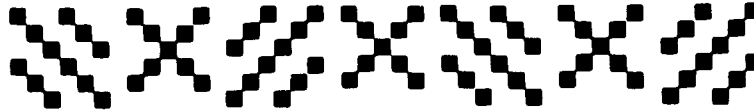


Agnes Hamilton of Fort Wayne: The Education of a Christian Settlement Worker

*Mina J. Carson**



Life is doing the work God put you into the world to do, to cultivate yourself to the best of your power, in order that, by cultivation, your capacity for benefiting your fellow-creatures may be increased. Of course the two duties melt into and blend with each other; they should not be allowed to come to blows, though their interests may sometimes clash.

Edward Denison, 1864**

Among her peers in the settlement house movement at the turn of the century, Agnes Hamilton was a latecomer to settlement work. The daughter of a prominent Indiana businessman and politician, she was educated to piety, virtue, and gentility at home and at Miss Porter's School for girls in Farmington, Connecticut. She was twenty years old when Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded Hull-House in Chicago in 1889. At twenty-nine, after a decade of family life, good works, and unhappiness in Fort Wayne, she followed her beloved cousin Alice Hamilton to Hull-House, just for a short winter visit, to meet the remarkable Miss Addams and see some of Chicago's sights. Smitten with settlement life, Agnes Hamilton barely tore herself away to return home after two exhilarating months. Three more years passed before she finally began her life's work at the Lighthouse Settlement in Philadelphia.

Most settlement workers, then as later, were recent college graduates. Full of idealistic enthusiasm and unburdened by specific technical or professional training, both men and women responded eagerly to the calls of visiting lecturers, campus missions,

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** Letter of March 3, 1864, in *Letters and Other Writings of the Late Edward Denison, M. P. for Newark*, ed. Sir Baldwin Leighton (London, 1872), 1.

and alumnae associations to sojourn for a while in the poor neighborhoods of great cities. Like Agnes Hamilton, they had been raised on the moral and religious writings of the Victorians—Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, George Eliot, Dr. Thomas Arnold and his son Matthew, Charles Kingsley, Frederick D. Maurice—who laid out their Christian duties in an industrial society and made compelling sense of such a middle-class mission to the slums.

Like many of her contemporaries Agnes Hamilton was stirred by the exhortations to “personal service” that formed the core of the settlement idea as it evolved from Christian Socialist reformulations of the proper spirit of philanthropy in a well-ordered society.¹ But unlike those who moved easily from their families and campuses to a new and hitherto alien field of action, Agnes found the call of duty, not liberating, but confusing. For over ten years, despite increasing responsibility and success in social service in her own city, she struggled with feelings of personal and spiritual inadequacy. It seemed clear to her that the only resolution of the tensions plaguing her life was a single-minded ded-

¹ The excellent standard history of the settlement house movement in the United States is Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York, 1967). For an analysis of the settlement workers' motives see especially pp. 33-39. See also John P. Rousmanière, “Cultural Hybrid in the Slums: The College Woman and the Settlement House, 1889-1894,” *American Quarterly*, XXII (Spring, 1970), 45-66. An acute, helpful, and compendious account of the settlement movement through World War I by two settlement leaders is Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon: A National Estimate* (New York, 1922). Contemporary assessments include Dwight Goddard, “The Advantages of Residence at a University Settlement,” *Hartford Seminary Record*, IV (December, 1893), especially 83; Vida D. Scudder, “The Place of College Settlements,” *Andover Review*, VIII (October, 1892), 343-45; Morrison I. Swift, “The Working Population of Cities, and What the Universities Owe Them,” *ibid.*, XIII (June, 1890), 589-613; Robert A. Woods, “Social Work: A New Profession,” *Charities and the Commons*, XV (January 6, 1906), especially 474-76. The most famous statement, by Jane Addams, was first published as “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” in Addams et al., *Philanthropy and Social Progress: Seven Essays* (New York, 1893), 1-26, and then reprinted in *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes* (New York, 1912); it is discussed below.

The major work for American adaptations of Christian Socialism is James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York, 1936). For more contemporary accounts of the origins of Christian Socialism, especially from the “settlement” point of view, see the Reverend Moritz Kaufmann, *Charles Kingsley: Christian Socialist and Social Reformer* (London, 1892), 1-8; Graham Taylor, “The Social Function of the Church,” *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, XXXVIII (January, 1904), 92-110; Robert A. Woods, *English Social Movements* (London, 1892), 61-66. See also Paul Monroe, “English and American Christian Socialism: An Estimate,” *American Journal of Sociology*, I (July, 1895), 50-68. The deans of the English settlement movement were the Reverend Samuel A. Barnett and Henrietta O. Barnett. Their volume of collected essays, *Practicable Socialism: Essays on Social Reform* (London, 1888), is a good introduction to the ideology of the movement.

ication to her duty. Not at all clear, though, was what that duty might be. Agnes's search for her proper role in her society reflects American middle-class culture in transition and suggests some of the underlying impulses and motives that shaped American social work on the verge of its professional era.

The Hamilton family of Fort Wayne, Indiana, had achieved over three generations an impressive balance between aloofness from the surrounding community and careful obeisance to its strictures. Agnes Hamilton was the third daughter of Andrew Holman and Phoebe Ann Taber Hamilton, but in the category ultimately more significant to her she was the fifth cousin born into the sprawling family "compound" in the pretty and prosperous city of Fort Wayne. Situated at the confluence of the St. Joseph and St. Mary's rivers, Fort Wayne had boosted itself from a frontier outpost to a busy marketing and processing center for the surrounding farmland. When the canals gave way to the railroads, the port city energetically transformed itself into the junction of five major midwestern lines. Agnes's grandfather, Allen Hamilton, was an educated and footloose young Scotch-Irish immigrant who followed a cousin to the Fort Wayne area just as the surrounding Allen County was being organized. After winning himself appointments as deputy in the federal land office and then as provisional county sheriff, Allen Hamilton threw over his legal study for the more profitable pursuits of merchant and Indian commissioner. At his death in 1864 he left his heirs several thousand acres of farmland as well as a number of rent-producing town lots, stock in several railroads and a canal, a family interest in the local bank and several businesses, and a secure position of social and political prominence in city and county affairs.²

² The major source for Hamilton family history is the immense collection of Hamilton Family Papers, composed chiefly of the correspondence and other private papers of four generations of Fort Wayne Hamiltons, in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The collection is accessible to the researcher on microfilm. For outlines of Allen Hamilton's career and estate see the manuscript biography of Allen Hamilton, possibly by Andrew Holman Hamilton, and the Last Will and Testament of Allen Hamilton, both on reel 1. A full account of Hamilton's career is offered by Allyn C. Wetmore, "Allen Hamilton: The Evolution of a Frontier Capitalist" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Ball State University, Muncie, 1974). Hamilton's estate as of 1860 is itemized on pp. 321-22n. See also Wallace A. Brice, "Biographical Sketches of Early Settlers of Fort Wayne, Etc.," in Brice, *History of Fort Wayne . . .* (Fort Wayne, 1868), 18-22; Bert J. Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana . . .* (2 vols., Chicago, 1917), I, especially 259, 326, 360, 362, 411, 422. Other sources for Fort Wayne history are Brice, *History of Fort Wayne*, 319-24; *Fort Wayne in 1871* (Fort Wayne, 1953). Alice Hamilton offers a brief but vivid portrait of the family in her autobiography, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades: The Autobiography of Alice Hamilton, M.D.* (Boston, 1943), especially 18-35.

Emerine Holman Hamilton bore Allen Hamilton eleven children, of whom five survived: two sons, Andrew Holman (1834-1895) and Montgomery (1843-1900), and three daughters, Mary (1846?-1922), Ellen (1852?-1922), and Margaret (1854-1931). In this second Hamilton generation, only Margaret never married. The others married, bore children, and for the most part stayed close to the Hamilton estates in and around Fort Wayne. The third generation of Hamilton children played, studied, and grew through adolescence in their own comfortable sanctuary. The first meaningful distinction in their lives was between "members" (the cousins and the "grownups") and "outsiders." Indeed, Agnes's parents, Andrew Holman and Phoebe, were adventurous in sending their children into the community for their early schooling, for Montgomery and Gertrude taught their precocious daughters, Edith, Alice, Margaret, and Norah, at home.

Several years younger than her sisters, Katherine and Jessie, Agnes found her natural playmates in her cousins Alice Hamilton and Aunt Mary's son, Allen Hamilton Williams (or "Allen W.," as he was called after one of Agnes's two younger brothers was also christened with the family patronymic). The "three A's" were born within several months of each other in the winter of 1868-1869. As children they played together in and under an old tree they called the "Frightfull," taking their imaginary personae from *Robin Hood*, *King Arthur*, and, perhaps more unusually, the ancient Greek plays. Their games continued well into adolescence, but in that difficult period tensions developed that transformed and complicated the cousins' relationship. At first the major annoyance was Allen's boyish betrayal of his female cousins: he began "slandering" them to his school friends.³ Soon, though, a worse rift threatened. In the diary Agnes began to keep at fifteen she recorded that the other two had suddenly "taken it in their heads that they want to know somebody." She found this whim incomprehensible. "I think the boys and girls in this town are very stupid and silly and I don't care to have anything to do with them."⁴ Though she gradually resigned herself to her cousins' social forwardness, a more fundamental worry began to nag her. At sixteen she wrote: "My lessons are so hard this year that I

³ Details of the cousins' childhood games are scattered throughout entries for December 6, 1883, through January, 1885, in the Diary of Agnes Hamilton, reels 15 and 16, Hamilton Family Papers. This work is hereafter cited as "Diary." The "slander" episode appears on [Saturday following January 7], 1884. See also Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 25-27.

⁴ Diary, February 10, 1884.

never get one moment to myself except on Saturday and yet Alice's are just as hard and even harder (she is so much further advanced than I am) and she don't have to study near so much. I wonder if I am so much stupider."⁵

Until 1884 Agnes had attended the Westminster private academy in the mornings and on those afternoons when drawing was offered, staying at home other days to study French with Allen and Alice. Seeking a more structured regimen, she persuaded her parents in 1885 to allow her to try the public high school for a year. Alice continued to study at home, while Allen was sent to school in Boston, returning home during vacations to his cousins' fond admiration of his "splendid" new physique and sophistication.⁶

Agnes's conviction that she was stupid grew into an obsession as she measured herself not only against her cousins but against her own resolutions of discipline and self-improvement. Initially she concentrated on her bad habits of sloth at her studies and talking too much, which at fifteen she considered her "principal fault." A week after these first resolutions were taken she had to admit failure. "I have neither studied hard nor stoped talking but next week I will try harder."⁷ On New Year's Eve, 1885, she drew up the first of the more elaborate programs that punctuate her diaries for the next decade. She was to rise at seven, study before school, devote the noon hour to Latin, read seriously ("not novels nor even stories in Harpers or Century") for an hour and half after school, and go to bed early. She was now seventeen and as far behind her cousins as ever: "I still feel so childish and I know so very, very little, I am really quite alarmed when I hear Allen and Alice talking about men and deeds that I have never heard of or that I merely know by name."⁸

Despite her increasing self-doubt, Agnes was by nature cheerful and resilient. While belittling herself, she glorified the family and celebrated the "members'" triumphs and activities, even if she always had to be the "stupid know nothing."⁹ Her diary entries often shifted abruptly from meditations on her own failings to detailed accounts of tennis parties, long walks with her sisters

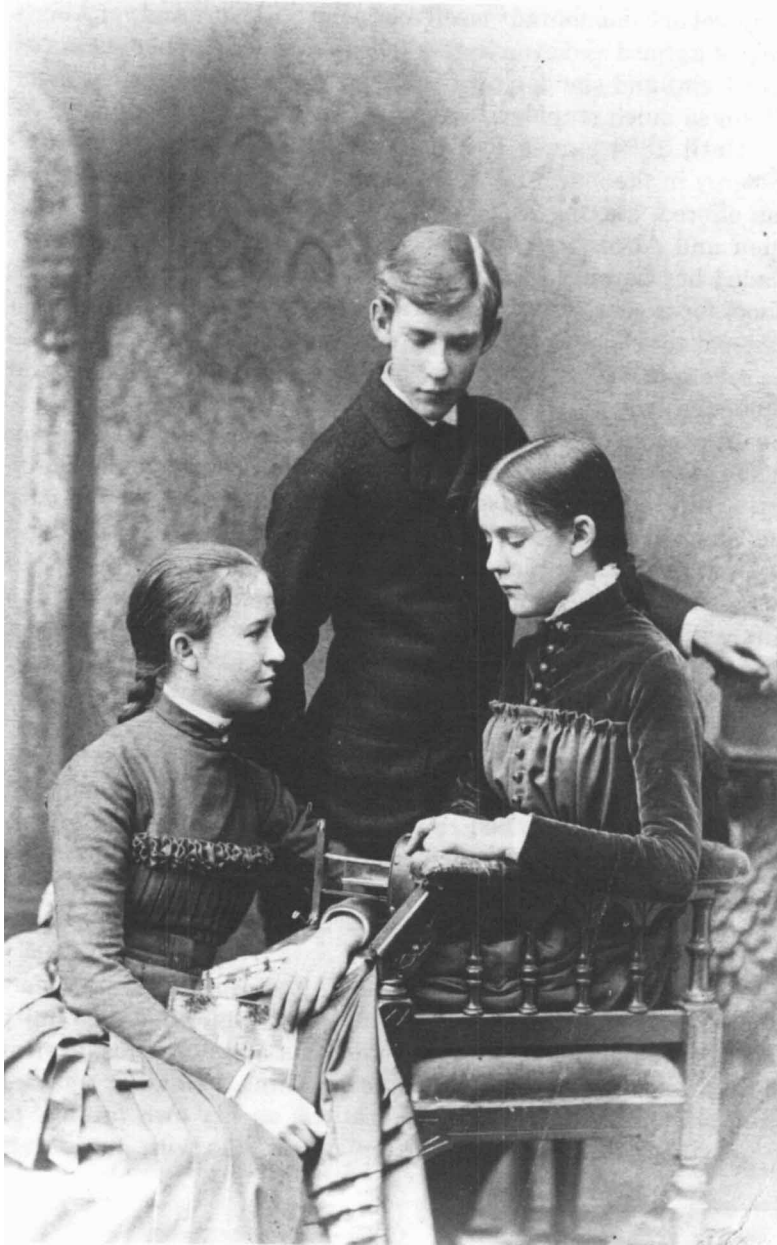
⁵ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1884.

⁶ *Ibid.*, December 6, 1883, January 3, April 25, October 4, 1885; Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 29-31.

⁷ Diary, January 7 [and following Sunday], 1884.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 3, 1885.

⁹ *Ibid.*, August 10, 1886.



THE "THREE A'S"
AGNES HAMILTON, ALLEN HAMILTON WILLIAMS, ALICE HAMILTON
DECEMBER, 1883

The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

and cousins, and evenings spent at Uncle Mont's house playing cards, talking, reading aloud, and singing. With the exception of her beloved Allen W., she inhabited a strikingly female world. Her father is an elusive figure in the family annals; he lapses into poor health in the late 1880s and becomes chiefly the source of vetoes and prohibitions. He was an important figure in Fort Wayne, however. Groomed for responsibility by postgraduate study in Germany and at Harvard Law School, he served as executor of his father's estate and shared its management with his brother Montgomery. A good Democrat in Democratic Allen County, he capped a successful career in local politics with two terms as United States representative from the Fort Wayne district from 1875 to 1879.¹⁰ Agnes recorded her father's political and financial fortunes from a child's perspective: she felt the bad times of the mid-1880s as the woe of fewer Christmas presents coupled with the joy of having Alice in Fort Wayne, for her uncle was forced to forego a family winter in Florida. With little experience of material deprivation, Agnes parroted the family wisdom: "We are really land-poor if only we would give away about half our property we would have much more money. We have only three servants now so Katherine and Jessie have to do some work, I have been helping them this vacation."¹¹

Her mother was the important parent in Agnes's life. Andrew Holman Hamilton had married his childhood sweetheart, the daughter and heiress of his father's business partner, Cyrus Taber. A less forceful and worldly woman than Aunt Gertrude Hamilton, Phoebe Ann Hamilton was loving and solicitous, with an infinite capacity for concern with the details of living. Pocket-money, dresses, and coffee parties were her preoccupations. She shaped her children with a constant, gentle, worried pressure.¹²

The patriarch, Allen Hamilton, had not stinted his children's education. His sons attended universities on the East Coast and in Europe while his daughters were sent to Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, for two years of polishing.¹³ This

¹⁰ For biographical details for Andrew Holman Hamilton see reels 1 and 2, Hamilton Family Papers; see also Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, I, especially 446.

¹¹ Diary, January 3, 1885.

¹² These qualities emerge in the correspondence of Phoebe Ann Taber Hamilton, which includes chiefly letters to her children and other family members, reels 3 and 4, Hamilton Family Papers. See also records of Phoebe Ann Taber's education, reel 1; the affectionate correspondence between Andrew Holman and Phoebe Ann Hamilton in the 1860s, reel 2; Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, I, 241.

¹³ Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 22, 35.

investment became a Hamilton tradition, and Katherine, Jessie, and Edith Hamilton were each packed off to Farmington at seventeen to complete their piecemeal education, classically Victorian in content and ambiguous in purpose. In 1886 Alice and Agnes anticipated the same opportunity with excitement and trepidation. Characteristically, Alice decided to prepare for life among strangers at Farmington by meeting new people at home while Agnes hung back, declaring, "I am very well contented with my present life for the present time."¹⁴ Her brilliant cousin Edith unconsciously added to Agnes's trepidations by describing her recent Farmington schoolmates as "very bright and studious." Agnes pictured the worst: "I never expected to be popular nor even to be liked by a few but I did think that I could know my lessons." She pitied herself for the blot she would leave on the family escutcheon, and "heartily wish[ed]" her school days were already past.¹⁵

At Farmington, Agnes seesawed between joy and agony. As had become habitual, she blamed her miseries on herself rather than her surroundings. "Farmington is just as perfect as they all said it would be, the girls, Miss Porter and all, but I don't think I am the right sort of Farmington girl."¹⁶ Privately, however, she spared her schoolmates none of the stern rigor with which she conducted her own self-evaluations. Ruthlessly she separated the "bores" from the "demigods." She was sure that, were it not for Alice, none of the nicer girls would ever look her way. The unpleasant novelty of her jealousy of Alice propelled her into sharp self-disgust: "I thought for a while that I had given up being conscious that there is an I always with me but here I am thinking of nothing else . . . Stupid, stupid, stupid is all I can think of tonight. How can I expect anyone to like me when I have just the character I especially dislike."¹⁷ Her poignant self-abasement reached an acute state when, in December of their first year, the "nicest girl in the school" asked the Hamilton cousins to room with her the next term. When Alice confided her fear that Kitty Ludington would find them dull, Agnes sought the silver lining. Since Kitty must already think Agnes "very stupid and empty," she had nothing to lose. "It makes me perfectly happy to be with her . . . It will be very hard to give her up in the Spring term for of course she will grow so tired of us that she will choose someone else to room with her."¹⁸

¹⁴ Diary, March 25, 1886.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, July 21, 1886.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1886.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1886.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, December 21, 1886.



AGNES AND ALICE HAMILTON
c. 1890

The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

Miss Porter's School was conducted academically on a free elective system. Alice Hamilton recalled years later that "some of the teaching we received was the world's worst." Her severest indictment was reserved for a sequential course in "mental and moral philosophy," taught by rote from two impenetrable tomes written by Miss Porter's brother, Yale president Noah Porter. Not surprisingly, the students could not understand why this text was venerated by the instructor, a German who "kept his eyes fixed on the ceiling, for he claimed that he knew both books by heart and need never look at the text."¹⁹ But what was a joke to Alice became a trial for Agnes. Her well-meaning mother urged her to complete the course. "I am afraid, like your Mother, you have not that flow of language with which many others are gifted and would it not be well to take up those studies in which this deficiency is most apparent . . ." She reasoned with her daughter

¹⁹ Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 36.

that since Agnes reported doing tolerably well in mathematics and languages, her reputation among her friends could not suffer much if she were not head of the class in "Mental" and "Moral," as the Farmington students called the two courses.²⁰

Aside from this pedagogical travesty, the education offered at Farmington seems to have been good. Miss Sarah Porter, the school's founder and its guiding spirit from the 1840s to her death in 1900, put the stamp of her own New England upbringing in a strongly Congregational family on her pupils' education. She had been taught, as she later wrote, that "life must be earnest, progressive, not worldly in motive or in plan," and she believed in the value of female education as a training in character, piety, and responsibility. Herself a good linguist, she made sure that languages and literature were taught with sensitivity in her school. Her brother Noah had just retired from the presidency of Yale when the Hamilton cousins arrived in Farmington; that family connection had long enriched the tiny school with a stream of prominent Yale academics, clerics, and musicians, imported for the girls' enlightenment (and Miss Porter's own intellectual pleasure). The school also offered training in drawing and painting, a special joy to Agnes and her older sister Jessie before her.²¹

Though Sarah Porter valued intellectual training, she was no advocate of higher education for women. Her students were being prepared for a disciplined Christian womanhood, not for scholarship. When Edith Hamilton confided to her a yearning toward college, the great lady is said to have responded: "My dear Edith, you can become learned; but, my dear Edith, I don't think much of learning."²² This ambivalence was certainly congenial to the Hamilton "grownups," who fostered and supported their daughters' talents but did not encourage plans for a college education. Though Agnes's mother urged her to take moral philosophy, she would not require it. There was one matter, however, in which she was adamant: "Please remember that is one thing I send you to school for—to learn how to arrange your hair in a *neat smooth* becoming manner—and please do as I wish."²³ Phoebe Hamilton approved Agnes's desire to select her own dresses and

²⁰ Phoebe Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, November 21, 1886.

²¹ Quote from George S. Merriam, ed., *Noah Porter: A Memorial by Friends* (New York, 1893), 3; see also William M. Sloane, "Sarah Porter: Her Unique Educational Work," *The Century*, LX (July, 1900), 345-47; "A Notable Teacher," *The Outlook*, LXIV (March 3, 1900), 477-78; Annette K. Baxter, "Sarah Porter," *Notable American Women* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), III, 88-89.

²² This remark may of course be apocryphal. It is reported in Doris Fielding Reid, *Edith Hamilton: An Intimate Portrait* (New York, 1967), 33.

²³ Phoebe Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, December 11, 1887.

sent her ample money for that purpose, but she also supported her older daughter, Jessie, morally and financially in seeking good art instruction in Fort Wayne. She had a studio built for her daughters on the Hamilton property, and she encouraged Agnes to secure a place in the "life class" at Farmington and to send home all her drawings.²⁴ As Agnes's two years at Farmington ended, Phoebe recognized the latent danger of so generously offering her daughters a glimpse of another world: "I am glad you think you will be perfectly contented at home next year—I was afraid you would not be very happy—" ²⁵

At Farmington Agnes had made friends, won some praise for her art work, traveled to Hartford and Boston, and confronted the adolescent terrors of the first solitary encounters with the self. The pleasures of school life had enabled her to establish a fragile peace with her "stupidity." Near the end of her second year she reflected: "Well, I am made as I am. It is a trouble, a trial. Others have worse . . . I can be very thankful for my power of enjoying and liking people though it is all on my side."²⁶

Agnes also formed grand and vague plans for her future life in Fort Wayne. No matter what profession she chose, she resolved to do "some really good work which shall help to make some women better than if I had not been here." Unlike her friend Kitty Ludington, who would develop naturally into a "splendid, noble" woman, Agnes would have to fit herself for such a role through hard attention to the duties at hand. "Anyone can carry out some splendid work if they only have perseverance and that is something which may be gained if it is not born in one."²⁷ By plunging now into her studies and her drawing, she would reap the benefits later—not in the vain gratification of being thought less stupid but in the true nobility of a life consecrated to duty.

For Agnes Hamilton the idea of duty imparted unity to her life and simultaneously created the only real conflicts that she ever knew. As the central tenet of her domestic, intellectual, and spiritual life, "doing one's duty" was a peculiarly free-floating mandate that invested objects, such as home and family members, and activities, such as reading, drawing, learning, and working. In the decade after her return to Fort Wayne, Agnes's inability to clarify and focus the unrelenting imperative of duty splintered her days and obstructed her search for the purpose of her life.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, February 14, December 11, 1887.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, December 11, 1887.

²⁶ Diary, April 18, 1888.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, March 6, 1887.

This primal sense of duty was an integral part of the culture imparted to and interpreted for her at home, in school, and at church. Agnes was raised in the Presbyterian church, and from childhood she lived in an untroubled and earnest acceptance of the faith. While Alice's father communicated to his children his intellectual passion for the historical and philosophical intricacies of theology, religion in Agnes's household was a less intellectual, if no less serious, affair.²⁸ The conflicts that had earlier shaken the Presbyterian church had receded, and the impact of the Social Gospel lay in the future when Agnes took her examination and was admitted as a church member in 1885. Church affairs served as Agnes's first contact with the community, and visiting ministers were probably her first palpable link with the world beyond her city. She and her sisters went to hear Dwight Moody when he came to Fort Wayne; she was less impressed than she had expected to be, but she appreciated his arguments against skepticism. "I was very glad to hear what he said, for, although of course I believe it all yet now if any time I should want to talk to any one I could argue much better."²⁹ She was more disturbed by the evangelical style of the local Baptist minister: "I never heard such a sermon before, it was really painful to listen to the Bible being yelled out in the manner that Mr. Northrup does it."³⁰ She preferred the "earnest and not at all threatening or tragical" approach of her own minister.³¹

As a Presbyterian, Agnes was taught the value of an educated familiarity with scriptures and doctrine, but what she sought and increasingly responded to in her religion was its aids to conduct and attitude. At Miss Porter's she and Alice had supplemented their Sunday church-going with evening prayer meetings with a few of their friends, choosing a topic, such as "trust," and looking up readings in the Bible and religious literature to illustrate it.³² She took deeply to heart all exhortations to self-improvement, however bland, general, or frequent they may have been in adult discourse to this community of vulnerable girls. A talk from Miss Porter on kindness toward others pricked her raw conscience and sparked a new resolution to speak kindly in the evening to any girl she wronged in thoughtless conversation during the day.³³

²⁸ Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 27-29. An undated letter from Phoebe Hamilton to Jessie Hamilton, containing a severe reprimand of her daughter for playing games with friends on a Sunday, suggests that strict religious observance was a requirement for the Hamilton children.

²⁹ Diary, February 21, 1885.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1886.

³¹ *Ibid.*, October 4, 1885.

³² See, e.g., *ibid.*, November 16, 1886.

³³ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1886.

She was particularly stirred by two sermons delivered by George Barker Stevens of Yale in November of her second year. Focusing on the duty of the individual to strive to lead a noble life, to shape his or her thoughts through judicious reading, and to bend all of his or her energies on one goal or object in life, these talks chimed perfectly with Agnes's new concern with her future. "Both sermons were just what I wanted, just what I need. They help me to look forward to next year with perfect pleasure to plan it all out as I never thought I should be able to." And she confessed: "I keep making plans and resolutions but in every day life they come to nothing."³⁴

At the back of her diary for 1886-1887, her first year at Farmington, Agnes began supplementing her daily schedules for Easter and summer vacations with broader resolutions, cast as religious commandments, which she either composed or adapted from other sources: "Do what little in thy power and God will assist thy good will." "Never be entirely idle; but either be reading or writing or praying or meditating." "Those things that a man cannot mend in himself or in others he ought to suffer patiently, until God order them otherwise." "Set yourself earnestly to see what you were made to do, and then set yourself earnestly to do it."³⁵ As Agnes accepted her own limitations, she looked increasingly to her religion to "ennoble" and impart to what she saw as her humdrum, unattractive, "stupid" young womanhood the romance at least of struggle, sacrifice, and victory. She might never equal her beloved Alice and Jessie in brains or social adeptness—far less approach her somewhat austere and formidable cousin Edith—but she could dedicate herself, over and over, to do "what little was in her power," and God would assist.

The rounds of resolutions, backsliding, anguished self-upbraiding, and renewed resolutions continued at home in Fort Wayne as Agnes set herself to the multiple tasks of self-improvement. The joy of being with her sisters and cousins may have been tempered by an unacknowledged envy of their fixed ambitions. Edith was stubbornly preparing herself for the Bryn Mawr entrance examinations, while Alice resolved in the year after leaving Farmington to become a doctor. In retrospect, both sisters would attribute their decisions to pursue professions to their father's declining fortunes and the probability of having to support themselves, but Montgomery Hamilton was still able and willing

³⁴ *Ibid.*, November 27, 1887.

³⁵ These resolutions are examples of those found at the back of Agnes Hamilton's Diary for [1884]-1887.

to finance the higher education of a determined daughter. More revealing is Alice's justification for choosing medicine *per se*: that it would give her professional autonomy and the freedom to travel and to deal with many kinds of people. So, while Edith studied trigonometry and polished her Latin and Greek, Alice made up her almost total deficiency in scientific knowledge and then entered the tiny, "third-rate" medical school in Fort Wayne.³⁶ Agnes loyally supported these projects, particularly Alice's; when her cousin entered medical school, Agnes wrote that it was "the fulfilling of one of the dearest wishes of my life."³⁷

Agnes herself found a new field of activity to supplement her reading, art work, and home duties. She began to volunteer her services at "Nebraska," a nondenominational mission and social center across the St. Mary's River in the poorer section of Fort Wayne. At first she took a class of young girls in the Sunday school sponsored by the Christian Endeavor Society, a national interdenominational young people's group with a missionary flavor and a program that emphasized the extension of Christian education through special Sunday school classes taught outside the aegis of any one church.³⁸ The Nebraska classes were organized so that the teacher might stay with the same group of boys or girls for a period of years.

Agnes judged her teaching harshly. She rebuked herself for spending too little time preparing her lessons and for teaching them in a "lifeless, empty" manner. "And yet it was every word that fourteen girls will hear of Christ for seven days; every bit of high thought, of encouragement, of help, of strength in the midst of low squalor, troubles, frightful temptations."³⁹ She also despaired of the girls themselves: "They are turning out so dreadfully . . . They flit from one home to another, one occupation to another, one resolution to another, one wish to another, never the same two days in succession."⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, she noted in them the same faults she berated in herself. As she visited their

³⁶ Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 38; Reid, *Edith Hamilton*, 33-34; Diary, October 9, November 22, 1889.

³⁷ Diary, December 7, 1891.

³⁸ The animus and antecedents of the Christian Endeavor Society are best explained in the works of its founder, Francis E. Clark. See especially Clark, *Christian Endeavor in All Lands* (Boston, 1906), 17-62. An account that places the Christian Endeavor Society in the context of other nineteenth-century young people's religious groups is Frank Otis Erb, *The Development of the Young People's Movement* (Chicago, 1917), especially 52-67. See also Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 858.

³⁹ Diary, November 22, 1891.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1892.

homes over the years, she encountered part of the city that she had seen little of as a child.

Teaching Sunday school was a natural outgrowth of Agnes's Christian upbringing as well as a traditional activity for a young woman of her class and education. This occupation led only gradually to a fuller commitment to social service. In her early twenties, increasingly restless in her homebound life and undoubtedly goaded by her cousins' example, Agnes groped for something larger, some grander outlet for her energies. In 1889 she enrolled in a course on the history of architecture offered through the Society for Encouraging Study at Home.⁴¹ She was fascinated by her reading and began dreaming and talking of becoming an architect. Above all she dreamed of leaving Fort Wayne, if only for a while. "I do so want to go. I am getting into the same state I was in before I went to school. Then I had that to look forward to, now it seems as if I should never, never leave." This outburst was followed almost immediately by remorse. "It seems to me that I am peculiarly blessed to have such splendid relations. And it is entirely due to them if there is anything worthy in me."⁴² By spring she was laying tentative plans to go to Cornell to study architecture. In August, on vacation with her cousins at their cottage on Mackinac Island, Michigan, she saw some of her old Farmington friends. She was shocked to find that one of them believed, "in these days, in this country," that a young woman's only alternative to marriage was the religious life; yet, the thought gave her pause. "It made me think how little I do go in for a religious life whether for one reason or another and how that should be the one motive and how it is only a little part of my work and thought, for of course Miss Budd meant active religious work, which I try to bring in after my other plans are settled."⁴³

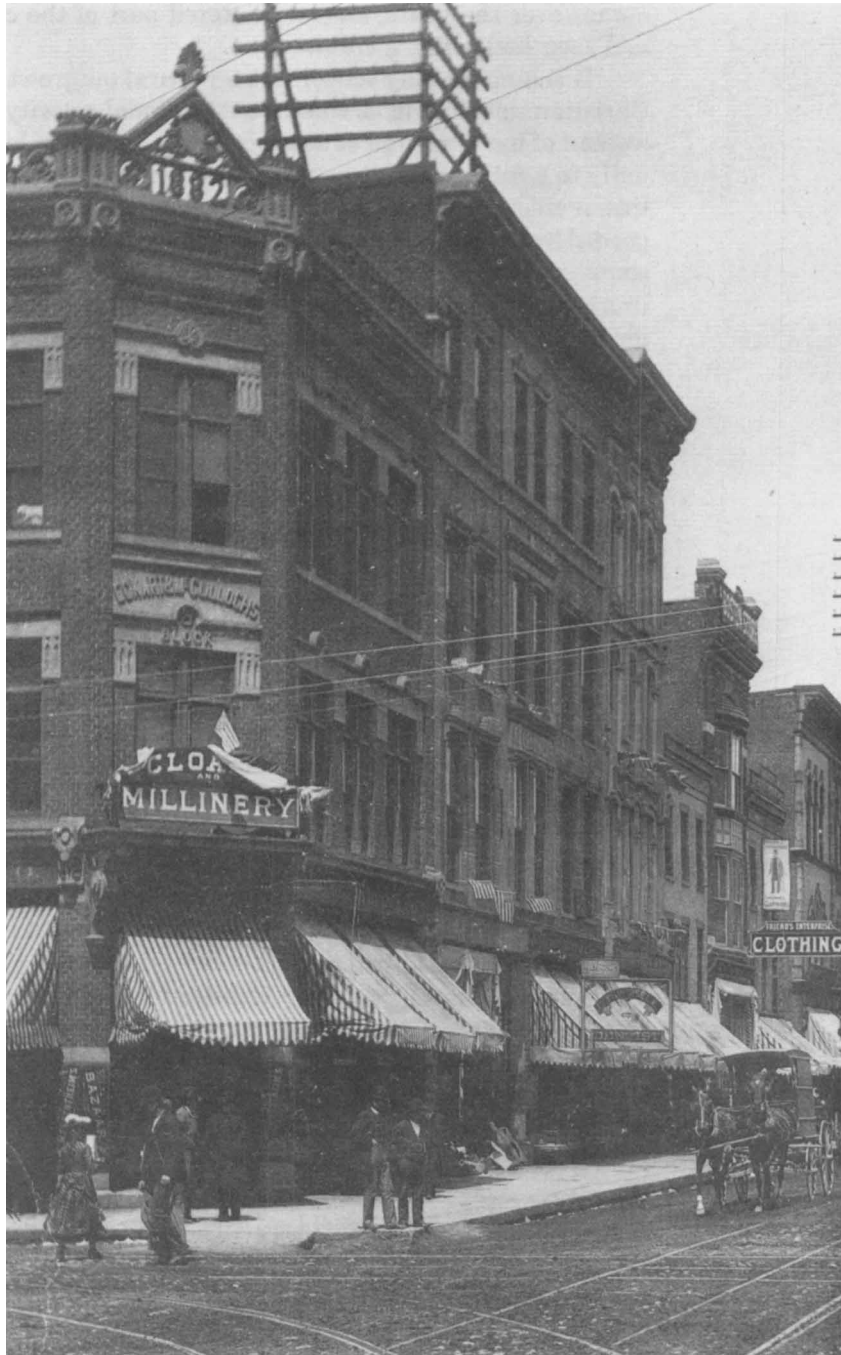
Agnes's hope of attending architectural school rose and faded regularly over the next five years. Despite her mother's support for the plan, Agnes's father, unlike her Uncle Mont, steadily refused to invest in a professional education for his daughter. (He also forbade any one of them to take a railroad journey alone, which necessitated various subterfuges by both mother and daughters over the years.⁴⁴) Her cousin Alice, having gone on to the excellent medical school at Ann Arbor, urged Agnes to find

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, October 9, 1889.

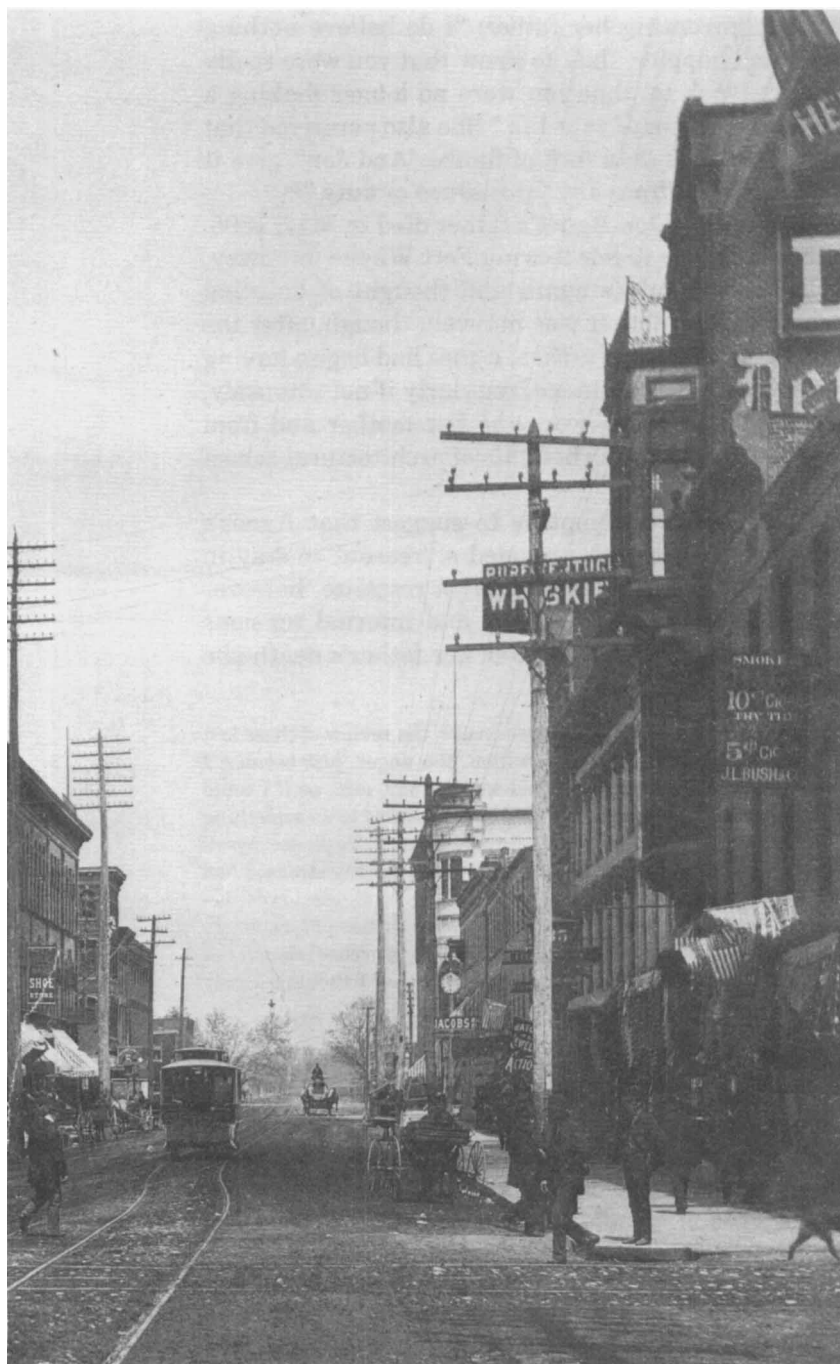
⁴² *Ibid.*, January 26, 1890.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, August [?], 1890; also *ibid.*, February 11, April 13, 1890; Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 41.

⁴⁴ Phoebe Hamilton to Jessie Hamilton, July 23, 1893; Agnes Hamilton to Jessie Hamilton, September 13, 1892, reel 18.



FORT WAYNE, INDIANA, C. 1889



LOOKING NORTH ON CALHOUN STREET FROM MAIN STREET

Courtesy Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

some means of circumventing her father: "I do believe nothing could make me much happier, than to know that you were really doing the work you wish to, that you were no longer making a useless, purposeless sacrifice of your life." She also perceived that more stood in Agnes's way than lack of funds. "And don't give it up," Alice wrote bluntly, "from any false sense of duty."⁴⁵

Alice was prescient. When Agnes's father died in May, 1895, the major external obstacle to her leaving Fort Wayne fell away. She began writing for catalogs again and thought of entering school the next year. Her mother was not well, though, after the strain of her husband's illness. Further, Agnes had begun having headaches in March. These continued, regularly if not intensely, for at least the next two years, worrying her mother and from time to time requiring bed rest. Thoughts of architectural school faded.⁴⁶

It is facile but certainly tempting to suggest that Agnes's sudden and continuing ill health provided a "reason" to stay in Fort Wayne. At the very least it was likely a response, however indirect, to deflected emotional reactions and internal tensions and frustrations. During the month after her father's death she took stock of her soul:

So many thoughts have come up during these two weeks, the review of these last seven years especially, the discontent, the rebellion, the anger, just because I could not have my own way. I thought I wanted work, study, aim, as if I could not have had them under any circumstances. I see now I wanted to do something remarkable, to be somebody. It was pride, unrestful ambition . . . To please myself by being an architect, a missionary, some grand thing with one big stroke, I had been worrying all winter over that. How at the beginning I am, the lowest beginning, just beginning to see God's way of using us, where He has put us, where He leads us and it is the lesson I have been teaching in Sunday school since I left Farmington. I wanted to be clever, interesting, learned, and I thought I only lacked opportunity. Poor, stupid, commonplace old self.⁴⁷

Agnes had now elevated even her desire for an embracing life purpose to a sin—the sin of selfish and ambitious pride. Her self-portrait as an angry, rebellious young woman is striking in its incongruity with her outward activities. She had left Farmington at nineteen; she was now twenty-six. Her responsibilities at Nebraska had gradually enlarged. By the end of 1894 she managed the "Noon Rest," a tea-and-lunch service for working women; she helped administer the League of Clubs as well as

⁴⁵ Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, August 31, 1893, reel 29.

⁴⁶ Diary, March 30, 1895; Phoebe Hamilton to Jessie Hamilton, February 21, May 29, 1897.

⁴⁷ Diary, May 17, 1895.

Temperance and Ladies Society affairs; and for three years she had been president of the Nebraska branch of the Christian Endeavor. In 1894 she had led in founding the Fort Wayne YWCA and had been elected its first president. Instrumental in involving more members of her own church in the religious and civic activities of Nebraska, Agnes had taken a prominent local role in the channeling of missionary energy into social as well as religious uplift that characterized the first stirrings of the Social Gospel in many comfortable middle-class neighborhoods and staid Protestant congregations.⁴⁸ Though Alice was impatient with Agnes's excessive and "false" sense of duty, she truly admired her cousin and took pains to tell her so. In an amusing mirror image of Agnes's self-indictment for unworthy motives, Alice saw her own stimulating life as a medical student as "the most selfish I have ever led, even more so than when I was at Farmington"; and she assured Agnes: "After reading one of [your letters] I feel a little as I do when I lay down Kingsley's *Life and Letters* . . . as if I had had my eyes opened to the beautiful, unconscious usefulness of some lives and the conscious and selfish uselessness of my own."⁴⁹

The growth of Agnes's church and community activities was accompanied by a gradual and coherent maturation of her social attitudes. Because she was by nature reflective and acutely self-conscious, it is not surprising that there was always an active interplay in her life between experience and thought—between life as she saw and tried to live it and the distillation of others' observations, experiences, and exhortations available in speeches and sermons and above all in books. Since childhood Agnes had been a careful and constant, if not a voracious, reader. She kept monthly lists of books read in the back of her diaries and conscientiously admitted to the popular novels and tales as well as to the more instructive tomes and classics. In the record for 1885-1886, Sir Walter Scott (*Redgauntlet*, *Anne of Geierstein*) jousts with Jonathan Swift, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Lessing, while Jean Ingelow (*Off the Skelligs* and *John Jerome*), Mrs. Alexander (*A Second Life*, *Her Dearest Foe*, etc.), and Mrs. Ewing (*A Flatiron for a Farthing*, *Mary's Meadow*, and *Jackanapes*) crowd Jane Austen (*Persuasion*), Mrs. Gaskell (*Wives and Daughters*), Charlotte

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, September 30, December 18, 1892, September 28, November 28, 1893, April 8, June 23, 1894; also see text of Agnes Hamilton's statement to her church's Christian Endeavor at end of Diary for 1887 (this is out of chronological order). Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, December 11, 1892; Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, I, 528.

⁴⁹ Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, November 27, 1893.

Brontë (*Jane Eyre*), and George Eliot (*Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda*, and *The Mill on the Floss*). She also read Thackeray, Byron's *Childe Harold*, an early novel of William Dean Howells (*The Lady of the Aroostook*), and Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia*. At fifteen she wrote that one reason she liked a particular volume of Christmas stories was "because they are English and I like anything English," and certainly she was steeped in both the Victorian production and the Victorian canon of "great books." Just as fairy tales and Arthurian romance had permeated the Hamilton children's games and fantasies, so the landscape and sensibilities of Victorian literature shaped Agnes's world view in adolescence.⁵⁰

It is not surprising, then, that Agnes found her bearings in social thought through English writers. She first encountered Kingsley during her school days and then began reading him in earnest, often aloud with Jessie, after she returned to Fort Wayne. Kingsley's Christian Socialism exhorted social salvation through individual regeneration. He deplored the social indifference which allowed the appalling living and working conditions of industrial Britain to fester. Sanitary advances, labor reform, and political reconstruction were urgent, but programmatic structural change was pointless without an accompanying class reconciliation attainable only by the rededication of each individual, rich or poor, to the social ideals of Jesus Christ. In *Alton Locke*, perhaps his most influential novel, he portrayed the human toll of a class-bound industrial England in the person of a young working-class poet, torn between loyalty to his fellows in the Chartist movement and the natural temptation to let himself be taken up and groomed for literary success by upper-class patrons. *Alton Locke* spares neither the Chartists—misguided and quixotic in their single-minded concentration on a slate of reforms—nor their conservative antagonists. Kingsley also indicts the Church of England for alienating the lower classes (he was one of the most outspoken opponents of the Oxford Movement) and the evangelistic sects for their narrow-minded opportunism. Alton Locke, the poor tailor-poet, comes to realize both the vanity of aesthetic beauty that only the privileged may enjoy and the futility of a political program that exacerbates, rather than eliminates, class hatred. He finds true spiritual ease only when he accepts Jesus Christ "as the great Reformer; and yet as the true conservative . . . the true demagogue—the champion of the poor; and yet as the true King, above and below all earthly rank; on whose will alone all real superiority of man to man, all the time-justified and time-hon-

⁵⁰ Diary, Friday, December [?], 1883.

oured usages of the family, the society, the nation, stand and shall stand for ever."⁵¹

What perhaps spoke more directly to Agnes Hamilton than Kingsley's vivid descriptions of the social problems of Victorian England were his prescriptive strictures on the Christian individual's inward attitude and outward behavior. Like so many other Victorian reformers who embraced the ideal of an "organic" society, Kingsley harked back to an idealized Middle Ages for the personal ideals of chivalry, honor, and duty that would provide the glue for such a social order. He enjoined upon women particularly a clear understanding of the true meaning of personal heroism in social service as entailing "the going beyond the limits of strict duty . . . [but] never . . . the going out of the path of strict duty."

I have known girls think they were doing a fine thing by leaving uncongenial parents or disagreeable sisters, and cutting out for themselves, as they fancied, a more useful and elevated line of life than that of mere home duties . . . and in the name of God, neglecting the command of God to honour their father and mother.⁵²

The sting of such a rebuke for the restless and hyperconscientious Agnes may be imagined.

By 1892 Agnes had gone on from Kingsley to his fellow cleric and Christian Socialist Frederick Denison Maurice, who founded the Working Men's College in London in 1854. Maurice's *Life and Letters*, compiled by his son, became regular reading for Agnes, and she copied into her diaries long passages on the need for personal strength to carry out God's mission.⁵³ Interestingly, she seems to have come late to John Ruskin, the touchstone of Victorian aesthetics and social thought; she encountered his work as part of her prescribed architectural reading. Though she appreciated Ruskin, she was not an uncritical convert. She was most attracted to "his grand idea, [that] a man's religion must enter all he does, all he says, all he thinks, if it be true religion." She dismissed his "objection to machine-made articles" as impractical and anachronistic.⁵⁴ While Agnes introduced Alice to Kingsley and Maurice, Alice urged her cousin to try Thomas Carlyle and

⁵¹ Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* (London, 1912), 339.

⁵² Charles Kingsley, "Heroism," in *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays* (London, 1880), 244-45. By the end of 1892 Agnes had read *Hypatia*, *Alton Locke*, *Two Years Ago*, and *Out of the Deep*. In the "commonplace" section of her Diary for 1894-1895 she refers to Kingsley's letters and essays.

⁵³ See end of Diary for 1892; see also Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, [January?] 8, 1893.

⁵⁴ Diary, December 13, 1893; see also *ibid.*, December 14, 1890, June 23, 1894.

Matthew Arnold. "I am in love with Matthew Arnold," she declared; but Agnes apparently never shared that passion.⁵⁵

Agnes seems to have been most attracted to those authors who offered her clear guides to living, upbraided her for her personal lapses, and inspired her to further struggle. Her literary judgment was intelligent but not profound nor primarily aesthetic. She particularly enjoyed memoirs—the "life and letters" *genre*—such as those of Kingsley, Maurice, Thomas Arnold (by Dean Arthur Penrhyn Stanley), and Baroness Frances Bunsen, whose dictum, "A man's character is his history," inspired in Agnes a new bout of self-reproach: "I have blamed circumstances for myself and do constantly though it is such a false thought."⁵⁶ She also read sermons by Stanley and Phillips Brooks, as well as Thomas à Kempis, *Royal Way of the Holy Cross* (to which she turned after her mother had to refuse her a nostalgic autumn visit to Farmington), and Sir Thomas Brown's *Religio Medici*.⁵⁷

From the fundamental tracts of English Christian Socialism Agnes moved in the early 1890s to contemporary assessments of American social problems. Her work at Nebraska brought her face to face with the grim effects of the depression of 1893-1894 on working-class neighborhoods, and she as well as Alice, who was then interning in Boston, saw firsthand that a man's inability to find work did not always stem from "laziness or drunkenness."⁵⁸ Agnes read the articles and editorials on labor issues in the popular journals that the family received. Though not unsympathetic to the trade unions' attempt to aid their members in hard times, she deplored Eugene V. Debs's action in pulling out his American Railway Union members in support of the Pullman workers in the summer of 1894. The railroad union, she felt, could have

⁵⁵ Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, January 8, July 13, 1893; the quotation is from *ibid.*, August 14, 1893.

⁵⁶ Diary, March 22, 1893.

⁵⁷ See reading list in Diary for 1891-1892; see also *ibid.*, entries for September 4, 1890, February [?], 1891.

⁵⁸ Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, January 25, 1894. The depression of the early 1890s was a shattering experience for many social workers and marked a turning point in their thought. At this time many early settlement residents rejected the classic distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor that had been popularized by organized charity and moved toward an acceptance of environmental factors as determinative in causing poverty. Some began cooperating actively with struggling labor unions in the garment and other trades. Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, 49-50, 172-76. Pointed firsthand testimony of the effect of the depression on the social attitudes and activities of the settlement workers may be found in the *Fifth Annual Report of the College Settlements Association, 1893-1894* (Philadelphia, 1894), 20-21, 34-35, 44-45. See also Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 159-66; Vida D. Scudder, *On Journey* (New York, 1937), 153-54; Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York, 1956), 21-22.

shown its support of the Pullman strikers in contributions of food or money rather than in jeopardizing the livelihoods of thousands of men. Worst of all was the exacerbation of class divisions that the strike entailed.⁵⁹ She responded even more sharply to William Jennings Bryan's campaign in 1896. On election day she wrote: "Today is decided whether the men of education and sense, the men of wisdom, rule our country or whether wild outlawry, Bryan, Debs, Coxie [*sic*]; whether our people can be taken in by any and every new wind that promises them in empty words, money that will not have to be worked for; whether we shall have for our president a man who sets one part of his people against another" ⁶⁰

It is hard to say how much of Agnes's political thinking was independent, even by her mid-twenties, and how much was shaped by family habit and social assumptions. Certainly the half-conscious social attitudes of childhood lingered. (She readily used the adjective "common" to describe people she found vulgar—those who pretended to a social status their lack of refinement belied.⁶¹) At the same time, under the tutelage of English and American social thinkers, she had become more sophisticated about her own economic position ("We are not even moderately rich, but the whole of what we have is unearned"), and she took pride in practicing locally the social ideals they preached. She boasted that in the city's YWCA "all are equally members, those who give and those who take . . . It is not a charity given by one class to another but the poorest member, the hardest worker, is carrying on this organization for mutual help as much as the richest woman with all her time at her disposal." The one exclusionary rule, that members of the Board of Managers must be drawn from the Protestant churches, "places the association, once and for ever, in the right hands and is the only one necessary."⁶²

The Americans whom she read largely followed the lines laid down by Kingsley and Maurice. Richard T. Ely was a professor of economics at Johns Hopkins and later at Wisconsin. He joined several other rebels against classical economics in founding the American Economic Association, which was dedicated to an ethical and activist approach to the study of economics, its chief purpose being, as Ely put it, "to bring science to the aid of Chris-

⁵⁹ Diary, July 6, 1891.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, November 3, 1896.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1894; Agnes Hamilton to Phoebe Hamilton, September 24, 1898, reel 17.

⁶² Diary, January 17, 1895, November 13, 1896.

tianity.”⁶³ Ely was another advocate of the concept of society as an organism, in whose ideal state every individual’s capacities could reach their fullest development. The duty of the true Christian was to dedicate his life to the good of the whole; true philanthropy implied, not handouts, but personal service aimed at enriching the lives of others.⁶⁴ “Socialism” was not a program of economic redistribution but the ethical antithesis of selfish individualism. Agnes was impressed by Ely’s concrete proposals for political and social reform, which included public ownership of utilities, and she bravely swallowed his recommendation of an inheritance tax “to lessen the ‘unearned increment.’” She was also reassured by his gradualist approach to social change; she agreed that “a sudden change is contrary to all nature and must necessarily put back and keep back progress.”⁶⁵

Through Ely’s *Socialism* and *Social Aspects of Christianity* as well as John Bascom’s *Sociology* and George Hodges’s *Faith and Social Service*, Agnes encountered the American brand of Christian Socialism, or, as it was more frequently called, social Christianity. This complex of ideas was endorsed by a broad and loose agglomeration of academics, publicists, Protestant ministers, and social activists who were able to agree on the vague but stirring proposition that the Kingdom of God, complete with sanitary reforms, judicious economic regulation, and social and cultural enrichment for all, should be established here on earth.⁶⁶ In the same years—1895-1897—Agnes first met representatives of the settlement movement. Graham Taylor came to Fort Wayne in late 1896. Taylor was the founder of Chicago Commons, after Hull-House perhaps the most prominent settlement in Chicago. Ordained as a Congregational minister, Taylor had been inspired

⁶³ Richard T. Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity* (New York, 1889), 25. Ely was familiar with the English Christian Socialists. One of the best accounts of the founding of the American Economic Association may be found in Daniel M. Fox, *The Discovery of Abundance: Simon N. Patten and the Transformation of Social Theory* (New York, 1967), 35-39.

⁶⁴ Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity*, especially 100-10, 123-32. For the formation of Ely’s ideas see Richard T. Ely, *Ground Under Our Feet: An Autobiography* (New York, 1938), especially 41-165. Dorothy Ross offers an excellent discussion of Ely’s ideological retreat from his early socialist fervor in the context of the shifting American political climate of the 1880’s and 1890s. Dorothy Ross, “Socialism and American Liberalism: Academic Social Thought in the 1880’s,” *Perspectives in American History*, XI (1977-1978), 7-79.

⁶⁵ Diary, January 10, 17, 1895.

⁶⁶ See Dombrowski, *Early Days of Christian Socialism*, especially 91-99, 110-20. Several very good general treatments of the Social Gospel movement are Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (1949; new ed., New York, 1967); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, 1978), chapter 5.

during his first decade of pastoral work in Hartford, Connecticut, by the examples of Dwight Moody and Josiah Strong. He was appointed professor of "practical theology" at Hartford Theological Seminary in the late 1880s. In 1894 he moved to Chicago to found a Department of Christian Sociology at the Chicago Theological Seminary, considerably more liberal than Hartford and receptive to his insistence on teaching the social aspects of the ministry "inductively," through field work at the settlement he proposed to establish.⁶⁷ Taylor struck Agnes as "intensely ugly," soft and indistinct in his speech, and powerfully attractive in "the truths that he utters." He delivered a sermon on the Incarnation in her church: "As Christ came here to live among men," she recorded his message, "so we must live among those to whom we carry the salvation." A week later—the day before her twenty-eighth birthday—he gave an "intensely interesting" public lecture on social democracy.

[He] ascribes wrong in politics, economics, all evils to lack of social democracy, to classes, differences, distinctions; Christ strikes at the evil by the whole Gospel, by every effort of his life, by every word . . . ; these we continue to preach and never to act; this causes evil on all sides to the fortunate and unfortunate; the one side longing to pity, to love, to do, the other longing, dying to be pitied, to be loved, to be done for; both full of resulting discontent.

Taylor too invoked the organic metaphor of society as "one body" whose parts must live in interdependent harmony.⁶⁸

Agnes also heard Florence Kelley of Hull-House speak about the sweat-shop labor system at the Women's Club League course in November, 1896, and she may have been responsible for inviting Kelley to return in January to talk about settlement work. For Christmas in 1896 Agnes asked for *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, a collection of articles and neighborhood surveys by the settlement residents, and around the same time she subscribed to *Chicago Commons*, a monthly that emphasized settlement work and related social and economic issues.⁶⁹

Agnes's new interest in settlement work was a natural extension of her long discipleship to Charles Kingsley as well as her more recent readings in the American "school" of Christian sociology. Graham Taylor's lectures in Fort Wayne made the lineage explicit. Around this time Agnes had another acute attack of self-doubt and conflict about the purpose of her life. "O Christ lead me out of this," she prayed at the end of January, 1897.

⁶⁷ Graham Taylor, *Pioneering on Social Frontiers* (Chicago, 1930), especially 379-83.

⁶⁸ Diary, November 22, 30, 1896.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, November 10, 1896, January 10, 1897.



AGNES HAMILTON, READING AT HOME
1896

The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

"Show me and show me by work. It is idleness that is taking away my love. If it seem best that I must stay on here, show me each day Thy work. If it [were] best to rise up and go, give me Thy strength. Let not the thought of my self, my pleasure, above all my self-esteem, come in."⁷⁰

In the course of things it was Alice Hamilton who first entered settlement life. In the spring of 1897 she accepted a position teaching at the women's medical college of Northwestern University in Chicago. Alice's ideas about settlements at this point were hazy. Unlike Agnes she had not made a special study of them; caught up in her medical studies for the previous six years, she had confronted the human costs of poverty and urban congestion

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, January 31, 1897. Although Alice says in her autobiography that she and Agnes "definitely" chose settlement work in the spring of 1895 after hearing Jane Addams at the local Methodist church (*Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 54), this scenario is not confirmed either in their correspondence or in Agnes's diary. Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, May 10, 1897.

in her case work, particularly in Boston, but she felt intellectually drawn toward medical research rather than practice.⁷¹ Still, she was intrigued by what she had heard of settlement life, largely from Agnes, and almost whimsically decided to try it.

If I decide on Chicago, I want to live either in Hull House or in Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons, probably the latter. I think from what you told me that he is perfectly willing to have working people go and live there even if they have no time to give to—well to whatever it is that he does. I know that I haven't at all the motives in going that you would have, but I know it will do me quantities of good, and perhaps the motives will come in time.⁷²

Upon applying, Alice was chagrined to find that places at both settlements were scarce and reserved for those who could contribute at least part of their time to the work. "The whole thing made me feel very small," she reported to Agnes. "It is so tremendously cultured, and all the people aim to be specialists in sociology or kindergartening or manual training or art or music or anything else that is taught there. I know I would never be accepted by them."⁷³ She had resigned herself to apartment life when in September a place at Hull-House suddenly opened up. She felt like a "miserable hypocrite" when Florence Kelley told her that she had been accepted on the merit of being one of the "Fort Wayne Hamiltons," whom Kelley had liked so much during her visit the previous winter. Further, she found herself disconcertingly "rattled" by Jane Addams, who was, simply, "quite perfect." "I really am quite school-girly in my relations with her . . . I know when she comes into the room, I have pangs of idiotic jealousy toward the residents she is intimate with."⁷⁴ Struggling as many others would for words to convey Addams's magnetic yet almost ethereal presence, she wrote: "Miss Addams is a quiet, sad-eyed woman, with a great weariness in her face which impresses you as having looked upon the misery and sin of the world and having accepted them as an inevitable burden which she must bear with no hope of ever reforming them."⁷⁵ Despite her misgivings Alice safely passed the six-week probationary period in No-

⁷¹ Alice Hamilton, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*, 95; Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, January 25, 1894, December 6, 1896.

⁷² *Ibid.*, May 10, 1897.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, June 13, 1897.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, October 13, 1897.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1897. In the summer of 1894, recently arrived in Chicago and already a frequent visitor at Hull-House, John Dewey wrote to his wife in Europe: "Either I forget between times, or Miss Addams feels & shows the burden of life more & more—The expression of her face is sad to the point of haunting one. One feels like an intruder." John Dewey to [his wife], August 31, 1894, microfilm copy, John Dewey Papers (Hull-House, Chicago).

vember and promptly urged Agnes to come visit her at Hull-House. "I know that to be in the same house with Miss Addams and to sit at the same table with her is enough to make it more than worth while for you to stay even if you didn't come to see me. Do, do, do it."⁷⁶

Agnes's stay at Hull-House in the winter of 1898 was for her an exciting and, in retrospect, momentous experience. Her letters home to her mother recount frantically busy days and barely digested impressions of settlement residents, "neighbors," and visitors. Eager to be accepted as "one of the people"—that is, the residents—despite her guest status, she volunteered for the smallest tasks, helping to recruit men for snow-shovelling jobs, delivering letters to Chicago Commons, and opening the front door in the evenings. "At the last moment the manager [of the Hull-House Players' current production] needed another white apron and to my joy I had one in my trunk which I rushed for."⁷⁷ She also filled in for absent club leaders, judged a paper hat contest, and stuffed envelopes with political broadsides. Hull-House was absorbed in its second full-scale campaign against the incumbent alderman of the Nineteenth Ward, the popular and corrupt Johnny Powers. Agnes witnessed strategy sessions around the dinner table and surreptitiously listened in on local Republican Club meetings (from which women were commonly barred).⁷⁸

Within a week Agnes was offered a regular "job" for the rest of her visit. The morning doortender had left the settlement for a nursing position, and Addams wanted Agnes to fill in. "She said something about Miss Holdin's manner not being all that was desirable and insinuating that mine was suited to the circumstances, which was very pleasing in her." (Had Addams been as other-worldly as she seemed, she might not have had such remarkable success in attracting a lifelong series of just such loyal aides as Agnes.) Though Alice protested that her cousin should use her time in Chicago to "fly around to see more," Agnes demurred: "I am very much pleased to be wanted and I think [Alice] is pleased, too." When one of the older residents told her that the others all hoped she would stay on for good, Agnes's cup of happiness overflowed. "Aren't they fine to want me? I feel so proud and pleased and grateful."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, November 4, 1897.

⁷⁷ Agnes Hamilton to Phoebe Hamilton, January 27, January 30, 1898.

⁷⁸ A firsthand account of this episode is in Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 315-18; see also Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 152-62; Agnes Hamilton to Phoebe Hamilton, January 30, 1898.

⁷⁹ Agnes Hamilton to Phoebe Hamilton, February 1, 1898.

What was to be a stay of two weeks stretched to almost two months as the residents urged her to stay and as she, like Alice, fell under the spell of Jane Addams. "The more I see of her, the more I feel attracted to her. She is such a sane person looking at things so squarely and honestly and above all so full of love."⁸⁰ Agnes's responsibilities increased when Addams asked her to take on some of the burden of her already vast correspondence. "She has an idea that I write good letters and I am sure she has never seen one that I have written, and I hope she never will."⁸¹ Agnes was also pressed to fill in for the woman who organized the Hull-House club work when she took her vacation in late February.

As Agnes lingered on, she repeatedly apologized to her mother for staying away so long and assured her that she could leave at any time if needed at home. The great attraction of Hull-House, she admitted, was that she was "wanted." "You see I am getting puffed up, and considering myself of some use."⁸² Like other Hull-House residents, who believed in living as "naturally" as they would uptown, Agnes took advantage of Chicago's attractions; she juxtaposed visits to the police court and women's club meetings with evenings at the theater. She cast a sceptical eye, however, on the myriad causes and platforms she heard expounded at Hull-House. "It is amusing to hear people, each one with his own scheme for setting us all straight and so sure that any other scheme would wreck us worse than ever. Looking at them all has quite cured me of any one"⁸³ What held her was less the external interest of life in Chicago, though this was compelling in its scope and novelty, than the exhilarating sense of being needed in such a place.

It seems strange that a woman who was already a recognized leader in church and civic affairs in her own city should derive such satisfaction from tending the door and answering letters in a distant settlement house. An interesting juxtaposition of thoughts in one of her letters home hints at an explanation: "Do tell me any time you want me. It is great fun in one way, and a very useful experience in another with no fun at all but a good deal of misery. It is fine to know Miss Addams and to see the way she deals with things and people. She is thirty seven years old, she told me last Sunday, and came here when she was twenty eight. But, what I started out to say was that if you need me, I should feel terribly about staying."⁸⁴ Agnes was twenty-nine, ten

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1898.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1898.

⁸² *Ibid.*, February 8, 1898.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, February 8, 23, 1898.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, January 30, February 8, 1898.

years out of school and still praying just a year earlier for a God-given deliverance from her endless restiveness, pride, selfishness, indecision, and repeated failures to do her duty. She may well have been heartened to reflect that Addams was only a year younger when she moved to Hull-House and began her life's work.

Agnes Hamilton was really very different from Jane Addams. Addams was a spiritual follower of Carlyle, not of Christ. Her outward humility was belied by the confidence with which, at the age of thirty, she moved toward national and then international prominence. But for Addams, as for Agnes Hamilton, the period of her twenties had been a fallow decade, punctuated by grand plans delayed or abandoned ostensibly for reasons of ill health and family claims. Like Agnes, she had backed into settlement work after years of inchoate and restless floundering in search of some unifying purpose for her education and energies. Three years after founding Hull-House, in an address to fellow settlement pioneers, she spoke from experience in delivering what remained the most eloquent justification of the "subjective necessity for social settlements."⁸⁵ The need for personal social work, she admitted candidly, lay as much with the workers as with the worked upon. The idealism bred into young people by college education and by the "democratic" and "humanitarian" spirit of the times was starved into aimless frustration in the absence of any "recognized outlet." Addams feelingly portrayed the plight of young women in the well-meaning thrall of "inconsistent" parents:

from babyhood the altruistic tendencies of these daughters are persistently cultivated. They are taught to be self-forgetting and self-sacrificing, to consider the good of the whole before the good of the ego. But when all this information and culture show results, when the daughter comes back from college and begins to recognize her social claim to the "submerged tenth," and to evince a disposition to fulfill it, the family claim is strenuously asserted; she is told that she is unjustified, ill-advised in her efforts.⁸⁶

With her wisdom Addams set forth what she called the "elements of a tragedy." Certainly parental prohibition and the external restraints of convention bound many talented and educated young women to circumscribed domestic roles. Unlike Agnes's father, Phoebe Hamilton respected her daughter's "right to make

⁸⁵ Biographies of Jane Addams include that of her nephew, James Weber Linn, *Jane Addams: A Biography* (New York, 1935); Daniel Levine, *Jane Addams and the Liberal Tradition* (Madison, 1971). The least generous and in some ways the most acute is Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York, 1973). The text of Addams's address may be found in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 115-27.

⁸⁶ Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 119.

your own life," but she fretted every time Agnes caught cold in a strange city and frequently reminded her daughter of all the good work that lay at hand in Fort Wayne.⁸⁷ What often gave a respected parent's claims their devastating potency, however, was the internalized dinning of the strident voices of these young adults' Anglo-American Protestant culture, which commanded simultaneously an active response to the demands of duty and a vigilant and suspicious resistance to the stirrings of merely personal ambition. For women particularly this was a cruel prescription for righteousness. For Agnes Hamilton the "family claim" was peculiarly palpable, but it was also a point of both personal and intellectual confusion. "I believe in the family so strongly," she wrote at twenty-six. "I believe in it as a divinely appointed institution, the most sacred thing on earth . . . there seems to me nothing greater except our great Father's fatherhood of which this little family is our best lesson." As she continued to resist the notion that she rejected at twenty, that a woman's sole aim should be marriage and child-rearing, she also hesitated to endorse her cousin Edith's contention that "if a woman (wife and mother) finds she can carry out her individual life better alone, she ought to give up her family and devote herself to improving herself and her own individuality; that that must be done at any cost." Significantly, she interpreted their disagreement on this point as the difference between "individualism and socialism"—herself representing the "socialist" side.⁸⁸

Christian Socialism and its variants spoke forcefully and pointedly to many of Agnes's contemporaries. Addams ascribed the appeal of settlements to "a certain renaissance going forward in Christianity" which expressed itself in "the impulse to share the lives of the poor, the desire to make social service . . . express the spirit of Christ"⁸⁹ The heart of Christian Socialism, as expounded by Kingsley, Maurice, Arnold Toynbee, and the Americans Ely, Hodges, Taylor, and their ministerial and academic allies, was not the movement's concern with social reform but its preoccupation with the soul of the reformer. Addams discerned in this ideology a cure for the ills of both low and high society, but in effect it was less a cure than an irritant and a symptom. The new Christian philanthropy demanded, "not money, but yourselves," as the English reformer Walter Besant had written; but where and how was one to give oneself, and what made one's *self*

⁸⁷ See, for example, Phoebe Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, March 9, May 23, 30, 1902, February 6, 1903.

⁸⁸ Agnes paraphrases Edith's comment in her Diary, September 22, 1895.

⁸⁹ Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 122.

worthy of being given?⁹⁰ The trappings of learning and culture surely were not enough; one felt compelled to strive for a purity of motive and an annihilation of self-seeking that were rendered nearly impossible by the emphasis on self-examination and self-testing implicit in this whole strain of Christian social thought. The social settlement movement as it shook itself out from Christian Socialism was more merciful—short on ascetic self-denial and long on the creative anarchy of heterogeneous ideologies and the “mutual aid” derivable from class interaction in poor city neighborhoods.

Most devastating of all aspects of social Christianity and its complex roots in the Victorian social *milieu* was the characteristic formlessness—the lack of content—of its invocation to “duty.” It is impossible to say what precise concatenation of forces broke the dam of indecision in the face of proliferating and conflicting duties for Agnes Hamilton. She did not stay at Hull-House in 1898. She returned to Fort Wayne in the early spring. In September she packed up and accompanied Jessie to Philadelphia, where they both enrolled in art school. Through old Farmington friends, whom her mother had enjoined her to cultivate, Agnes was drawn again into settlement work. At first she attended occasional evening activities and helped to paint scenery for plays. Then, in late 1901, she decided to leave her boardinghouse and move into the Lighthouse, a Presbyterian settlement located in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. There, with her mother’s reluctant blessing, she stayed.⁹¹

While Dr. Alice Hamilton went on to become one of the nation’s first experts in industrial toxicology and Edith Hamilton served as headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School and became a noted and prolific popularizer of ancient culture, Agnes Hamilton made a career of settlement work. She served as a director and member of the executive committee of the Lighthouse until the early 1930s, when, following their mother’s death, she and Jessie moved to their summer home in Connecticut, close to their cousins Alice and Margaret. Unlike Alice, who used Hull-House as a base for public health activism on a national scale, Agnes was one of the settlement movement’s staunch “insiders,” whose dedication to a single local constituency insured the settlements’ institutional longevity.

⁹⁰ Walter Besant, “University Settlements,” in *University and Social Settlements*, ed. Will Reason (London, 1898), 2, 4.

⁹¹ Agnes Hamilton to Phoebe Hamilton, September 24, November 14, 20, 1898, January 27, 1899, January 4, 1902; Phoebe Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, January 4, 13, 21, 1902.

It is doubtful that Agnes found in settlement work a permanent release from the relentless self-questioning that she had lived with since adolescence.⁹² She did gain, first at Hull-House and then in the long Lighthouse years, an explicit sense of her own worth—the joy of being “useful”—which had evaded her in Fort Wayne. At home she had felt pulled in a dozen directions. Her busy-ness left her unfulfilled, and resulting periods of restlessness would trigger bouts of self-recrimination followed by rededication to the impossible task, or tasks, of self-perfection. Settlement life entailed a similar splintering of her time and energy, but the encompassing walls imparted that crucial illusion of “one single purpose” which she had sought, vainly and with an increasing sense of her own guilty *hubris*, at home in Indiana. With its explicit Presbyterian affiliation, the Lighthouse represented a direct continuation of Agnes’s religious work in Fort Wayne. More broadly, the settlement embodied the ideas of Christian Socialism, which had become for Agnes the litmus test of the worth of her worldly activities. A deep and enduring affection for Esther Bradford, who with her husband Robert ran the Lighthouse for over thirty years, also anchored Agnes to the settlement with a bond transcending institutional loyalty.

Not a renunciation, but a re-creation, of home and family, the settlement achieved an almost seamless merger of domestic detail and the personal enlargement and fulfillment of what Vida D. Scudder would call the “freedom that is perfect service” to a clamoring, suffering world.⁹³ There were certainly many who en-

⁹² Agnes Hamilton’s spiritual questing continued, according to information offered by her niece, Phoebe Hamilton Soule. Sometime in the early 1930s Agnes succumbed to the charisma of the controversial Frank Buchman, founder of A First Century Christian Fellowship, later renamed the Oxford Group, and then Moral Re-Armament. Moral Re-Armament as propounded by Buchman was an evangelistic movement that sought to bring both personal betterment and international peace through a universal rededication to God and the four “Absolutes”: honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. Agnes was apparently an ardent disciple and strove to convert friends and family members. Her cousins resisted the call, not least because Buchman’s advocacy of “public confession” violated the family’s tacit code of privacy. (Interestingly, the practice of public profession of faith was part of the Christian Endeavor idea as developed by Francis Clark, though it is unclear whether Agnes’s groups at Nebraska and her own church practiced this.) Interview with Phoebe Hamilton Soule, August, 1983. On Moral Re-Armament, see Buchman’s collected speeches in Frank Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1961); for an insider’s exposition of the philosophy of the Oxford Group see *The Layman with a Notebook*, with a preface by L. W. Grensted, *What Is the Oxford Group?* (New York, 1933); for a lengthy and hostile exposé see Tom Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament: A Study of Frank Buchman and His Movement* (New York, 1965).

⁹³ Vida D. Scudder, “What It Means To Be a Member of the College Settlements Association,” reprinted in Scudder, *On Journey*, 136.

tered settlement work with the relatively uncomplicated urge to right social wrongs. Others, like Scudder, sought a sense of “reality” in the escape, however partial, from the privileged, precious world which had nurtured them.⁹⁴ For Agnes Hamilton, the Christian ideals of duty and service constituted a confused and confusing mandate of propitiatory selflessness achieved by scrupulous attention to self. For one who could not allow herself the unleashed ambition of single-minded professional or creative endeavor, the settlement substituted a real-world battleground for the rigged and treacherous battlefield of her own soul.

⁹⁴ Scudder, *On Journey*, 50-51, 67-68, 91.