lovely Ambition as there is in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Old Town Folks, which traces the various controversies of thought and practice in post-Revolutionary New England. Both England and America are represented in this discussion in The Lovely Ambition, which sometimes comes close to being just a discussion but at others is translated into characters, incidents, and even, in the case of Mrs. Gowan, influences. These varieties are mainly those of Methodism.

The Lovely Ambition is almost as rich in characters as Windswept. So successful is Miss Chase with the first-person narrator that the reviewers comment, ". . . it is hard to believe that it [the book] is not literally and in detail 'true,'"³⁹ and "if one did not know better one would assume this to be a memoir."⁴⁰ And the other characters are accepted as "beautifully delineated."⁴¹ The reviewer for The Library Journal notes: "This narrative . . . seems to be about actual people, so real are their experiences and characters."⁴² Gannett's comment on Miss Chase's skill in characterization is probably truer of The Lovely Ambition than of any of her earlier novels: "To an extraordinary degree Miss Chase has the true novelist's gift for creating characters, interesting the reader in them, and conveying the conviction that these characters are real people."⁴³

³⁸Gannett, p. 3.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Hicks, p. 13.

⁴¹Review of The Lovely Ambition, Booklist, LVI (June 15, 1960), 626.

⁴²Review of The Lovely Ambition, Library Journal, LXXXV (June 15, 1960), 2454.

⁴³Gannett, p. 3.

This seems to be true of all the characters, even the most minor ones in The Lovely Ambition. Besides the Tillyard family, Mrs. Gowan and the other visitors from the state hospital, and the Plimsolls, there are the parents of both Parson and Mrs. Tillyard; Katie, the Tillyard's English maid; Mrs. Baxter, their American housekeeper; and a good many lesser characters. On the whole they are presented with more humor than is usual with Miss Chase. This is partly the achievement of her many years of practice in her art. It may also be that the limited first person point of view necessitates an external presentation of the characters. The reader is not allowed into their inner lives as has been so often true in earlier novels by Miss Chase. This is one thing which brings Mary Ellen Chase closer to her predecessor Sarah Orne Jewett, with whom reviewers like to compare her. They are usually more ready to note the relationship than to account for it. Perhaps Granville Hicks in his review of The Lovely Ambition has put the comparison the best way it can be put: "Miss Chase not only knows and loves Maine as Miss Jewett did; she has the same sort of feeling for character."⁴⁴

Miss Chase's similar love for Maine has probably been stronger through the years than has her similar feeling for character. The Maine in The Lovely Ambition is the Maine of her childhood and not so contemporary as the Maine of The Edge of Darkness. She acknowledges the earlier creation of Mrs. Gowan but one wonders how much else in The Lovely Ambition was created, on paper or in her mind, at an earlier period. When David E. Philips calls her style "slowly cadenced . . . overseen always by the primly propped figure of Henry James,"⁴⁵ he was, besides being a little extravagant

⁴⁴Hicks, p. 13.

⁴⁵Philips, p. 4.

as he is in his whole review, noting a characteristic of Miss Chase's style which has always been more pronounced than the easier, simpler aspect of her prose which predominates in The Edge of Darkness. Perhaps the style of each is best suited to its subject matter. When Philips also notes of this most recent of Miss Chase's novels, "What may be new is the author's ability to control all the elements of her story and form them into a . . . whole,"⁴⁶ he is not in complete accord with Miss Blackman who questions Miss Chase's success in fusing "disparate elements" and finds that "Miss Chase falls honorably short."⁴⁷

Although the time of The Lovely Ambition is some sixty years ago, and some of the scenes and incidents may, as several reviewers have pointed out, hold nostalgia for some readers, the author does not make a main issue of the importance of the past. It was noted earlier that John Tillyard does have a strong interest in the past, but his interest in the present and future is as strong if not stronger. As his daughter recalled of his Wesleyan tradition: "He loved tradition, it is true, and yet he was singularly free from its holds in any number of other ways" (p. 31). When Parson Tillyard left England to come to America he left a consciousness of the past as evidenced in his surroundings, and in America he had to depend more on finding it in books. The village of Pepperell where "there remained few active memories," "was experiencing an interim between two civilizations" (p. 136). Probably Granville Hicks has pointed to the best evidence of a "usable" past in The Lovely Ambition: "And it does remind us that there was a time when goodness seemed more achievable than it does today."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Blackman, p. 11.

⁴⁸Hicks, p. 13.

CHAPTER XII

A SERIES

Mary Ellen Chase has continued to be productive in her writing since her retirement from teaching at Smith College, and it is impossible to predict what she will bring forth in the years ahead. Right now, however, it seems appropriate to close this study of her work with an appreciation of the three small books she has recently contributed to Houghton Mifflin's rapidly growing "North Star" juvenile series in American history and biography. It is quite consistent with Miss Chase's long interest in and sympathy for childhood experience, and with one of the major themes of her work as a whole--the past has its uses for the present--that she should apply the enthusiasm she has always had and the mastery of style she has achieved through the years to this kind of writing. The subject matter of all of these books, Sailing the Seven Seas, 1958, Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships, 1959, and The Fishing Fleets of New England, 1961, represents familiar interests of hers and she brings to her writing that kind of integrity one naturally gives to best-loved topics. It would not be difficult to believe, in the light of what has heretofore been seen of her expressed and implied views, that Miss Chase would hold with Lillian Smith, a critic of children's literature, that "our modern way of life holds complexity that is inexplicable to a child unless it is approached historically."¹ All three of these books involve, in different ways, the sea, which, also

¹Lillian Smith, The Unreluctant Years (Chicago: American Library Association, 1953), p. 178.

according to Miss Smith, "especially to children, carries with it the spell of the unknown and the unexplored."² Miss Smith is speaking primarily of fiction, and Miss Chase has written non-fiction here, but this does not necessarily change the appeal of the sea unless to increase it for the fact-searching child.

Since the books belong to a series it is important to realize what changes have occurred in the custom of writing series of books for children. Miss Chase's early books for girls, The Girl from the Big Horn Country, 1916, and Virginia of Elk Creek Valley, 1917, were related to each other in a way typical of the traditional kind of series. In those two the same girl was the heroine of both books, and many of the same characters figured in both stories, although the setting shifted. The characteristics of those first books which were particularly Miss Chase's own have been discussed, but besides these there remained certain situations, adventures, and "lessons" which were little more than the stereotypes common to this kind of writing for children. Fortunately Miss Chase quickly outgrew her "series," and gave it up after the second book rather than continuing to the usual great length of many volumes.

²Ibid., p. 135. In justification of the frequent reference made in this chapter to The Unreluctant Years, it must be explained that this book stands as an exception in the great scarcity of sound, substantial criticism in the field of children's literature. Miss Smith's carefully developed thesis is "They /children's books/ are a portion of universal literature and must be subjected to the same standards of criticism as any other form of literature" (p. 7). She proceeds to make application of this in a manner which shows her equally at home in both children's and universal literature. The writer's own satisfaction at discovering The Unreluctant Years was increased by the recommendation of it to her by Miss Virginia Haviland, a children's librarian at the Boston Public Library and a teacher of children's literature at Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts.

The lifeless characters, mediocre writing, repetitive plots, and sentimentality which have customarily made the books of this variety of series "each exactly like the last, except in detail,"³ have given them a generally low literary evaluation. Although Miss Chase rose above the usual level, she did share in some of these faults. But as has been noted earlier, the girls' books were part of a necessary apprenticeship for her. These later books, however, which she has written for young readers are of a different class.

The recent development of a new type of series deserves a better overall opinion than the traditional type. In addition to the basic difference between fiction and non-fiction, there are other distinctions; according to Josette Frank, the new kind

. . . are series only in format and title, but actually deal with different subjects in each volume. The Landmark Books and First Books, each over a hundred titles, as well as several other successful series, have ranged through history, biography, and the sciences to cover an enormous variety of interests. Many of these books, though not all, are well written, some by distinguished authors who are authorities in their particular fields. Their similarity in appearance does not mean that they are all alike, even as to age appeal, but it does give boys and girls that comforting feeling of the familiar which makes a "series" of any kind popular.⁴

It seems to be the aim of the editors of some of these series to make them of sufficient quality to give also to the adults selecting them for children "that comforting feeling" of having chosen well. This should not excuse the lack of exercise of critical judgment, but any lifting of goals and standards is to the good. In the opinion of Miss Virginia

³Josette Frank, Your Child's Reading Today, revised (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 102.

⁴Ibid.

Haviland, children's librarian at the Boston Public Library, the "North Star" series is fortunate to have Miss Chase as a contributor. She has done more than lend her name to it, she has lent her interest as well. The first of her contributions, Sailing the Seven Seas, is structured on autobiographical, at least in the ancestral sense, material. Both Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships and The Fishing Fleets of New England go back to topics treated fictionally in Silas Crockett, 1935.

In one sense of the word Sailing the Seven Seas is the most original of the three because, particularly in the first chapter, it tells the personal experiences of Miss Chase's grandparents at sea. Such incidents as her grandfather's lone rescue from one wreck off the coast of Galway and her grandmother's miraculous escape, but without her trousseau, from another on her honeymoon voyage to Bermuda, make reading which adventure-prone children like. This is material which Miss Chase had used with different focus in A Goodly Heritage. Using the presumed viewpoints of Melatiah and Eliza Ann Chase as a rudderpost throughout the rest of the book, she tells the story of American sailing, especially in the nineteenth century, steering a course between such externals as trade, weather, and American history, and such internals as shipboard responsibilities and habits of officers and crew, and shipboard living and education for a captain's family.

It is the career more than the personal life of Donald McKay which gives form and substance to Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships. It is clipper-ship building and sailing rather than the man which is the book's hero, in many ways its tragic hero. The greatest of McKay's ships are given their separate stories in the book, just as in some instances their

captains have theirs. Shipowners as well as shipwrights are included in the story, and also those episodes of history served by the clipper ships--the American California gold rush, for example, and the British service to Australia. This is familiar material to those interested in the clipper ships, but it is so presented as to catch the imagination of those who are not.

The Fishing Fleets of New England follows quite a direct line of chronological development from pre-colonial days to the present. To keep the story simple Miss Chase has concentrated on cod-fishing, which she considers most basic in the history of this whole New England industry. There are more centuries to this chronicle than there are decades to the McKay biography, but it has more unity, perhaps because the activity receives the author's unrivaled attention. She goes into some historical and practical aspects which would be likely to be least familiar to young readers and, while giving fair treatment to modern mechanization, offers worthy reasons for fishing crews of today to feel nostalgia for earlier customs.

These are Miss Chase's three little books of maritime history for young people--which are not really beneath the interest of older people. In many respects they share some of the qualities of the best children's literature, among them those which children respond to or absorb unconsciously without analyzing or even recognizing in the way adults might. Of these, the use of language, which specialists in children's literature make a criterion of literary worth, is important. But first, there are things about these books that make Miss Chase's contribution to contemporary children's literature close to the center of the present trend.

In a way it is happy coincidence that the kind of writing for young people especially in demand today is also the kind Miss Chase's particular skills fit her to do well. Otherwise, these books would most likely never have existed. Certainly only the most recent of today's adults had this type of literature made available to them in their childhood.

Like many good books for the young these are hard to assign to any particular age group. Martha C. Bentley considers Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships suitable for children in the third to the sixth grades,⁵ but Josette Frank places Sailing the Seven Seas in the ambiguous grouping of Selected Lists of Books for Various Ages and Interests.⁶ When the "North Star" series first appeared, the dust jacket carried this statement: "Although eleven-year olds will find no difficulty in understanding these books, teen-agers and adults will also find them good reading." They all are brief enough, yet substantial enough in content, to be equally suitable for the precocious younger child and for the maturing child who is a slow reader. This matter of age level is, of course, useful mainly as a preface to the discussion of some of the more significant qualities of the books. At least all these three seem to be suitable for readers of the same age. In this day of sharp competition for a child's time, there may be something to be said for the merit of a book that can present its meaning and feeling briefly. In an approximate sense the age which Miss Chase is directing her writing to is that age between childhood and adulthood when a person may very possibly do the most free-choice reading of a lifetime.

⁵Library Journal LXXXIV (December 15, 1959), 3925.

⁶Frank, p. 283.

To classify Sailing the Seven Seas, Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships, and The Fishing Fleets of New England as maritime history is to be accurate without being complete, for there is certainly more to them than a mere repetition of the record, which the term history may suggest. Without going too far afield, it may be worthwhile to look at a few views of what has been happening in this special area of non-fiction for juveniles. It has already been mentioned that much of today's reading for children comes in the form of these non-fiction series books. In introducing a group of reviews of new children's books, Millicent Taylor comments, "Something like a revolution in children's reading began when the publishers saw that history, natural science, and many other aspects of the world would be eagerly absorbed through well-written biographies. The flow of these books for young people continues, and on the whole the quality is high." When Miss Taylor comes to The Fishing Fleets of New England, she calls it an "addition to an already distinguished series of North Star Books."⁷ It was the twenty-eighth of that series. Sailing the Seven Seas three years before was the fourth. A New York Herald Tribune review "Introducing a New Series" said, "The two seafaring books [one of them Sailing the Seven Seas] are splendid, based as they are on reminiscences. Mary Ellen Chase writes beautifully. . . ."⁸

All of these three books are both history and biography, and they represent what Josette Frank refers to when she says, "Both history and biography are most significant to our young people in books in which the past illuminates the present. . . . We have today a wealth of historical

⁷Christian Science Monitor, November 16, 1961, p. 7B.

⁸Book Review, November 2, 1958, pt. 2, p. 14.

chronicles which are neither stuffy nor dull but exciting and vigorously written as well as authentic."⁹ On the other hand, not all of such writing comes up to this level. Fran Martin, writing for the junior section of the Library Journal, complains in "Stop Watering Down Biographies" while she also comments on the series books:

Parents and teachers have egged on publishers in the tremendous boom in biography for children . . . [there is] scarcely a publisher who is not spawning a series at the rate of five or ten volumes a year . . . as biographies they have serious flaws. . . . But the ¹⁰ characters in the series books are all of a pattern.

She is generalizing, of course, and her criticism is not quoted because it applies to Miss Chase's work, but to show the failing of some of the writing contemporaneous with Miss Chase's.

It is difficult to arrive at a clear understanding of exactly what is happening in writing for children today, even though there is some indication that a good deal of it is being done. The comment made in a footnote earlier in this chapter that there is a scarcity of substantial criticism is borne out in one way by the fact that most of the reviews which do appear are extremely short, usually just several sentences each. Lillian Smith makes a very pertinent summary of the problem:

The publishing of children's books has become a profitable field as we see when we find it stands second only to fiction in the number of books of all classes of literature published in any year. When we consider the number of children's books arriving from the press the matter becomes fundamental. There is a real possibility that the fine book may pass unnoticed, or undistinguishable, even if included in an omnibus review, simply because serious attention to children's books is all but absent

⁹Frank, p. 107.

¹⁰Library Journal, LXXXIV (December 15, 1959), 3887.

in contemporary criticism. There is good, bad, and indifferent writing to be found in every field. But what would become of our culture if the fine novel, poem, or play was a matter of indifference to us and was neglected in the critical press, merely because of lack of general interest in that particular form of literary achievement? And surely, the fine children's book in which literature is attained is as valid and as worthy of serious criticism as any other good book.¹¹

That there is not complete indifference to the field of children's books is illustrated by a negative criticism of David Riesman's in "Books: Gunpowder of the Mind." Mr. Riesman has noted the present trend in informational writing for children and is concerned about its restricting influence on our culture. He implies that this trend toward informational reading is an evidence of a turning away from the greatest riches books can hold:

The fact is, however, that books, whatever their liberating power in society as a whole, can be used, of course, in nonliberating ways. For instance, a child can be forced into slavery to print through the fanaticism of parents or pedagogues. . . .

But few are the American homes today, or schools and colleges where these patterns still prevail; on the contrary, both home and school seek to come to terms with life at its most unbookish (just as many books for children--and TV shows, too--are not in search of fantasy, but in search of documentary detail).¹²

While it is true that much of children's literature which might be ranked highest from a critical point of view is fantasy, not all children have the creative imagination to respond to it. It is a fact that not all children have liked Alice in Wonderland or Wind in the Willows. Not all

¹¹Smith, pp. 33-34.

¹²In A Collection of Readings for Writers, ed. Harry Shaw (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 187.

children have liked the books which have been awarded the annual Newbery Medals, which are given each year to "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children." Elizabeth Nesbitt in an essay about the Newbery Medal Books, called "The Test of Recollection," points this out:

There are some books which create a world so universal that any child may enter it. There are others which create a world that only certain minds may enter. Both kinds may have distinction, but that distinction is independent of the extent of popularity.¹³

The real world portrayed by informational writing is more universal for children than the one of fantasy. Indeed, "some children . . . want no traffic with fantasy or fiction. These children, it seems, want nothing but truth." Josette Frank makes a distinction among the books which serve the needs of "those children who hunger for information":

Some are compendia of pure information, useful to the child who is bent upon getting the facts in any form while others have been touched with the writer's imagination not to the point of distorting fact but rather with the purpose of inviting the young reader to come and find out.¹⁴

Certainly Miss Chase's books fall into this last classification. It seems that it is just here that her books make their particular contribution to the children's literature of today. If some children are unable to enjoy the pleasures of the imagination found in fantasy and some other fiction, certainly they ought to have such reading as they can enjoy presented with integrity, good style, and some kind of imagination. While not making a plea for the mediocrity which the ideals of democracy sometimes produce, one cannot dismiss, as easily as Meindert DeJong seems to, the child who

¹³In Newbery Medal Books: 1922-1955 (Boston: Horn Book, Inc., 1955), p. 441.

¹⁴Frank, p. 113.

is unable to respond to every demand of imagination. When Mr. DeJong speaks of his own writing "being . . . classified as being for special children," he rejoins, "Special children? But aren't all children special? Special or clods. And who writes for clods? Clods have no childhood; they have television."¹⁵ Even if one has to admit that some children grow up to be clods, it seems harsh to condemn them to that category at the start. With the right kind of sustenance it seems that such a fate might be avoided for many of them regardless of their varying capacities.

When Lillian Smith wrote "Books of Knowledge" as her last chapter to The Unreluctant Years, she summarized her judgment of such books in this way:

In general, there are three ways of writing books for children whose purpose is to inform. One writer may have information as his sole aim. Another, in giving information, also interprets the subject of his books. Still another (though this is rare) writes a book which not only informs and interprets but which is, in addition, literature.¹⁶

Perhaps today she would be less strict in her qualification about the rarity of the last, for a good many books of this nature have been written in the decade since The Unreluctant Years was published, and many of them are considered of high quality. Josette Frank observes of the class of book to which Miss Chase's three belong:

Recent years have seen a great upsurge of books about history, real people and places. To ask of historical books that they be authentic and truthful is not enough. A book of history, whether fiction or non-fiction, must have the breath of life in it. It will be most useful to

¹⁵"Acceptance Paper," Newbery Medal Books, p. 438.

¹⁶Smith, p. 181.

young readers if the period and the people it deals with are presented in relation not only to their contemporary world but also to their significance for our own times. Books about the past can, so to say, foreshadow the present.¹⁷

As has been said, Miss Chase's contributions to the "North Star" series have the advantage of dealing with the sea, a topic appealing to young readers, perhaps because it is "a world," in the words of Rachel L. Carson, "that, in the deepest part of his subconscious mind, he [man] had never wholly forgotten."¹⁸ Besides the sea, these books deal with American history, a field which some serious writers for children think holds many literary possibilities. Walter Edmonds expresses a view on this topic:

The country's story is greater than any of its incidents, any of its heroes, and we American writers have one of the great stories of the world to tell, if we have the wit to tell it truly. . . . This present that some of us get so het up about is less than the wink of an eyelid of the face of time. The past is as alive as we are. There are times when we even seem to fall behind the past. . . .¹⁹

This view of Edmonds about the value of the past coincides quite closely with the one which from the early years has been a major theme, variously expressed, of Miss Chase's writing. At the close of A Goodly Heritage she referred to "converting whatever had been of value throughout a relatively stable past into capital for a new and unstable present" (p. 294). While all that these books for juveniles portray may not seem to represent a stable past, they may in one way or another be considered "capital" for their readers.

¹⁷Frank, p. 43.

¹⁸The Sea Around Us (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 15.

¹⁹"Jack Darby on Writing Books for Children," in Newbery Medal Books, p. 223.

The form that the "capital" of the American past takes in Miss Chase's books for young people is designated in an omnibus review by Henry F. Graff, which includes Sailing the Seven Seas. He writes, "American mythology, of course, continues to grow. . . . This charming little volume will show our youngsters a kind of frontiersman and frontierswoman they ought to know."²⁰ And this is what James Daugherty, without using the term mythology, was calling for in his Newbery Acceptance Speech:

. . . a third significant group in the contemporary juveniles is the American scene. Certainly the vast and fantastic epic of America is a rich storehouse of true stories that make the legends of Greece and old Europe seem trivial and tame. Instead of a handful of bad-tempered legendary national heroes, we have a vast lore of very actual saints, desperadoes, romantics, inventors, robber barons, Indian chiefs and railsplitters . . . a whole race of writers and artists is needed to sing and image it.²¹

Daugherty might have added to his lore the heroes who went to sea. In Sailing the Seven Seas was "a kind of frontiersman and frontierswoman," even though their frontier was reached by ship. The unique details of the family material used in that book make a small private contribution to the larger American mythology. Mythology is a term much used in recent years, and variously used as well, but Graff, when he used it, must have had the broadest of traditional usage in mind.

Certainly all three of Miss Chase's books, written as they are for the near-adolescent reader, portray times and situations belonging to the age, mentioned in connection with Miss Chase's early books for young people which Henry H. Murray called "the adolescence of our nation."²² Miss Smith

²⁰New York Times Book Review, November 2, 1958, p. 49.

²¹In Newbery Medal Books, p. 187.

²²"A Mythology for Grownups," Saturday Review, XLIII (January 23, 1960), 11.

notes the common educational belief that there is a parallel between the chronological development of the child and the total development of mankind, concluding, "As his knowledge increases he begins to see in proportion the world of today as it came from the past."²³ Surely the adolescent reader is best able to comprehend with sympathy the freedom epitomized in our history by the period which these books mainly represent. Murray wrote, ". . . the mythology of adolescence, stressing freedom without qualifications or conditions, constitutes our national religion."²⁴ If we have a mythology peculiarly ours, these must be part of it: the fishermen who "did not like to take orders,"²⁵ the shipwright who "never yet built a vessel that came up to my own ideal,"²⁶ and Tiah Chase, who "could see, from his school bench and desk, white, wind-filled sails cutting the distant horizon where sky and open sea met."²⁷ This is not the mythology which is invented story shaped into symbolic truth, but the mythology which is facts made to hold the significance of an acceptable truth larger than they are.

It would be beyond the scope of this present study to test the accuracy of every fact in these volumes, but there is no obvious indication that they fail to meet the most basic requirement, as Josette Frank puts it:

Of books in this category, children have a right to expect that they shall be authentic and accurate

²³Smith, p. 178.

²⁴Murray, p. 11.

²⁵Mary Ellen Chase, The Fishing Fleets of New England (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 63.

²⁶Mary Ellen Chase, Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 187.

²⁷Mary Ellen Chase, Sailing the Seven Seas (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 16.

beyond the shadow of a doubt, clearly written and well-organized. Pictures and diagrams, carefully conceived and faithfully illustrating the text, serve a most useful purpose in clarifying difficult concepts for the young reader.²⁸

There are, in fact, a number of internal evidences of the authenticity of Miss Chase's writing. On appropriate occasion she quotes a source, giving authority to her statement and at the same time introducing the young reader briefly but suggestively to historical topics which might later reward his exploration. In discussing early American trading in Sailing the Seven Seas, she quotes Samuel Pepys in 1660, "There is also the very good news of 4 New England ships come safe to Falmouth with masts for the King" (p. 45). It is an interesting sidelight on Miss Chase's perennial practice of New England thriftiness in the use of her materials that she uses this same reference in The Fishing Fleets of New England: "We know upon the good authority of the famous English diarist Samuel Pepys that in the year 1666 'four ships from New England' brought such mighty tree trunks to the port of Falmouth in Dorsetshire" (pp. 55-56). In The Fishing Fleets of New England, she also quotes one of the Pilgrims, Edward Winslow, and Captain John Smith, about whom she says:

It has long seemed to me, and to many others as well, that Americans have not given Captain John Smith the recognition he deserves, as one of our earliest pioneers, map makers, explorers, and, above all else in its long effects, fishermen. (pp. 28-29)

Other ways of handling her material indicate her integrity toward it. For example, when she formulates a supposition she makes it clear that that is exactly what she is doing; when there is little exact source material available she acknowledges the fact, but tries to do as well as she can to

²⁸Frank, p. 114.

create something tangible for the reader's imagination. In The Fishing Fleets of New England, she writes:

We unfortunately know far more about the beds, chairs, and tables constructed for colonial homes than we know about our first boats; in fact it is difficult from lack of accurate information to discover precisely what these fishing vessels were like. (p. 72)

But accompanied by an illustration of the Sparrow Hawk is a description which she introduces this way:

In the Peabody Museum in Salem, however, is a model of the ketch Sparrow Hawk, which brought forty passengers from England in the year 1626 and which probably was very similar to most of our first boats in fishing. (p. 72)

In each of these three books can be found simple explanations of terms, phrases or words, which contribute to both exposition and narrative. The strong feeling Miss Chase has for words has been noted many times. Here some attention to them is most justifiable, but she shows caution where integrity demands it. She qualifies the following explanation, for instance, by using the verb seems:

The characterization of his craft, which he /Captain Andrew Robinson/ called a schooner, seems to have come from the New England colloquial term "scoon," which originally meant the swift skipping of a stone across water. (p. 74)

On the other hand, she does have some dictionary authority behind her explanation. Webster's New World Dictionary gives this derivation for the word schooner: "[New England word scoon, to skim or skip upon the water]".

Another indication, less specific but none the less telling, of her integrity toward her subject matter is her willingness to include the unpleasant side of life in these earlier times, even though the general tenor of her attitude is to see all that was in its favor. A few chapter

titles may serve to illustrate this although individual examples are numerous. The Fishing Fleets contains a chapter on "The Dangers of a Fisherman's life." Sailing the Seven Seas has one called "'The Sea's a Rough Teacher'" and another "All Sorts of Sailors." Donald McKay is far from being a story of success unmingled with failure.

There is, of course, a kind of information where fact is tempered by interpretation or evaluation, and about which it is impossible, and perhaps not necessary, to be "accurate beyond the shadow of a doubt." The young person who happens to read Miss Chase's Donald McKay and another book called Clipper Ship Days, and notes a discrepancy in the two statements which follow here has begun to develop the skills of history-reading required for mature understanding. It will do the child who may be keen enough to observe the difference no harm to ponder a way to reconcile two such views as these on the first relationship between Donald McKay and Enoch Train. Miss Chase reports:

The meeting at Newburyport of Enoch Train and Donald McKay, though almost forgotten now after more than a century, was truly one of the most important events in American maritime history. One of the two was a man of wealth and ambition; the other shared the ambition, but by no means the wealth. One had determined to found his new line of passenger packets to England, a line which should compete favorably with those already well established in New York; the other knew more about their building than any man in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Both in their separate ways were men of imagination though that of the Scotsman was of far more lofty and idealistic quality than that of the shrewd Yankee merchant and shipowner. Finally each was quick to see in the other the realization of his vaulting ambitions.
(p. 94)

John Jennings, who wrote the Landmark Book Clipper Ship Days, put it this way:

Up in Boston, Enoch Train was trying to get his Liverpool

Line started. Since he was operating on a shoestring, he could only afford to deal with unknown builders. Among them he found a young man whom nobody had ever heard of before, named Donald McKay. Train persuaded McKay to build the Joshua Bates. After that Donald McKay found he had all the work he could handle. . . .²⁹

Both of these quotations add interpretation to facts. And there are other more definite measures of interpretation in each of Miss Chase's group of children's books. Interpretation, it will be remembered, as well as information makes the second way of writing "books of knowledge" for children according to Miss Smith's analysis.

It has been emphasized that all these books treat one portion or another of American maritime history. Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships is obviously biography, although as the reviewers discern, it "is really more history than biography,"³⁰ and "Rather than a biography of Donald McKay, this is a well-written, spirited saga of the rise and fall of clipper ships as epitomized in the career of McKay, their finest designer."³¹ If one looks at the book as a biography, one is aware of the missing material which might make it more completely biographical, but it would not have been desirable for the author to distort or strain the material at her disposal just to make it so. And as she made Tiah and Eliza Ann Chase the measures of the other material included in Sailing the Seven Seas, so she makes Donald McKay the measure of the material on the clipper ship era. Furthermore, the young reader would not wish the same amount

²⁹Clipper Ship Days: The Golden Age of American Sailing Ships (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Landmark Books, 1952), p. 92.

³⁰Ellen Lewis Buell, Review of Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships, New York Times Book Review, January 31, 1960, p. 32.

³¹Martha C. Bentley, Review of Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships, Library Journal, LXXXIV (December 15, 1959), 3925.

of biographical analysis as an adult. These three books all bear witness to Miss Smith's observation: "Biography and history are often so blended in children's books that they are intermingled in children's minds as well. A child likes to identify himself with some character in a book he is reading."³² Although single figures or events do not dominate the narrative exclusively or long, there are enough of both in each of these books for the needs of the child reader seen by Miss Smith:

Writers of history for children have recognized that a child's interest is in men and events, rather than in the growth of political and social institutions. . . . Abstract conceptions of the truth in regard to historical characters and events can only be grasped by him when presented in story-telling form.³³

There is the suggestion of a good deal of action in each of these books, although the events are not closely related to each other. In Donald McKay the most spectacular events are the voyages of the various clippers, with their exciting runs, sometimes record-breaking, sometimes competitive, sometimes dramatic because of obstacles. Besides the stories of wrecks in Sailing the Seven Seas, there are such stories as that "of a cleverly halted mutiny on board the clipper ship Challenge" (pp. 140-144), and the suggestion of numerous other events, which, true to a characteristic of style long employed by Miss Chase, are catalogued rather than developed:

There were numberless things to be savored in every port from Cadiz to Canton by all boys and girls who sailed the Seven Seas. There were visits to other ships at anchor, sometimes from home, sometimes from England where they heard their own language spoken in an accent strange to them; shopping in crowded bazaars and market places; odd games to watch, played by children unlike themselves and

³²Smith, p. 186.

³³Ibid., p. 185.

yet the same in their excitement; in China, rides in rickshaws, and in Honolulu, bathing in white surf on miles of white sand. From London Pool, where the river Thames widened to receive ships from half the world, they might go to the Tower of London or to Hampton Court to see history live again. When the ship waited overlong for her new cargo, there were sure to be longer excursions by coach or by railway to cities which land-children of their day could never hope to see, Paris or Athens, Rome or canal-cut Venice, or into the towns and villages of Sicily (pp. 160-161)

The events of The Fishing Fleets are largely generalized such as "the ways and methods of fishing," both old and new, although the author occasionally uses specific references drawn from Captains Courageous by Rudyard Kipling. The dangers of the fishing life discussed in their own chapter become almost events in Miss Chase's vivid depiction. In fact, she does use some brief illustration, as when she draws an incident from her own experience to show the danger of fog and collision before the days of radar:

One night, when we were passing through the fishing grounds off Cape Race, I awoke to the perceptible slowing of our ship, then to the stilling of our engines, and to the constant bellowing of our foghorn. At breakfast the steward told me that we had struck and sunk a fishing schooner and that in the hope of rescuing her crew we had lowered boats and done all that we could.

"Which was precisely nothing," the steward said. "Those poor fellows haven't the ghost of a chance when they get in our course, God help them!" (pp. 127-128)

The men like the events are sharply emphasized. If Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships portrays more of the career than of the personal life of the man, this is no less than what the author has set out to do. If even as a builder he seems to take second place to what he built, the personal spirit which impelled him never quite sinks below the surface of the narrative.

Captain Melatiah and Eliza Ann Chase of Sailing the Seven Seas have

already been referred to, but the book contains other people briefly but vividly sketched. They vary in nature from "a tough old tar called Rats" to two little daughters of the Captain's. It is one of Miss Chase's skills to make a strong suggestion to the imagination with the use of a few details. Of Rats, she records:

Rats, like most sailors, had a girl, or could easily procure one, in every port; and his vivid, if crude imagination had conceived the fancy of having the symbols of these various sweethearts pricked out in blue, purple, and red dyes upon his broad back. Each symbolic likeness was placed within a small square, and together these converted Rats' back into a checkerboard of birds, beasts, and fishes. One of his sweethearts apparently suggested a snake; another, a spider; a third, a robin redbreast; a fourth, a shark; and a fifth, a gentle deer. Each was thus assured preservation, even in this odd form, so long as Rats might live! (pp. 138-139)

This is the author's reminiscence of her aunts:

I used to imagine my aunts, Ann and Abby, walking there or riding up its steep, narrow streets on the backs of small donkeys. On the wall of our spare bedroom in Maine were portraits of both, actually painted in Cadiz when they were five and seven years old; and although they were hardly dressed for riding, each being in a low-necked dress, one in pink, the other in blue, with pantalettes of white lace showing beneath their wide skirts, I could never quite separate them from the Cadiz donkeys which they rode, my grandmother said, in the brilliant Spanish sunlight. (pp. 159-160)

Even in The Fishing Fleets of New England, which is the least biographical of the three books, there are men for the readers to identify with. Sometimes they are just the categories of men who have certain chores among the fishing crews; sometimes they are individual men, briefly encountered, such as the old Gloucester fisherman who went at the age of ten to the Grand Banks with his father. He told Miss Chase:

"The plain fact is . . . that I was a high-liner by the time I was seventeen. Fishing is tame enough in these days. It can't make boys into men as it used to when I

was young. There's nothing like a dory adrift on a high sea to make a shaver grow up into something stout and strong. Take it from me, lady! I learned to be a fisherman in the hard way, not on one of these pleasure cruisers they call fishing boats today." (p. 107)

The use of this last quotation represents the second way listed by Lillian Smith of writing information books for children, for it shows the aim of interpretation as well as that of information. The interpretation expressed by the old fisherman is one generally subscribed to by the author herself. From Miss Chase's previous writing it would be reasonable to expect that when she came to write these three short books of maritime history (and biography) for young people, she would make a distinct attempt to indicate some of the values which she believes the past has for the present. It should be remembered that apart from any explanatory interpretation of the past, the mere selection of those facts of the past she chooses to write about is in itself a kind of interpretation. It does not seem illogical to apply to the relatively simple task Miss Chase engaged in, in writing these books, the truth which Edward Hallett Carr applies to the work of the historian: "The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which is very hard to eradicate."³⁴ Miss Chase's inclusion of the words of the old fisherman quoted above not only indicates the old man's nostalgia and her sympathy (for as the New York Times Book Review judges, "The author's heart is with the fishermen of earlier days"³⁵), but it also prepares for one explanation for the decline

³⁴What Is History? (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), p. 10.

³⁵Review of The Fishing Fleets of New England, New York Times Book Review, November 16, 1961, p. 48.

of fishing she makes later on. In all fairness to Miss Chase it should be stated that she recognizes "that, by and large, the innate character of our fishermen remains" (p. 174); but she sees the loss as well as the profit in the change in the ways of doing things:

The relinquishment of sail to steam and gasoline, of trawl lines and dories to the nets of otter trawlers, has in its own way added to the decline of the fishing industry even as, at the same time, it has contributed to its growth. In spite of the fact that a female codfish of average size drops in spawn some three to nine million eggs each year and, therefore, might seem exhaustless in supply of fish, no supply, however huge, can be safe against the dragging of great nets across the bottom of the sea. (p. 143)

This is one bit of interpretation which helps to explain the present in relation to the past. The Fishing Fleets of New England as a whole offers special interpretative values. As Miss Chase says in the foreword: "For the cod, not only the most plentiful fish but the humblest in terms of food, has a great deal to do with the history of New England, which means to a large extent the history of our country as a whole." The Fishing Fleets covers a long period of time, longer than either of the other two books, and has the special value of continuity:

Let us, then, dedicate our first pages to them [earlier mariners] and turn our thoughts and our imaginations backward some four or five hundred years to foreign men and boys, long since dead, who, with incredible courage began the history of codfishing off our forbidding North American shores. (Foreword)

This view of a long past should help to move the young reader toward a mature realization, which René Dubois presents as a necessity of our present-day society - that is an appreciation of "the historical continuity of mankind--the fact that human existence transcends the life of each particular individual."³⁶ In her treatment of the earliest part of her

³⁶Mankind Does Become Better," Vogue, CXL (September 1, 1962), 219.

chronicle, Miss Chase brings another realization to the youthful reader.

There are in our past lost, unrecorded events and experiences which can never become part of our history:

When one looks back upon those faraway voyages to North American waters and tries to visualize what must have happened during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in those many tossing ships, it seems a pity that so little is known about the fishermen who made up their adventuresome crews. It is said that one Frenchman, named Scavelet, made forty voyages to Newfoundland after codfish before the year 1609. If he did, he clearly did not think his courage and discomfort worth recording, even though, which is improbable, he had been able to write. Information about the explorers is scarce enough; nothing whatsoever remains about the daring and the peril of the thousands of fishermen drawing up the teeming riches of the seas. Their tiny vessels are phantoms and they themselves are but ghosts. (pp. 21-22)

This raises a feeling toward the unknown of the past similar to that found in Windswept--except that here the unknown is man's activity and in Windswept it is nature's.

In contrast to the long continuity of the past, in spite of change, which is brought to the young reader's understanding in The Fishing Fleets, is the fleeting, temporal quality of the brief but glorious era depicted in Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships. The author makes clear the various reasons for this, without lessening the imaginative appeal of the excitement of the time. In fact, she shows that the brevity is almost a necessary concomitant of the greatness. This was certainly true of the individual ships. For example, "The Flying Cloud paid a heavy price for her splendid achievements. . . . Repairs were constantly necessary; yet there were certain repairs which could never be made because of weakening and damage to the whole fabric of the ship" (p. 115). Speed and weather made the lives of McKay's ships either necessarily short or ignominious in the end.

Miss Chase emphasizes this by her comment on the Lightning:

. . . after fifteen years of valiant service she burst into sudden flame in the harbor of Geelong, Australia. She went to her death in a roar of fire from the combustion of her cargo. It seemed at least a fitting way for her to leave the seas through which she had so magnificently torn like the thunderbolt in the upraised hand of her figurehead. (pp. 168-169)

One of the chief interpretations Miss Chase offers her young readers is the understanding that Donald McKay, whose life encompassed the clipper ship era, not only had the genius to contribute largely to the era but the endurance to see its passing: "Donald McKay, framed of pioneer stuff from the beginning and always in spirit an adventurer, wasted no time in mourning the steady passing of sail from the seas" (p. 174). Perhaps one of the best things the child could learn about the present as it has come from the past is the inevitability of change. This is an understanding offered in Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships as well as a recounting of McKay's "unsurpassed contributions not only to American enterprise and industry but to American idealism and art" (p. 176).

It is interesting to note that for all their general similarity in subject matter, the chief interpretative value of each of these books is quite different from those of the others. Sailing the Seven Seas indicates very clearly the richness of experience a child can gain from contact with a multiplicity of places, people, and conditions of life. Even with the mobility of our life today, few children have quite the variety of change enjoyed by the children of sea captains. Perhaps none of them have the double advantage of this change plus the security of a constant home which the sailing ship supplied. The many things these children could learn Miss Chase points out, but no individual experience could equal the overall

realization which was always a possibility:

From such sights as these there crept into their minds, as perhaps into the minds of no other boys and girls of their time, the understanding that the whole world was one, bound together by the measureless waters over which they sailed, each country and each island dependent upon all others for their well-being, their happiness and their hope. (p. 162)

And this is the kind of understanding perhaps even more needed today than it was then. If a child can have it even to a small extent in his reading, the author has added the quality of interpretation to that of information.

But there is a third quality sometimes present in informative writing for children which, according to Miss Smith, added to the other two, makes a third kind of writing--one which she called literature. That quality is the most pertinent to this study and at the same time the most elusive. How is this quality of literature achieved? Miss Smith suggests that it may be through style: "A fine book has something original to say and says it with style." After seeming to dismiss style: "Originality and style are words that are used loosely by many reviewers of books," she returns to it as a necessary literary ingredient:

Style describes the different ways writers have of expressing what they want to say. Each of us forms his sentences differently and the personality of the writer is woven into the manner of his expression. When a writer forms his sentences so that the order and the choice of words is distinguished he attains literary style.³⁷

This is something the child does not directly realize, although the adult can:

. . . one kind of enjoyment which adults find in children's literature is an enjoyment of which children are seldom consciously aware; a pleasure in the order and beauty of words, in the art of

³⁷Smith, pp. 36-37.

writing that is similar to listening to music or looking at a picture.³⁸

Josette Frank makes a similar demand of literature:

Perhaps we might attempt this working definition: a literary work is one with depth and pace and style. Its sentences are well constructed, its language moves in a cadence pleasing to the ear, its words are skillfully selected to evoke images.³⁹

The kind of pleasure which both of these critics of children's literature are asking for is the one Miss Chase has always taken in her own writing. It has never been absent from her work, but her skill in producing it has become more deft with her years of experience, and her exuberance, while never lessened, has become more controlled and increasingly less liable to the danger of becoming ludicrous by going beyond the mark. In fact, the skill which Miss Chase lends most distinctively to this type of writing for children is the ability to remain honest with the facts and yet ebullient with enthusiasm for what those facts represent. Perhaps in a way that characteristic of her style which creates exuberance and enthusiasm is better adapted to the youthful reader than to the adult who may have allowed his interests to become jaded or too sophisticated.

Miss Chase's choice and use of words show her special love for them. While usually simple and direct, she never appears to talk down to her young readers. She understands of the child what Josette Frank has stated: "He doesn't even mind a few big, unfamiliar words if the action of the story or his interest in the information (in a book of nonfiction) carries him past these words without having to pause."⁴⁰ Miss Chase often helps

³⁸Ibid., p. 17.

³⁹Frank, p. 48.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 102.

her young readers with vocabulary. When she speaks of the New England fisherman as "a curious anomaly," she adds "or puzzle."⁴¹ And there is no necessity for a reader to pause over a word such as commodity in this passage:

What American ship merchants and shipmasters were searching after, in those years when the end of the war had brought a new opportunity for safe trading by sea, was some new commodity which would appeal to the wealthy classes in China and the sale of which would yield a substantial, if not, indeed, a fabulous profit. This commodity they found in the skins of fur-bearing animals, the seal, the beaver, and especially in the black, shining pelts of the sea otter.⁴²

Or what need would there be to pause over dunnage when the first mate tells the new sailors to "get below and stow away your dunnage"?⁴³

The author's love of the beauty of words is recorded in her listing of some of the clipper ships:

These insolent, defiant, saucy clipper ships caught the imagination of the seafaring world one hundred years ago. . . . Their very names suggested their power of swift flight through fair or stormy waters: the Lightning, the Flying Fish, the Sea Witch, the Winged Racer, the Meteor, the Snow Squall, the Cyclone, the Shooting Star, the Herald of the Morning, the Sovereign of the Seas.⁴⁴

Her language is always attuned to making her subject vivid, whether she chooses a precise, new word or a familiar idiom. She remembers what is sometimes easy for the adult to forget, that the cliché to the adult can be fresh and stimulating to the child. Even to the adult ear her reference to the captain and "his motley crew"⁴⁵ may carry a note more germinal than

⁴¹Chase, Fishing Fleets, p. 68.

⁴²Chase, Sailing the Sevens Seas, p. 48.

⁴³Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 132.

hackneyed. New or old in the child's vocabulary, what more exact word could be used to designate the desired response to a first mate's discipline than alacrity: "each of his commands must be executed with alacrity and good humor."⁴⁶ A familiar expression can take freshness from the special appropriateness of its meaning, its emphasis, and even its cadence, as do the simple words "and his alone" when referred to the shipmaster: "The responsibility for his ship's safe passage and for the safety of all on board was his moral obligation and his alone."⁴⁷ Underneath her love of the fitness, the beauty, and the rhythm of words, Miss Chase also has a sense of the humor that can come from play with words. Mentioning the delivery of a baby as the occasional emergency responsibility of the chief officer, she adds, "With an agitated father trying helplessly to help him."⁴⁸

The child who has already become attentive to words may sharpen his discrimination in response to the distinction implied between two such similiar words as confusion and chaos: "They [the carpenter and the sailmaker] shared the same task of bringing order out of confusion or even chaos."⁴⁹ Finally, the child, perhaps reading something by Mary Ellen Chase for the very first time, will not know when she writes of Donald McKay, "Time and chance, and change may have been his enemies; but they were never his conquerors" (p. 149), that her use of the simple, familiar words time, chance, and change is a special echo in her writing and that it strikes back particularly to her novel Silas Crockett, but he may

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 120.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 27.

recognize that in this context the author is asking for a consideration of these terms which he has never stopped to give them before. If not, his ear at least may be pleased by the balance of the sentence.

Beyond the use of individual words and expressions are the larger units, the combinations of words, which give order and cadence, and thereby further meaning, to language. There is considerable variety in the ways Miss Chase employs the rhythms of language to fit its meanings. The staccato opening of the following brief passage subsides at the end to a more regular rhythm, just as the ship itself is finding its own rhythm.

Now the pilot has dropped over the side. His boat is bearing him ashore. The ship is already on her own, her sail taut before the wind. The countless masts and spars crowding the waterfront become each minute less distinct. All land sounds have faded away. The water, so lately soiled with drifting harbor rubbish, now is deep and clear, curling backward from the sharp bow to rush aft in long swells and join the tumbling wake beyond the stern.⁵⁰

Usually the pace of the language in all of these books is free and easy, whether it is slow or fast, rough or smooth, but occasionally it is deliberate and almost ponderous, as in this remarkably balanced sentence, which must move slowly if the impact of the thought is to be felt:

The lowly codfish and his daring captors were responsible for the shipbuilding in which, after the Revolutionary War and in the century following, we were to excell all other nations, just as both were responsible for our first ventures in trade, which was eventually to extend to the four corners of the earth and make American ships and seamen known throughout the world.⁵¹

Probably only the most thoughtful of young readers would stop long over this sentence, but here is for them the kind of language which they must

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 102-103.

⁵¹Chase, Fishing Fleets, pp. 57-58.

become familiar with if they are going to learn to cope in their thinking with the complexities of comparisons.

Choice of words and rhythm together contribute to the vividness of Miss Chase's language. Of this, imagery is a large factor. Her images can fall singly with a peculiar aptness, or in the catalogue so familiar to her style, or as ingredient of action. It is interesting that when she uses color, it is often a compelling part of the whole image. Perhaps only the reader who has seen their counterparts can have the proper mental pictures of these two brief images, used separately: ". . . they watch the thick brown ropes cast off"⁵² and "he . . . packed his blue sea chest";⁵³ but the brown and the blue are as necessary to the authenticity as to the imagery. Another descriptive contribution to authenticity is her skill in creating the sense of space, here of space closed in, with an economy of details:

When he [young Donald McKay] left the schooner and walked along South Street in search of a lodging such as his slender purse could afford, he moved under an arcade actually formed by the bowsprits of great ships at their berths. Those long, slanting bowsprits extended over the cobbled street and even over the sidewalk, their tips almost touching the upper windows of the warehouses. (p. 13)

The catalogue is particularly useful to Miss Chase in each of these books because she is covering a lot of material in a few pages. As a rule she achieves more movement than such a seemingly static device might be expected to allow. In the one from Sailing the Seven Seas "of goods for barter with the Indians, whose reputation for savagery was well known," the

⁵²Chase, Sailing the Seven Seas, p. 99.

⁵³Ibid., p. 35.

number of items and the brevity of their names hasten the reader to the end of the list. Even the sounds of the words contribute to the speed of the passage:

These goods included rolls of bright cotton cloth, beads, nails, a variety of tools, axes, gimlets, saws, and chisels, jew's harps and other simple musical instruments, sheets of bright copper, pocket mirrors, cheap rings and bracelets, hundreds of pairs of shoes, blankets in vivid colors, tin kettles--in short every type of gadget, trinket, or toy which might appeal to the natives of those faraway coasts.
(p. 49)

Another passage, in which there is movement of action as well as of prose, creates a kind of excitement which comes partially from the tension between the author's pleasure in the accuracy of her imagery and her distaste for some of what she sees. This comes from her description, in The Fishing Fleets, of modern methods of handling fish and is only a portion of a long passage:

The otter trawlers, once they have steamed into harbor from perhaps a week's haul of cod from the Banks of Newfoundland, tie up in a long line beside the pier and begin to unload their hundreds of thousands of pounds of cargo. Mammoth trucks back into place ready to receive from crane-run sluiceways an incredible stream of slippery gray cod, or perhaps of haddock or ocean perch. These are dipped from icy holds of the trawler in huge canvas buckets and dumped first into revolving wire scalers, which strip the scales from them before they are ready for the high sluiceways.

The clash and whir of machinery are everywhere. Engines of every sort sputter, throb, backfire, hum, purr. Men in oily coveralls bend above them, watching, adjusting them, turning a wheel here, moving a lever there, increasing or decreasing speed. Belts stretch and creak, slacken and tighten. The uproar is never-ending; the smell of gasoline, smoke, dirty harbor water, and fish mingle in the air.

The brown boards and bricks of the pier run with slime, blood, water, and bits of ice. The spate of fish is borne aloft up the dripping sluiceways to fall in silvery masses into the waiting trucks, which will bear them to the nearby processing plants. Some fall from the laden sluices either

to be gathered up by men with pitchforks and returned, or to be seized by the thousands of gulls which hover in clouds above the pier, line the roofs of the buildings like heavy white fringe, recklessly balance themselves on cranes or sluiceways in the hope of grabbing a fish, tear at those dropped on the pier, swoop over the boats themselves. Their constant squawks and cries add to the bedlam of noise. By the curb of a crammed alleyway, which runs between two lines of processing plants, a dejected old horse stands, hitched to a rickety junk wagon. He looks as out-of-place as he perhaps feels. Every now and then a scrawny cat slinks about, intent on a morsel of fish. (pp. 161-164)

This description continues to the end of the processing. This long quotation and the shorter ones too might be replaced by others equally appropriate, not, of course, to substitute adequately for the achievement of each book as a whole, but to hint at least at the way Miss Chase fulfills the third qualification Lillian Smith sets up for the best "books of knowledge" for children, those which may be considered literature, and for a good book generally: "The quality of the writer's idea, the soundness of the structure he builds, and the expressive power of his language, will to a great extent determine the literary quality of his book."⁵⁴ That the "expressive power" of a writer's language will not be recognized as such by the young reader does not negate the possibility that he will in his own way be responsive to it and that it will become a part of his growing experience with language. Lillian Smith says at the end of The Unreluctant Years: "The child may not know that it is the spirit of literature that moves him when he takes these books to his heart, for his sense of criticism has not matured though his appreciation is high" (p. 190).

Mary Ellen Chase has been quoted as referring lightly to her own recent writing as Mother Goose in comparison to the more scholarly accomplish-

⁵⁴Smith, p. 36.

ments of one of her friends.⁵⁵ Whatever might be said about the relative values of Mother Goose and scholarly works, it is to be hoped that Miss Chase will continue to help to swell the "great upsurge of books about history, real people and places"⁵⁶ presently being written for children. Perhaps the vigor of her long-held interests, the knowing enthusiasm of her concern for what has gone before us, and the classical turnings of her prose will enable Sailing the Seven Seas, Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships, The Fishing Fleets of New England, and whatever else may follow to do what Lillian Smith says informational books seldom do, that is "survive the generation they were written for" (p. 180). Aside from their values for young readers, these books also serve to say again to one interested in Miss Chase's work as a whole that to know significant aspects of the past both sympathetically and intellectually is one of the best ways to extend one's horizons even to the future.

⁵⁵Miss Chase's oldest sister, Mildred Chase Hinckley, told the writer this when she visited the Chase family home in Blue Hill, Maine, in June, 1962.

⁵⁶Frank, p. 43.

EPILOGUE

Although Mary Ellen Chase continues to write industriously, there is little indication that she will produce anything in the future which is at sharp variance with what she has written in the past. Her most recent book, The Psalms for the Common Reader, 1962, shows her using the conventional beauty of her style at its best and the personal vitality of her enthusiasms to please an audience which she has held for many years. She has long identified herself with certain interests and values which this dissertation has tried to make note of and which many of her readers have come to expect and appreciate in her.

These interests and values, on the whole, represent the tried and the familiar. If, as some feel, the greatest art reaches ahead of the crest of its age to create what is new and unknown, then her art cannot be called great. In its essence, it stands for those "ideas and ideals"--to use a phrase of Miss Chase's own--which have proved themselves worth repeating from the past of our common experiences and worth remembering from our personal experiences. Miss Chase's particular perspective on the past of all varieties is that it should not be foolishly cherished but that it should provide enjoyment or some insight into what is happening to oneself and to the world of the present. She knows wisely that if mankind is not to return to its primitive state, it must be told again and again of the ways by which it has arrived at the present. If it is a lesser part to do this retelling than to prophesy the future, it is still a necessary function of maintaining our culture.

Although Miss Chase has a strong concern for the past, there is a

newness or an air of discovery in her approach to it, whether she is finding new facts and ideas about her familiar New England past, as when she learns from his private papers the kind of man Parson Fisher was, or whether she is discovering a past she has not known before, as Ellen Pascoe does in Dawn in Lyonesse, or as the Wescott children do in Mary Christmas, or as she knows the young readers of her recent "North Star" books may.

But Miss Chase is never aloof from her own time. Perhaps one of the virtues of the present-day custom, or necessity, of many contemporary American writers to teach college students as well as write is that it keeps them from isolation. Miss Chase usually judges her age as she finds it with traditional New England shrewdness. She is not afraid to say in her essays, or to imply in her fiction, whatever she is critical of. But she has too much common sense and too large a share of the optimism many American women authors have shown, to belabor her criticisms. She has always protested against the fads and fancies which have sprung up around new theories of education, child care, or psychology. But although her attitudes are placed in the most conventional of novelistic settings, nothing could be more in keeping with the concerns of American society of today than her interest, for one example, in those whose capacity for full enjoyment of life has somehow been limited, particularly by their social environment. This is a theme of long standing in her writing, but its fullest implications are to be found in the novels The Plum Tree and The Lovely Ambition. She sees the need for recognizing human dignity even in the lives of those who have been crippled by their lack of natural gifts or by what life has done to them, and she portrays this sympathetically and imaginatively in the creation of some of her characters.

There is another tie which joins Miss Chase to the world of today even more firmly than she might ever have thought at the time of some of her writing, particularly her fiction. Place to her is largely, but not entirely, a matter of natural environment. She relishes the total impression of this as well as the sharp, fragile details of it. Place as she realizes it sometimes has a strong element of the past in it and sometimes a mood of oldness which cannot be related to history. Windswept shows this, for example, and so do parts of This England. The sense of place is, of course, nothing except in its impact on the human consciousness, and today there seems to be a concern among biologists--perhaps one should say ecologists--, sociologists, psychologists, and even practical men such as city planners about the danger of separating people from the kind of environment which can give them a natural understanding of and adjustment to the realities of life. Much of Miss Chase's writing shows that she has known all along how important to people a secure relationship to their environment is. This need not be an entirely comfortable relationship, but it should be a relationship with knowledge in it, as a book like The Edge of Darkness suggests.

Miss Chase's career as a teacher has kept her interested in the experiences of the young. The age which spans the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence has figured often in her writing and she has needed no study of child psychology to inform her that childhood experiences of the right kind can offer security for the rest of life in spite of change. The child's need for a link with the past she shows in The Silver Shell. The influences of early years at sea on the rest of life is one of the themes of Mary Peters. The beginning of wisdom in random sensory experiences,

"like the flashing of fireflies in the darkness," is demonstrated in The White Gate.

Sensory impressions and the images which catch and hold them for the imagination have played an important part in Miss Chase's writing from the beginning. She has always liked them and the words that represent them as well, as she has often found occasion to say. Her skill in making them serve specific purposes of her meaning has developed with her years of experience. Some of her imagery suggests symbolic meaning, as she sometimes, in not too subtle a fashion, leads her reader to see. More important is the understanding implicit in most of her writing that imagery can form a large part of experience. Sometimes the total impression of a single novel of hers, with a large element of imagery in it, has been called by reviewers that of a parable.

Usually Miss Chase expends her greatest writing skill on her use of imagery, not only on the choice of words which she loves so well, but in the fluency and rhythms of her prose. Her use of language usually follows conventional patterns. Her tendency is to preserve and carry on the achievements of English prose in the past, but she has learned to adapt these to a simplicity appropriate to her day. There is much in her writing to hearten those who may be fearful about what they consider the degenerating standards of modern English. Beauty, dignity, exactness, and vigor are the usual characteristics of her conventional style.

Mary Ellen Chase's career has been motivated by a familiar American tradition--that of hard work. From the beginning she has been glad to sell what she has written. While she was working to write what would sell, and, therefore, be read, she was also improving such skills as her natural

talent had given her. The vitality of her energies has made her output fairly large, and her work as a whole is a respectable contribution to American letters. This study of all her work has revealed, besides the recurring ideas and traits of style, an uncommon tendency to reuse her materials, but perhaps that is no more than the natural habit of thrift which is one aspect of her New England heritage.

In a different day Miss Chase might have been an outstanding essayist, but twentieth-century tastes influenced her to direct much of her effort to the novel. All of her novels except the two very short ones, Dawn in Lyonesse and The Plum Tree, are set in Maine. The story of The Plum Tree might have taken place in Maine, and Dawn in Lyonesse as well as the first short section of The Lovely Ambition are as regional in their English way as all the rest of Miss Chase's novels are in their New England way. Because setting, in its variations, is the strongest element in the novels, they must be considered regional. Like the best of fictional regionalism always, they show broader meanings within their special context. New England sailing in its heyday and in its decline, the social life of sea-coast villages then and later, life in isolated areas, both inland and coastal, are all turned to account in the novels with both authenticity and imagination. And such settings are peopled with believable characters. The best of Miss Chase's men characters tend to be thoughtful and sensitive, and on the whole less vigorous than her women, who have endurance, understanding, and practicality. Her children and her eccentrics often have charm. Although most of her novels contain a negligible amount of action, they do have many moments of dramatic tension.

Among her non-fiction books, This England adds to her English region-

alism, and A Goodly Heritage, Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson, The White Gate, and the three juveniles in the "North Star" series increase the body of her New England regionalism. In A Goodly Heritage, which may well become a classic in the social history of New England, Miss Chase treats the ideas and customs which Blue Hill, Maine, had inherited from the long century of its history and was still sharply aware of at the turn of the present century. The authenticity of A Goodly Heritage takes the form of many lively illustrations, appreciations, and interpretations. Its narrative has more drama and more humor than some of her fiction. The same kind of subject matter is presented from a more limited point of view in The White Gate. Less appealing to some readers, perhaps, but more valuable in its contribution to the historical records of New England is the biography of Jonathan Fisher. The material for this was provided by an effort of community proportions, largely in the decoding of Fisher's private papers. Miss Chase has worked the material into a book which is both an interesting life study and a unique historical document.

Miss Chase's books of popular commentary on the Bible have at least their origin in her New England heritage, for it was in her childhood that the Bible became important to her. Although her critics acknowledge the soundness of her Biblical scholarship, it is her interest in the ancient Hebrews as a people and in their books as literature, and her literary skill in communicating this interest to her readers which have distinguished her four books on the Bible.

The one contribution she has made to formal literary scholarship has been the publication of her doctoral dissertation, Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel. It will probably always have a place in Hardy bibliographies.

Most of Miss Chase's short stories and essays have been written for popular periodicals. Few of the stories have any great literary merit. If none of these essays should survive, as some of them deserve to, at least a small part of Miss Chase's reputation may rest on the accomplishment as an essayist which she displays in The White Gate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, J. Donald. Literary Frontiers. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951.
- Aldridge, John W., ed. Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-1951, Representing the Achievement of Modern American and British Critics, with a foreword by Mark Schorer. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1952.
- Bailey, Robeson, ed. Techniques in Article-Writing. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1947.
- Boynton, Percy H. America in Contemporary Fiction. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940.
- _____. "Two New England Regionalists," College English, I (January, 1940), 11-23.
- Brooks, Cleanth. The Well Wrought Urn. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947.
- Brooks, Cleanth, and Robert Penn Warren. Understanding Fiction. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959.
- Brown, Herbert Ross. The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860. New York: Pageant Books, 1959.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. What is History? New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.
- Carroll, Gladys Hasty. "New England Sees It Through," Saturday Review of Literature, XIII (November 9, 1935), 3-4, 14, 17.
- Carson, Rachel. The Sea Around Us. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Chase, Mary Ellen. "Abby Aldrich Rockefeller," Good Housekeeping, CXXX (June, 1950), 56-57, and CXXXI (July, 1950), 56-57.
- _____. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950.

REVIEWS

Christian Century, LXVII (September 27, 1950), 1137.

New York Herald Tribune Books, September 24, 1950, p. 4.
(Agnes Rogers)

New York Times Book Review, October 1, 1950, pp. 5, 33.
(Elizabeth Janeway)

Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII (October 21, 1950), 20, 32.

Survey, LXXXVI (November, 1950), 520-521. (Gertrude Springer)

____ "The Abundant Life in Books," Ladies' Home Journal, LIII (September, 1936), 19, 50.

____ "The American Father Attends His Wife's Reunion," Scribner's Magazine, XCVI (July, 1934), 22-24.

____ "An Ancient Democracy to a Modern," Common Ground III (Winter, 1943), 65-71.

____ "Are Parents Afraid of Their Children?" Ladies' Home Journal, LIV (March, 1937), 60, 62, 64.

____ "Are You Afraid of Snakes?" Reader's Digest, LXIX (July, 1956), 45-48.

____ The Bible and the Common Reader. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944.

REVIEWS

Canadian Forum, XXIV (February, 1945), 264-265. (John F. Davidson)

Catholic World, CLXI (June, 1945), 275-276.

Christian Century, LXII (January 24, 1945), 112.

Boston Globe, November 29, 1944, p. 30.

New York Times Book Review, December 24, 1944, pp. 1, 14.
(Sigrid Undset)

Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (January 13, 1945), 14.
(Willia McClung Evans)

Yale Review, XXXIV (Summer, 1945), 745-757. (Amos N. Wilder)

____ The Bible and the Common Reader, revised edition. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952.

____ "A Candle at Night," Collier's, CIX. (May 9, 1942), 17.

____ "Christmas Is a State of Mind," Reader's Digest, XXXV (December, 1939), 39-40.

____ "Concerning Old Things-- and New," House Beautiful, LXIX (January, 1931), 52.

____ "Confidences of a Lecturer," Commonweal, XVIII (May 26, 1933), 100-102.

____ Constructive Theme Writing for College Freshmen. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929.

____ "Courtesy on Wheels," Atlantic Monthly, CXCVIII (October, 1956), 78-79.

____ Dawn in Lyonesse. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938.

REVIEWS

Catholic World, CXLVII (May, 1938), 251-252.

"A Healing Beauty" (Review of Dawn in Lyonesse), Commonweal, XXVII (March 18, 1938), 585. (Olive B. White)

Boston Evening Transcript Book Reviews, March 5, 1938, p. 1. (Olga Owens)

New York Herald Tribune Books, March 6, 1938, p. 3. (May Lambertson Becker)

Saturday Review of Literature, XVII (March 12, 1938), 6. (Theodore Purdy, Jr.)

Times Literary Supplement, August 13, 1938, p. 529.

Yale Review, XXVII (Summer, 1938), viii. (Helen MacAfee)

____ "The Dean of American Essayists," Commonweal, XVIII (August 18, 1933), 384-386.

____ Donald McKay and the Clipper Ships. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959.

REVIEWS

Christian Science Monitor, November 5, 1959, p. 5B.

Library Journal, LXXXIV. (December 15, 1959), 3925. (Martha C. Bentley)

New York Times Book Review, January 31, 1960, p. 32. (Ellen Lewis Buell)

____ The Edge of Darkness. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1957.

REVIEWS

Boston Globe, October 27, 1957, p. 9A.

New York Herald Tribune Book Review, October 27, 1957, p. 5.
(Lewis Gannett)

New Yorker, XXXIII (November 30, 1957), 237.

Saturday Review, XL (December 21, 1957), 23.

____ The Fishing Fleets of New England. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1961.

REVIEWS

Christian Science Monitor, November 16, 1961, p. 7B. (Millicent Taylor)

New York Times Book Review, November 19, 1961, p. 48.

____ "The Garment of Praise," Scribner's Magazine, LXXVII (October, 1925), 422-432.

____ The Girl from the Big Horn Country. Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1916.

REVIEWS

Boston Evening Transcript, February 23, 1916, p. 25.

Literary Digest, LIII (July 8, 1916), 80-81.

Nation, CII (June 29, 1916), 708-709.

____ "The Golden Age," North American Review, CCXLI (March, 1936), 135-147.

____ The Golden Asse and Other Essays. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929.

____ A Goodly Fellowship. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939.

REVIEWS

Boston Evening Transcript, November 11, 1939, Section 3, p. 4.
(Constant Churchyard)

Catholic World, CL (February, 1940), 630-631.

Commonweal, XXXI (December 22, 1939), 207. (Helen C. White)

Christian Science Monitor Weekly Magazine, December 16, 1939, p. 11.

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 26, 1939, p. 3. (George F. Whicher)

New York Times Book Review, November 19, 1932, p. 6.

Saturday Review of Literature, XXI (November 11, 1939), 6.
(William Lyon Phelps)

_____ A Goodly Heritage. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932.

REVIEWS

Catholic World, CXXXVI (January, 1933), 505.

Commonweal, XVII (December 7, 1932), 165. (George N. Shuster)

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 20, 1932, p. 7. (Robert P. Tristram Coffin)

New York Times Book Review, November 27, 1932, p. 10.

Saturday Review of Literature, IX (October 29, 1932), 204.
(Arthur Train)

_____ "Head and Hands Working Together," Common Ground, I (Autumn, 1940), 3-6.

_____ His Birthday. Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1915.

_____ "How Four Girls 'Discovered' Maine," Ladies' Home Journal, XXXIV (May, 1917), 18.

_____ "I Like the Younger Generation," Ladies' Home Journal, LVI (December, 1939), 21.

_____ "The Islands Lose a Friend," Outlook, CXXXIII (February 21, 1923), 365-366.

_____ Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948.

REVIEWS

New York Herald Tribune Books, October 24, 1948, p. 3. (Henry Steele Commager)

New York Times Book Review, November 7, 1948, p. 4. (Perry Miller)

Nation, CLXVII (November 27, 1948), 612.

____ "A Legacy from My Childhood," Parents' Magazine, XXVIII (August, 1953), 31.

____ Letter to the writer, dated April 9, 1957.

____ Life and Language in the Old Testament. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955.

REVIEWS

Booklist, LII (November 15, 1955), 113.

Christian Century, LXXII (November 9, 1955), 1304-1305. (Louise Pettibone Smith)

Library Journal, LXXX (November 1, 1955), 2503. (Ruth Tubby)

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 6, 1955, p. 5. (Marvin Lowenthal)

New York Times Book Review, November 13, 1955, pp. 5, 42. (Ellery Sedgwick)

____ Look at America: New England. By the Editors of Look in Collaboration with Mary Ellen Chase. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947.

____ Look at the U.S.A. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955.

____ The Lovely Ambition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960.

REVIEWS

Booklist, LVI (June 15, 1960), 626.

Boston Herald, June 19, 1960, Section IV, p. 3. (Alice Dixon Bond)

Catholic World, CXCVII (October, 1960), 52.

Christian Science Monitor, June 16, 1960, p. 11.

Library Journal, LXXXV (June 15, 1960), 2454.

New York Herald Tribune Book Review, June 19, 1960, p. 3.

New York Times Book Review, June 19, 1960, p. 4. (David E. Philips)

San Francisco Chronicle, July 1, 1960, p. 27.

Saturday Review, XLIII, June 11, 1960, p. 13. (Granville Hicks)

_____ "Marigolds," Harper's Magazine, CXXXVIII (May, 1919), 819-825.

_____ Mary Christmas. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1926.

REVIEWS

Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, June 12, 1926, p. 2.

New York Herald Tribune Books, May 9, 1926, p. 19.

New York Times Book Review, May 16, 1926, p. 24.

_____ Mary Peters. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934.

REVIEWS

Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, September 29, 1934, pp. 1-2.

Canadian Forum, XV (January, 1935), 156-157. (W. A. Breyfogle)

Catholic World, CXL (January, 1935), 503.

Christian Century, LI (October 21, 1934), 1378-1379.

Commonweal, XXI (December 21, 1934), 239-240. (Geoffrey Stone)

New Republic, LXXX (October 21, 1934), 344. (Hazel Hawthorne)

New York Herald Tribune Books, September 30, 1934, p. 3.
(Robert P. Tristram Coffin)

New York Herald Tribune, September 25, 1934, p. 15. (Lewis Gannett)

New York Times Book Review, September 30, 1934, p. 3.

Saturday Review of Literature, XI (October 6, 1934), 160.

Survey Graphic, XXIII (November, 1934), 563.

_____ "The Massachusetts Review, An Evaluation," Massachusetts Alumnus, IX (Spring, 1962), 7.

_____ "Memorial Day 1900," Ladies' Home Journal, LXXIV (May, 1957), 230.

_____ "Mrs. Gowan Gives Notice," Atlantic Monthly, CXLIX (May, 1932), 611-619.

_____ "Must America Live in Fear?" Coronet, XXXIV (July, 1953), 19-23.

____ "Old-Time Christmases in Maine," Ladies' Home Journal, LIV (December, 1937), 28, 54-56.

____ Parson Fisher House. Blue Hill, Maine: Jonathan Fisher Memorial, Inc., n. d.

____ "A Pinch of Snuff," North American Review, CCXL (June, 1935), 122-143.

____ "Pitfalls of a Perfectionist," Coronet, XL (September, 1956), 46-48.

____ The Plum Tree. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949.

REVIEWS

Catholic World, CLXX (December, 1949), 313. (Mary Sandrock)

Christian Science Monitor, October 27, 1949, p. 15. (Margaret Williamson)

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 27, 1949, p. 4. (Joanna Spencer)

New York Times Book Review, October 16, 1949, p. 4. (Nona Balakian)

New Yorker, XXV (October 15, 1949), 134.

Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII (December 17, 1949), 26. (Catherine Meredith Brown)

____ The Psalms for the Common Reader. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962.

REVIEWS

Boston Herald, April 15, 1962, p. 88. (Edward Wagenknecht)

Christian Science Monitor, May 7, 1962, p. 9. (Millicent Taylor)

Library Journal, LXXXVII (March 1, 1962), 979.

New York Herald Tribune Books, March 18, 1962, p. 12. (Sidney Kaplan)

New York Times Book Review, March 18, 1962, p. 12. (Liston Pope)

____, ed. Readings from the Bible. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952.

REVIEWS

Library Journal, LXVII (September 1, 1952), 1394-1395. (Louise R. Miller)

New York Times Book Review, December 21, 1952, p. 11. (Chad Walsh)

____ Recipe for a Magic Childhood. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951.

____ "A Return to Constancy," Harper's Magazine, CXXXVII (November, 1918), 846-855.

____ Sailing the Seven Seas. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958.

REVIEWS

Horn Book, XXXV (April, 1959), 138.

New York Herald Tribune Book Review, part 2, November 2, 1958, p. 14.

New York Times Book Review, part 2, November 2, 1958, p. 3. (Henry F. Graff)

____ "Salesmanship," Pictorial Review, XXXI (July, 1930), 9.

____ "Sarah Orne Jewett as a Social Historian," in The World of Dunnet Landing, A Sarah Orne Jewett Collection, ed. David Bonnell Green. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962.

____ "She Misses Some Goals," Life, XLI (December 24, 1956), 23-25.

____ "'She's Had the Doctor!'" Atlantic Monthly, CLI (June, 1933), 726-732.

____ Silas Crockett. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935.

REVIEWS

Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, November 16, 1935, pp. 1, 3. (Dorothea Lawrence Mann)

Christian Science Monitor, November 12, 1935, p. 20.

Commonweal, XXIII (December 13, 1935), 191. (Robert P. T. Coffin)

Forum, XCV (January, 1936), v.

New Republic, LXXXV (November 11, 1935), 146.

New York Herald Tribune, November 12, 1935, p. 17. (Lewis Gannett)

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 17, 1935, p. 20. (Mary Ross)

New York Times Book Review, November 17, 1935, p. 1. (Stanley Young)

North American Review, CCXLI (March, 1936), 153-155. (Herschel Brickell)

Saturday Review of Literature, XIII (November 6, 1935), 5.

Times Literary Supplement, January 4, 1936, p. 13.

_____ The Silver Shell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930.

REVIEWS

Cleveland Open Shelf, November, 1930, p. 132.

Saturday Review of Literature, VII (December 6, 1930), 442.

_____ "'Sorry, We Can't Afford It,'" Good Housekeeping, CXXXI (November, 1950), 54, 152, 154, 156.

_____ "A State of Grace," House and Garden, XCII (August, 1947), 89, 145.

_____ The Story of a Village and a Tradition. Blue Hill, Maine: Rowan-trees Pottery, n. d.

_____ "Sure Dwellings," Harper's Monthly, CXXXIX (November, 1919), 869-876.

_____ "Taxi Driver 63," Delineator, CXXVIII (February, 1936), 12-13, 52.

_____ "Thanksgiving Manners," Woman's Day, November, 1962, pp. 41, 132.

_____ This England. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936.

REVIEWS

Christian Science Monitor, November 24, 1936, p. 18.

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 29, 1936, p. 5. (Esther Cloudman Dunn)

New York Times Book Review, November 8, 1936, p. 14.

Springfield Daily Republican, December 11, 1936, p. 10.

_____ Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel, Foreword by Joseph Warren Beach, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1927.

_____ "Time to Oneself," Yale Review, XXX (Autumn, 1940), 128-140.

_____ "Upland Pastures," Atlantic Monthly, CXXIX (May, 1922), 651-658.

_____ Uplands. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927.

REVIEWS

Atlantic Monthly, CXL (September, 1927), n.p. (Theodore Morrison)

Boston Evening Transcript Book Section, August 20, 1927, p. 4.

Independent, CXIX (September 24, 1927), 311.

New York Herald Tribune Books, September 11, 1927, p. 16.

New York Times Book Review, August 14, 1927, p. 7.

Saturday Review of Literature, IV (October 15, 1927), 223.

_____ Virginia of Elk Creek Valley. Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1917.

_____ "The Virtue of Living Fully," House and Garden, CIV (September, 1953), 126-127.

_____ "What Do You Expect of College for Your Daughter?" Ladies' Home Journal, LIII (August, 1936), 15, 77-78.

_____ "What Has Happened to Common Sense?" Coronet, XXXVL (May, 1954), 21-25.

_____ "When You Go Home" Coronet, XXXIII (December, 1952), 23-27.

_____ "When You Go to New England," Harper's Magazine, CLXXXIII (August, 1941), 294-295.

_____ The White Gate: Adventures in the Imagination of a Child. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1954.

REVIEWS

Chicago Tribune, November 7, 1954, p. 3.

Christian Science Monitor, November 11, 1954, p. 19. (Rae Emerson Donlon)

New York Herald Tribune Book Review, November 7, 1954, p. 5. (Dan Wickenden)

New York Times Book Review, November 7, 1954, p. 5. (Samuel T. Williamson)

New Yorker, XXX (November 20, 1954), 225-226.

San Francisco Chronicle, November 24, 1954, p. 54. (J. H. Jackson)

____ Windswept. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941.

REVIEWS

Atlantic Monthly, CLXVII (December, 1941), lii, liv. (Robert S. Hillyer)

Catholic World, CLIV (January, 1942), 506-507.

Christian Century. LVIII (December 3, 1941), 1512.

Commonweal, XXXV (January 16, 1942), 323.

New Republic, CVI (January 19, 1942), 94.

New York Herald Tribune Books, November 16, 1941, pp. 1-2.
(Rose Field)

New York Times Book Review, November 16, 1941, pp. 1, 30.
(Katherine Woods)

Saturday Review of Literature, XXIV (November 15, 1941), 12.
(Bess Jones)

Time, XXXVII (November 17, 1941), 100.

Chase, Mary Ellen, and F. K. Del Plaine. Art of Narration. New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1926.

Chase, Mary Ellen, and M. E. MacGregor, Writing of Informal Essays. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1928.

Chase, Richard. The American Novel and Its Tradition. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957.

Coffin, Robert P. Tristram. John Dawn. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936.

Coan, Otis W., and Richard G. Lillard. American Fiction: An Annotated List of Novels That Interpret Aspects of Life in the United States. Revised Edition. Stanford University Press, 1945.

Commager, Henry Steele. The American Mind. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

____ "Our Goodly Heritage," Scholastic, LVIII (March 14, 1951), 12-13.

Crook, Margaret B., and other Members of the Faculty of Smith College
[including Mary Ellen Chase]. The Bible and Its Literary Associations. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1937.

DeVoto, Bernard, The Literary Fallacy. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944.

- Dubois, Rene. "Mankind Does Become Better," Vogue, CXL (September 1, 1962), 218-219+.
- Edel, Leon. Literary Biography. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957.
- Fiedler, Leslie, ed. The Art of the Essay. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1958.
- Field, Rachel. Time Out of Mind. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935.
- "A First Aide to Bookselling: At Smith It Is Mary Ellen Chase," Publishers' Weekly, CXXVI (August 4, 1934), 336-337.
- Foster, Charles H. The Rungless Ladder, Harriet Beecher Stowe and New England Puritanism. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1954.
- Frank, Josette. Your Child's Reading Today. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960.
- Garland, Hamlin. A Son of the Middle Border. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925.
- Garraty, John A. The Nature of Biography. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.
- Geismar, Maxwell. Rebels and Ancesters. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953.
- Goodman, Theodore. The Writing of Fiction. New York: Collier Books, 1961.
- Gordon, Caroline, and Allen Tate, eds. The House of Fiction, An Anthology of the Short Story with Commentary. Second edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.
- Hall, Virginia Smith. "Down East Today," a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Major Honors in English at the University of Maine in May, 1938 (unpublished).
- Hardy, Thomas. Far from the Madding Crowd, New Introduction by Mary Ellen Chase. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951.
- Herron, Ima H. The Small Town in American Literature. Durham, North Carolina: The Duke University Press, 1939.
- Horton, Rod W., and Herbert W. Edwards. Backgrounds of American Literary Thought. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952.
- Howard, Leon. Literature and the American Tradition. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960.
- Jennings, John. Clipper Ship Days: The Golden Age of American Sailing Ships. Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Landmark Books, 1952.

- Jung, C. G. "Jung on Freud," from C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffee, Atlantic Monthly, CCX (November, 1962), 47-56.
- Kazin, Alfred. Contemporaries. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962.
- Lee, Donald W., and William T. Moynihan, eds. Using Prose: Readings for College Composition. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1961.
- Literary History of the United States. Ed. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Seidel Canby. Bibliography volume. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948.
- Lowes, John Livingston. Essays in Appreciation. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936.
- Luccock, Halford E. American Mirror: Social, Ethical and Religious Aspects of American Literature 1930-1940. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941.
- Mark Twain. How to Tell a Story. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1908.
- Martin, Fran. "Stop Watering Down Biography," Library Journal, LXXXIV (December 15, 1959), 3887-3888.
- Merrill, Dana Kinsman. The Development of American Biography. Portland, Maine: The Southworth Press, 1932.
- Michaud, Régis. The American Novel Today: A Social and Psychological Study. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1928.
- Moore, Harry Estill, and Howard W. Odum, eds. American Regionalism. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938.
- Morris, Ivan, ed. Modern Japanese Stories. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962.
- Morris, Lloyd. "Some Recent American Fiction," North American Review, CCXLI (June, 1936), 274-288.
- Mumford, Lewis. The Golden Day, A Study in American Experience and Culture. New York: Boni and Liveright, Publishers, 1926.
- Murdock, Kenneth B. Literature and Theology in Colonial New England. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949.
- Murray, Henry H. "A Mythology for Grownups," Saturday Review, XLIII (January 23, 1960), 10-12.
- Newbery Medal Books, 1922-1955. Ed. Bertha Mahony Miller and Elinor Whitney Field. Boston: Horn Book, Inc., 1955.

- Shumaker, Wayne. English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954.
- Smith, Betty. A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943.
- Smith, Lillian H. The Unreluctant Years: A Critical Approach to Children's Literature. Chicago: American Library Association, 1953.
- Stallman, R. W., and Arthur Waldhorn, eds. American Literature: Readings and Critiques. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961.
- Stevenson, Adlai. Quotation from the program of the Annual Meeting of The Society for Social Responsibility in Science, September 9, 1961.
- Stewart, Randall. American Literature and Christian Doctrine. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. The Pearl of Orr's Island. New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1900.
- Strauman, Heinrich. American Literature in the Twentieth Century. New York: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. Calvalcade of the American Novel. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952.
- Warren, Robert Penn. Interview, TV Series, Writers at Work, Channel 2, Boston, Summer, 1962.
- Westbrook, Perry D. Acres of Flint. Washington, D. C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1951.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WRITING OF MARY ELLEN CHASE
(Publication no.)

Evelyn Caldwell Dodge, Ph.D.
Boston University Graduate School, 1963

Major Professor: Professor Edward Wagenknecht

Mary Ellen Chase, a contemporary author of many parts, has followed the double career, not uncommon in twentieth-century America, of writing and of teaching college English, contributing the vigor of her New England heritage in a complementary fashion to both professions. She has written short stories, and novels, biographies and autobiographies, volumes of essays and Biblical commentary, textbooks and a miscellany of introductions, reviews, articles, and pamphlets. Although she retired from the Smith College faculty in 1955, she continues to write books and many lesser pieces. Since the body of her published work is now a substantial one, it has seemed a good time to survey her general accomplishment to date, in the individual use of many ideas and traditions, both historical and literary.

The name of Mary Ellen Chase has appeared in footnotes, appendices, and lists. She has sometimes been mentioned or even briefly discussed as a New England regionalist. Almost all of her books have been reviewed, some of them often and quite generously, but there has been no general survey or study of the whole body of her writing.

Thus there has been very little established opinion to guide this study. The problem has been to bring together such ideas about Miss Chase's writing as have been separately expressed, mainly in reviews, and to find in her writing its motivating themes, recurrent interests,

and developing characteristics of style. A complete bibliography of her books and contributions to major periodicals has been attempted.

Miss Chase's New England heritage has been the pivot on which many of her interests have turned. Unfailingly her concern for her own traditions and others as well has been motivated by her delight in them and by the search for any understanding which can contribute to a "good life" in the present. She makes it clear that the past, even at its high points, should inform the present, but never afford a mere retreat from it. The New England past forms a large part of her New England consciousness, which includes a strong sense of place and of the things and people to be found in the rural and coastal areas of Maine. Her contributions serve mainly to brighten old knowledge into new. Often the sense of place in her writing outweighs the impact of the past. Some of her best style describes the relationships between her characters and their natural environment. Sometimes she shows the symbolic power of one single object from the natural environment.

In her interest in England and in the Bible, Miss Chase is focusing on secondary aspects of the cultural heritage of New England. In her studies of the Bible, past and place are again important, as is the love of language, which has permeated all her writing with increasing effectiveness. Characteristic of Miss Chase's books about the Bible is her infectious enthusiasm for the ancient Hebrew people and for their literature.

The impact of literary traditions on her work has occasionally been noted, and some close examination has been made of her imagery,

the aspect of her style most generally useful to her. Its use has often allowed her to make distinct the multiple pasts producing together the total sense of the past which she never wishes to separate from the present.

VITA

Evelyn Caldwell Dodge, the first daughter of John Albert and Annie Caldwell Dodge, was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 20, 1915. She attended the public schools of Ipswich, Massachusetts, graduating as an honor student from the Manning High School in 1932. While at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, from 1932 to 1934, she received two Ipswich scholarships, from the Woman's Club and from the Eunice Caldwell Cowles Memorial Fund. In 1935 she went to teach in a district school in East Hodgdon, Maine. In 1939 she entered the State Teachers College at Salem, Massachusetts, from which she received the degree of B.S. in Ed. in 1942. She then taught grades five through eight at the Riverton School in Barkhamsted, Connecticut, for four years, and next spent a year as social studies teacher at the Marblehead Junior High School.

In the summer of 1946 she began graduate study at Boston University. Her master's thesis was "A Psychograph of Nathaniel Hawthorne," and she received the A.M. degree in August, 1948. From February, 1948, to June, 1950, she was a Graduate Assistant in English and from 1950 to 1957 she was secretary of the department of English for the College of Liberal Arts at Boston University. From 1951 to 1961 she taught English for Foreign Students in the Boston University Evening Division and Summer Term. In 1958 she was appointed assistant professor of English at Emerson College in Boston. She left Emerson in 1960 to assume her present position as instructor in English in the State College at Framingham, Massachusetts.