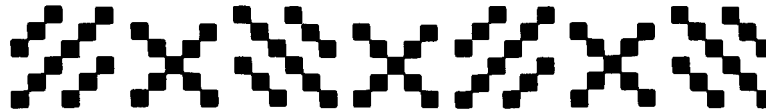


Richard W. Thompson: The Persistent Know Nothing

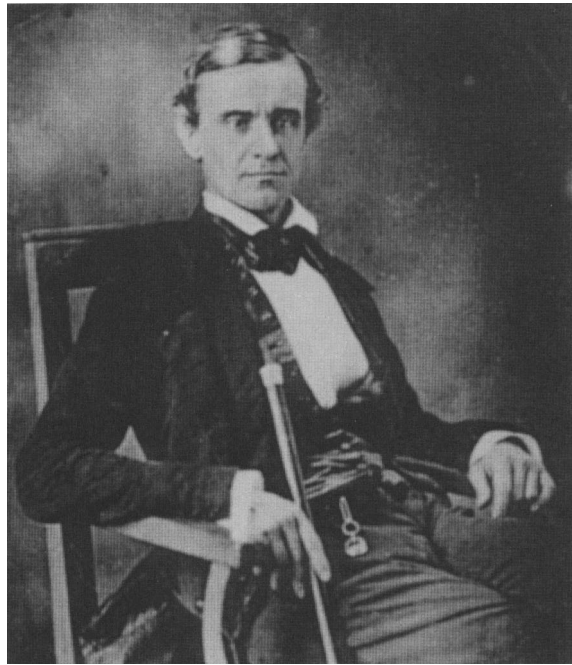
*Mark E. Neely, Jr.**



The Know Nothing party in the Old Northwest has been seen more as a party of sectional compromise than as a party of ethnic and religious divisiveness. Historians have argued for years that the anti-Catholic, antiforeign party was, in the states west of Pennsylvania, principally a haven for conservative Union loving Whigs who became Know Nothings because they wished to avoid Republican radicalism on the slavery question but who could not bear the thought of joining forces with their lifelong enemies in the Democracy. Historians have belittled the party's voter appeal and have pictured it as a hopelessly senile movement which embodied little or no sincere animosity toward the Midwest's small Catholic and foreign born population.¹

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¹ John P. Senning's article, "The Know-Nothing Movement in Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, VII (April, 1914), 1-33, concluded that the Know Nothing movement in Indiana's western neighbor was "issueless" because opposition "to the foreign immigrant in the West would have proved suicidal to its development" (p. 12). It was, therefore, the haven of Union loving conservatives. The standard history of Know Nothingism, Ray Allen Billington's book, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago, 1964), adopted the same interpretation for the whole Midwest. After 1854 conservatives were "left stranded with no party allegiance, for many of them refused to support either the proslavery Democratic party or the antislavery Republican party. . . . They drifted naturally into the Know-Nothing party, which was not only neutral on the vital issue of slavery but loudly promised to preserve the union" (pp. 390-91). Billington wrote before the discovery of midwestern race prejudice by writers like Voegeli, Litwack, and Berwanger and *did* say at one point that the "anti-Catholic sentiment which did exist in the northwest was almost certainly sincere" because the "people of this section wanted no compromise on slavery" (p. 395). In 1940 Henry J. Carman's and Reinhard H. Luthin's "Some Aspects of the Know-Nothing Movement Reconsidered," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXXIX (April, 1940), 213-34, questioned the sincerity even of the northeastern members of the party,



RICHARD W. THOMPSON (1850)

Reproduced from Richard W. Thompson, *Recollections of Sixteen Presidents from Washington to Lincoln* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1894), II, frontispiece.

Of late, the history of the Know Nothing party has undergone extensive revision, all of which points toward a much greater inherent vitality in the movement than historians used to think. Scholars now shy away from the "Civil War synthesis" which attempted to relate all political issues

concluding flatly that "in the majority of states invaded by the movement the issue served as a mere cloak for issues of far greater moment" (p. 213). Allan Nevins made the same mistake in *Ordeal of the Union: A House Dividing, 1852-1857* (New York, 1947), 316-18, 323-32. This interpretation became a useful exculpatory tool in the hands of skillful biographers of statesmen who had dallied with the party. Thus Albert D. Kirwan's *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union* ([Lexington], 1962) excused the Kentucky statesman on these grounds: "In the border states . . . Know-Nothings were influenced more by fear of sectional conflict over slavery than by eagerness for its protection or by an aversion to Catholics. . . . The Know-Nothing party offered them an alternative, a delay of violent civil war. They sought to preserve the Union by pushing aside the slavery issue" (p. 297). Thus Crittenden joined the "healthy, respectable element" in the party. For a different view of Crittenden, see Wallace S. Hutcheon, Jr., "The Louisville Riots of August, 1855," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, LXIX (April, 1971), 150-72, esp. 169.

in the 1850s to slavery and sectionalism. They try instead to approach the events of the decade as they appeared at the time to voters and politicians who did not know war was coming.²

Michael F. Holt has studied the Know Nothing party's meteoric history more thoroughly than any other recent student. He pictures the Know Nothings as sincere zealots responding directly to sensational issues involving immigration and the Catholic church. Most important, of course, was the influx of Catholic immigrants from famine stricken Ireland and from Germany in the late 1840s. When their five year naturalization periods expired and the Maine law agitation made them fear they would lose their beer, these immigrants came to the polls in droves, voting—as tradition has dictated—for the Democratic party. Know Nothingism in the eastern states, Holt says, was a direct, bigoted response to this new presence.³

Tactical errors made by the highest ranking Catholic prelate in America, Archbishop John Hughes of New York, as well as local squabbles led to sensational headlines that made the Catholic issue important even in states where few Catholic immigrants lived or voted. Hughes pressed the

² On the perils of the Civil War synthesis see Joel H. Silbey, "The Civil War Synthesis in American Political History," *Civil War History*, X (June, 1964), 130-40.

³ Studies which discuss the Know Nothing party in Indiana do not seriously challenge the generally accepted interpretation of the movement. Carl Fremont Brand's article, "The History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVIII (March, June, September, 1922), 47-81, 177-206, 266-306, presented a bland summary of the movement's rise and fall. Brand largely avoided speculation on the motivations of the party's adherents because he had no access to the private papers of the leaders. Sister M. Evangeline Thomas' book, *Nativism in the Old Northwest, 1850-1860* (Washington, 1936), was sensitive to American anti-Catholicism, but her regional focus slighted Indiana's experience. Logan Esarey's treatment of the movement in *A History of Indiana from 1850 to the Present* (Reprint, 2 vols. in one, Indianapolis, 1970), II, 619-21, was too brief to attempt any major interpretation of the movement. John D. Barnhardt's and Donald F. Carmony's *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth* (4 vols., New York, 1954), II, 141-52, is rather tentative, stressing as a cause of the party's growth the rise of Catholic population at first (p. 141) but then arguing that it "secured substantial political significance only because of the resurgence of the agitation over slavery" (p. 142). On the whole they belittle the vitality and significance of the Know Nothing party in Indiana. For Holt's view, see Michael F. Holt, "The Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *History of U.S. Political Parties, 1789-1860*. Volume I, *Factions to Parties* (New York, 1973), 596-98; and Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History*, LX (September, 1973), 323-31.

trusteeship controversy over ecclesiastical ownership of church property in New York to the point that a papal nuncio, Gaetano Bedini, was sent to settle the question. Bedini's ensuing trip to extend the papal blessing to Catholics across the country in 1853 spawned fears of a Catholic assault even where few Catholics lived. Campaigns like the one launched by Hughes in New York in 1852 to end reading of the Protestant version of the Bible in the public schools and to split the public school fund for parochial schools were ill timed and fed the fires of hatred and fear in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. A depression along the Ohio River in 1854 brought working class hostility to foreign laborers who lowered wages or threatened scarce jobs.⁴

Holt argues that many native Protestants sensed a crisis, but the established political parties, Whig and Democrat, did not respond to the issue quickly. Seeking a new party responsive to the popular will and sensitive to this social crisis, impatient reformers created the Know Nothing party. It did not await the nationalist vacuum created by the death of the Whig party and the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854; in fact, it helped destroy the Whig party by stealing its nativist voters.⁵

But Holt's revised picture challenges the old view of the Know Nothings only in regard to the eastern states; he has little to say about the Catholic issue in Indiana or other states of the Old Northwest. In the Northeast, Holt argues, the Know Nothing party outstripped the Republicans' growth rate in 1854, 1855, and 1856.⁶ In the states of the Old Northwest, however, the Republicans took an early lead over the Know Nothings in competing for homeless anti-Democratic voters.⁷

Know Nothing lodges began to spring up in the Hoosier State in February, 1854, before the national House of Representatives passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act but shortly after anti-Catholic agitator Alessandro Gavazzi toured the state. As a political party the Know Nothings very early fused with other anti-Democratic groups and often dictated most of the nominations to the state ticket in secret session the night before the open Fusion or People's party convention met. In

⁴ Holt, "Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," 594.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 603.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 607.

⁷ Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, II, 148.

1854 three fourths of the Fusion state ticket were Know Nothings, and they swept the state on a prohibition and anti-Nebraska platform. By 1855 Know Nothings and anti-Nebraska men were reaching agreement by compromise, the former reducing their demand for longer naturalization periods from twenty-one to five years and the latter proposing a change in the Indiana constitution to prevent alien voting.⁸

The Know Nothing party reached its peak of influence in Indiana in 1854, but what killed it was the Kansas issue in 1856. Know Nothing David Kilgore summed up the party's demise when he urged its members to send delegates to the Republican national convention; the Kansas question cannot wait, he said, but Americanism can. The American or Know Nothing party which had supported Millard Fillmore in Indiana in 1856 hardly existed north of the National Road; and it stressed through its major speaker, Richard W. Thompson, a stand on sectional issues so prosouthern that many thought him secretly in the pay of the Democrats. The People's party took the name "Republican" in 1858 and refused further concessions to nativists. The Know Nothing party disappeared by 1859, but some remnants went into the Constitutional Union party in 1860.⁹

Throughout the history of Indiana's Know Nothing party, Thompson was one of its most important leaders. He was a Terre Haute lawyer and resilient politician; his career has long been viewed as perfect proof that midwestern Know Nothingism was most often the refuge of Union loving moderates rather than of malignant and aggressive bigots. Thompson was born in Virginia in 1809 but moved to Indiana in 1831. In politics he became a follower of Henry Clay and an advocate of the protective tariff, internal improvements, and the sanctity of the Union, carrying these principles with him into the state legislature in the 1830s and into the United States House of Representatives in the 1840s. After Winfield Scott's loss to Franklin Pierce in the presidential election of 1852, however, Thompson recognized that the Whig party was dead. A fellow Whig wrote him just after election day: "In relation to political matters I feel as you do. Democracy, with

⁸ Brand, "Know Nothing Party in Indiana," 58, 62, 65, 200-202. See also Esarey, *History of Indiana*, II, 619-21, and Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, II, 141-52.

⁹ Brand, "Know Nothing Party in Indiana," 273, 280, 282.

its indomitable energy has swept every vestige of whiggery from the land—As a party organization we are extinct . . . Where shall we go?"¹⁰

Thompson's answer by 1855 was to join the Know Nothing party. According to Charles Roll's biography of Thompson this was a move to a party "quite generally regarded as the successor to the Whig party," and it revealed a consistent Unionist conservatism in Thompson's political thought. He had always been one of those Whigs who sought to calm sectional animosities. As a congressman in 1849 he had voted against a proposal to prohibit slavery in the District of Columbia despite his personal beliefs that slavery was wrong and that Congress had the constitutional power to abolish slavery in the District; Thompson feared the threat to the Union that lay in irritating the South over such issues. Roll interpreted Thompson's Know Nothingism as a respectable extension of this spirit of conservatism on sectional issues:

The secrecy of the Know Nothing movement and the antforeign, anti-Catholic activities of some of its supporters in the larger cities, have received much attention. The more significant aspects of the party as a conservative force in politics have been largely ignored. Yet it was this phase of the movement that appealed to men of the character of Thompson, Fillmore, Bell, and Crittenden.¹¹

Thompson continued his Know Nothing affiliation well after the time that the Republican party had clearly taken the lead as the most promising opponent of the Democracy. He became a Constitutional Union party member and was lured to the Republicans only when they nominated a man he considered a "conservative" for president in 1860. Even as a Republican, Thompson stressed efforts to restore the Union (he recruited Indiana soldiers and combatted Copperheadism

¹⁰ Charles Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson: The Persistent Whig* (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XXX; Indianapolis, 1948), 1, 12, 19, 21, 44-45; E. J. Terry to Richard W. Thompson, November 13, 1852, Richard W. Thompson Collection (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

¹¹ Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 146-47, 87, 105-11, 147. Emma Lou Thornbrough's *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis, 1965) cited Thompson's career as a prime example of the same brand of Know Nothingism: "Some Indiana Whigs, of whom Richard W. Thompson was most prominent, were attracted to the movement, not because of its anti-foreign, anti-Catholic character, but because of its conservative character and because they regarded it as true successor of the Whig party" (p. 60).

as a provost marshal) and protested the Emancipation Proclamation.¹²

However one interprets Know Nothingism, any conclusion as to why its adherents joined the movement must be arrived at indirectly. The party operated in secret. In Indiana, the Know Nothing's activities were so clandestine that one party leader, Godlove S. Orth, wrote the proper names in his correspondence in code. Another prominent Indiana Know Nothing, Schuyler Colfax, falsely denied that he was a party member in 1854 and hid his attendance as a delegate to the party's national council meeting in Philadelphia in 1855 by claiming that he was covering the meeting as a reporter for his South Bend newspaper. Thompson's correspondence during the period of his Know Nothing affiliation is sketchy and uninformative. Thus the case which some historians have made for the respectability of his Know Nothing affiliation rests, not on candid assertions in private letters that the anti-Catholic party was a refuge from sectional controversy, but on his record as a Unionist before and after the 1850s and on the circumstances of national party politics.¹³

Thompson probably did not bring the sort of impatient reforming zeal to the Know Nothing party that Holt describes. He did not desert the Whigs out of impatience; he accurately judged the party incapable of winning an election after 1852 and was politically homeless when the Know Nothing party emerged. Whether his presence in that party was reluctant—whether he joined its despite its anti-Catholic and antiforeign platforms or because of them—that is the tough question.

For Thompson the Catholic issue was not merely a matter of exotic news stories from New York. Most of the Catholics

¹² Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 156-57, 169-70, 175-88. Answering questions in an election year, 1847, Thompson wrote a correspondent that he regarded slavery "as an evil of incalculable magnitude—from which neither master nor slave is exempt." See R. W. Thompson to [?], June 8, 1847, Thompson Collection (Indiana State Library). Thompson stressed Lincoln's conservatism on the slavery issue in his *Recollections of Sixteen Presidents from Washington to Lincoln* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1894), II, 390-96. Thompson's draft of a petition protesting the Emancipation Proclamation is in the Richard W. Thompson Collection (The Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne).

¹³ See J. Herman Schauinger, "The Letters of Godlove S. Orth, Hoosier American," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XL (March, 1944), 51-66; and Willard H. Smith, *Schuyler Colfax: The Changing Fortunes of a Political Idol* (*Indiana Historical Collections*, Vol. XXXIII; Indianapolis, 1952), 53, 56, 57.

in Vigo County lived in his home town, Terre Haute. The first Catholic church in Terre Haute had been founded as early as 1838. In 1853 the church added fifty-two pews, and a Catholic school was founded. Still, there was no perceptible Catholic "threat" in Vigo County or almost anywhere else in the Midwest (except Ohio River towns); thus, the reasons for Thompson's Know Nothingism must be sought by other strategies of indirection.¹⁴

There are no studies which focus specifically on the careers of Know Nothing party members after the 1850s. As a test of sincerity of anti-Catholic and antiforeign convictions, such a study would surely be as conclusive as studies of foreign and Catholic population growth and the emergence and decline of other parties. It is a test, at any rate, which calls into question Roll's attempt to fit Thompson's career into the model provided by the older studies of Know Nothingism in the states of the Old Northwest. True enough, Thompson's correspondence in the 1850s reveals little to prove or disprove an anti-Catholic basis for his politics. But Thompson did nothing in his later career as Republican politician and orator, as secretary of the navy in Rutherford B. Hayes' Cabinet, or as revered Indiana man of letters that was inconsistent with a sincere anti-Catholic and antiforeign sentiment. He did much that was pointedly anti-Catholic and antiforeign. In short, the events of Thompson's later career are utterly consistent with a belief that he joined the Know Nothing party at least in part because he feared and genuinely disliked the activities of the Roman Catholic church and immigrants in the United States.

Thompson's nationalism has been vastly overrated. As Morton Grodzins has argued, "One fights for the joys of his pinochle club when he is said to fight for his country." Nationalism always has specific social content which falls short of

¹⁴ H. C. Bradsby, *History of Vigo County, Indiana, with Biographical Selections* (Chicago, 1891), 595; H. W. Beckwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties, together with Historic Notes on the Wabash Valley . . .* (Chicago, 1880), 128-29. Sister M. Evangeline Thomas estimated the rise in foreign born population in Indiana at 3 percent between 1850 and 1860. Foreign born citizens comprised only 5.7 percent of the Indiana population in 1850; they numbered only 55,572 in that year. In 1860 Indiana had by far the smallest percentage of foreign born population in the states of the Old Northwest. Unlike Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, it had less than 10 percent foreign born population. See Thomas, *Nativism in the Old Northwest*, 34, 101. The city of Boston alone held just 6,493 fewer foreign born residents than the whole state of Indiana in 1850. See Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants* (New York, 1968), 243.

comprehending all the social elements within the nation, and Thompson's nationalism was no exception. In the very depths of the secession crisis, on December 22, 1860, Thompson could draft a remarkable letter to Governor John Letcher of Virginia which began:

Such is the fearful posture of our public affairs that we are all trying to look into the future, to see in what way the interest of the several sections is to be preserved and advanced. It will not do to let the material prosperity of the Country be all sacrificed and destroyed by political or sectional broils,—and whether the Union shall remain intact or be finally & entirely dissolved, every reflecting man must see that the central belt of States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, must always share a common destiny. In the event of dissolution they would have no difficulty in forming a satisfactory union,—leaving the extreme north to indulge its vagaries alone, and the extreme South to develop its capacity and resources in its own way.

The letter went on to delineate the course of action demanded of this middle section if the Union were to survive. The plan flattered Virginia as “the controlling State” in the nation should the Union continue, but Thompson's plan was no gimmick to persuade Virginia not to secede. He added blithely that “if the union should not be continued, Virginia, by her own policy, may yet have it in her power, to make Norfolk the rival of New York and still secure the commanding position.”¹⁵

The plan, according to Thompson, was to open direct trade between Norfolk and Europe. Railroads would hitch Indiana to Virginia's commercial star: “The present and prospective system of railroads in the State already points to the great North-West, and must soon become an important part of the immense net-work of roads which now reach Kansas and are fast progressing towards the Pacific:—and the entire system, when complete, will be entirely, or almost so, within the sectional belt which I have indicated.” Private profit as well as sectional pride was, no doubt, involved in the scheme. Since 1847 Thompson had served as attorney for the Terre Haute and Richmond Railroad Company, which controlled a vital link in the route from St. Louis to Cincinnati. These

¹⁵ Grodzins' remark is quoted on page 48 in David Potter's perceptive essay, “The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,” which has been conveniently reprinted in Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 34-83. Richard W. Thompson to John Letcher, December 22, 1860 (draft letter), Thompson Collection (Lincoln Life Foundation).

towns were among the "great centres of accumulation and distribution for the products of their respective neighborhoods." "The plan is not *mine*, as you may suppose," Thompson explained to Letcher, "but as I am known to those who have produced it, to have cherished, for some years, the hope that such an arrangement might be accomplished, and am convinced that, with proper management, it may be made most effective for the purpose designed, I have been made the medium of laying it before you for your consideration." The letter specifically mentioned "profits" more than once, but Thompson's personal motivation for taking the Union lightly is not at issue here. The letter is cited only as proof that nationalism alone probably did not send a reluctant Thompson into the Know Nothing ranks.¹⁶

By way of contrast Thompson's identification with Protestantism was strong enough to drive him back into the arms even of New England when he imagined that all sections faced a common, *Catholic* enemy. In 1868 Thompson was chosen to give an address on the religious history and character of the Puritans before the New England Society of Terre Haute, an unusual subject for a Virginia born man "who sprang from the Cavaliers, and in whose veins there runs no drop of Puritan blood." It was also a strange audience for a man who, eight years before, had been willing to let New England stray out of the American nation to indulge in its "vagaries" alone.¹⁷

Thompson's address celebrated the role of the Puritans in founding America, furthering the Protestant Reformation, and advancing the principles of free thought and free speech associated with Protestantism. He excused the Puritans for executing witches by pointing to the large numbers of imagined witches burned in continental Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the executions of thousands of witches in England from the reign of Henry VI to 1736, and Lord Bacon's and William Shakespeare's belief in witches. He also excused the Puritans' anti-Quaker laws by showing that

¹⁶ Richard W. Thompson to John Letcher, December 22, 1860 (draft letter), Thompson Collection (Lincoln Life Foundation). For Thompson's interest in railroads see also Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 134.

¹⁷ Richard Thompson, *Address on the Religious History and Character of the Puritans*, by R. W. Thompson, *Delivered before the New England Society of Terre Haute, Indiana, December 20, 1868* (Terre Haute, 1868), 7.

Episcopalian Virginia also had its anti-Quaker statutes. A man so conscious of his Cavalier heritage could cite embarrassing practices in Virginia to excuse embarrassing practices in Massachusetts only for the sake of unity against a more dangerous common enemy:

Observed within the circle of the light now shining upon us, both the Cavaliers and the Puritans had their errors; but they had virtues which rose above those so high as to obscure them to all except the ignorant and envious The work which lies before us, is great enough to demand our united energies. The labor of our fathers must not be lost by neglect, at our hands. We must see that there be no chilling frost to wither the fruits of the Great Protestant Reformation. We must take care that Liberty is preserved, in all its variety of forms. There must be no hesitancy or halting in the contest between truth and error—right and wrong;—between Protestantism and all the forms of antagonism by which it may be assailed.¹⁸

To continue the work of the Puritan fathers was, for Thompson, to continue a work conceived in the earliest history of the race:

The primitive stock of Britons from whom we have descended, were rude and unlettered, yet they were courageous enough, during all the years of Roman domination over them, and those of the Danish invasions, as well as after the Norman Conquest, to maintain a religious faith of their own, and the traditionary belief that it was planted among them by the ministry of St. Paul. Their modes of worship, with all their rites and ceremonies, were plain and simple, and whether drawn from those of an Apostolic church or not, they were designed to be expressive only of the sincerity of their religious convictions. Their churches took the Episcopal form, and when, in the year 597, they were brought in contact for the first time with the Church of Rome, by the visit of St. Augustine, they refused to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of Pope Gregory The object of the Pope was, then and always, to blend the temporal and spiritual power in his own hands; in other words, to unite the State with the Church, so that the entire christian world should bow in humiliation before him, as "*the vicar of God on earth.*"

Later, the "Pope triumphed in obtaining the possession of both Church and State, but there was no period either before or after this beginning of the Reformation when the British christians were entirely exterminated." In short, Thompson, a Methodist, repeated the post-Reformation English dissenter's anti-Catholic view of Christian history. A true, pure, and simple church always existed (even before the Reformation);

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18, 19, 20.

the Reformation began in England first (with the work of John Wycliffe); and the Anglican Church separated from Rome only jurisdictionally (retaining "the ceremonials which had been fastened upon it by the influences of Rome"). Traditional Protestant anti-Catholicism, then, appears to have been at least as powerful a force in molding Thompson's ideas as American "nationalism."¹⁹

Anti-Catholicism may also have played a larger role in Rutherford B. Hayes' selection of Thompson for secretary of the navy than has hitherto been thought.²⁰ Because of the spectacular dispute that followed the presidential election of 1876, recent historians' preoccupation with black history, and ironically the very excellence of C. Vann Woodward's *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*, which emphasized the election's aftermath and its implications for Reconstruction history, the 1876 canvass itself has been slighted.²¹ A glance at the events of the campaign leading up to the election reveals the prominence of the Catholic issue.

In a sense President Ulysses S. Grant initiated the Republican campaign in 1875. In a speech at the annual reunion of the Army of the Tennessee in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 29, 1875, Grant predicted: "If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence . . . the dividing line will not be Mason's and Dixon's, but between patriotism and intelligence on the one side, and superstition,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 9, 10. For the origins of this pattern of historical understanding see Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (New York, 1968), 6-9.

²⁰ No one has suggested that Thompson's nativism was anything but a liability to his chances to join Hayes' Cabinet; only Barnard mentions it. See Harry Barnard, *Rutherford B. Hayes and His America* (Indianapolis, 1954), 416; Kenneth E. Davison, *The Presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes* (Westport, Conn., 1972), 112; William Dudley Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton, Including His Important Speeches* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1899), II, 479-80; Charles Richard Williams, *The Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States* (2 vols., Columbus, 1928), II, 31; Hamilton James Eckenrode, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Statesman of Reunion* (New York, 1930), 242; Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 210-12.

²¹ C. Vann Woodward's *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston, 1966) has only recently met with criticism. See Allan Peskin, "Was There a Compromise of 1877?" *Journal of American History*, LX (June, 1973), 63-75. Paul Kleppner, for example, treats Hayes' gubernatorial campaign but ignores his campaign for the presidency. See Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York, 1970), 111-14. The Catholic issue drops from sight abruptly in late 1876 in any treatment of Hayes' life.

ambition and ignorance on the other." To prevent future civil war he urged his audience to "resolve that not one dollar of money appropriated to their [the free schools'] support, no matter how raised, shall be appropriated to the support of any secretarian school." His Seventh Annual Message to Congress in December of 1875 called for "a constitutional amendment . . . prohibiting the granting of any school-funds, or school-taxes, or any part thereof, either by legislative, municipal, or other authority, for the benefit or in aid, directly or indirectly, of any religious sect or denomination."²²

The issue was anti-Catholic and explosive. It was anti-Catholic for two reasons. First, American Catholics had recently launched a campaign to divide local school funds so that their parochial schools could gain support from the taxes paid by Catholic citizens. Second, it was anti-Catholic rather than constitutionally impartial because public schools included Bible reading in the curriculum, and the King James rather than the Douay Bible was used. In fact, therefore, the common schools were Protestant rather than religiously neutral.²³

The explosive nature of the issue was nowhere better exemplified than in Hayes' home state in 1875. Catholic moves to prove the King James Bible a sectarian book, remove it from the public schools, and divide local school funds put Ohio in an uproar.²⁴ The likeliest candidate to receive the Republican nomination for governor was Judge Alonzo Taft. In 1870, however, he had written a minority opinion in a lawsuit in which he upheld the right of the Cincinnati Board of Education to ban the use of the King James Bible in the city's public schools.²⁵ Taft lost the gubernatorial nomination to Hayes because of this opinion. Hayes' diary recorded the fact succinctly: "The leading other candidate before the convention, Judge Taft, of Cincinnati, is an able and good man. But he had such a record on the Bible question in the schools that his nomination was impossible."²⁶

²² Edward McPherson, *A Hand-Book of Politics for 1876: Being a Record of Important Political Action, National and State, From July 15, 1874 to July 15, 1876* (New York, 1969), 155, 156, 56.

²³ Kleppner, *Cross of Culture*, 77.

²⁴ Barnard, *Hayes and His America*, 273-74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Diary entry, June 3, 1875, in Charles Richard Williams, ed., *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes* (5 vols., Columbus, 1924), III, 273.

The ensuing gubernatorial campaign focused, as had the state Republican nominating convention, on the religious issues. Democratic votes in the Ohio legislature had recently passed the Geghan bill, a measure guaranteeing Catholic clergymen the right to minister to Catholic inmates in Ohio's prisons.²⁷ Hysterical Protestants and opportunistic Republicans interpreted the bill as a prelude to a Catholic assault on the public schools. Hayes began the gubernatorial canvass with one idea uppermost: "*to rebuke the Democracy by a defeat for subserviency to Roman Catholic demands.*"²⁸ Along the campaign trail experience taught him that the "tariff and finances" were "controlling subjects" in some areas of the state unaffected by the Catholic issue, but he always combined these issues with the anti-Catholic appeal.²⁹ On July 10, 1875, he wrote a political associate: "We must not let the Catholic question drop out of sight. If they do not speak of it, we must attack them for their silence. If they discuss it, or refer to it, they can't help getting into trouble. We can't, I think, do better than to stick to the texts, *honest money*, and *no secretarian interference with the schools.*"³⁰ Hayes had long ago learned the power of the Catholic issue. Though he himself shunned the Know Nothings, he had seen them at work in Cincinnati in 1854. Commenting on an election victory at that time, he wrote his uncle: "How people do hate Catholics, and what a happiness it was to thousands to have a chance to show it in what seemed a lawful and patriotic manner."³¹ Hayes never forgot the lesson and kept it in mind when he ran for the presidency in 1876.

Hayes was not alone in thinking that the Catholic issue would help the Republican party in 1876. James G. Blaine, as a part of his own bid for the Republican presidential nomination early that year, had introduced a proposal to amend the Constitution in order to prohibit the use of public money for religious purposes. In August, after Hayes' nomination, Republicans dutifully brought the proposed amendment up for

²⁷ Daniel R. Porter, "Governor Rutherford B. Hayes," *Ohio History*, LXXVII (Winter, Spring, Summer, 1968), 71.

²⁸ Diary entry, June 3, 1875, in Williams, *Diary and Letters of Hayes*, III, 274.

²⁹ Rutherford B. Hayes to John Sherman, June 29, 1875, *ibid.*, 282.

³⁰ Rutherford B. Hayes to W. D. Bickham, July 10, 1875, *ibid.*, 284.

³¹ Rutherford B. Hayes to S. Birchard, October 13, 1854, *ibid.*, I, 470.

debate in Congress, insuring maximum public exposure for the issue before the election. Such, at least, was the interpretation put upon the debate by the Democrats, who claimed that Blaine had hoped to use the issue to gain the nomination and that the Republicans were now using it as a substitute for the Negro issue in the fall campaign.³²

Hayes himself certainly desired maximum exposure for the public school question. On the day the debate on Blaine's amendment opened in Congress, he wrote James A. Garfield: "Let me again call your attention to Blaine's proposed Constitution Amendment to protect the schools. A few paragraphs on the Democratic treatment of it, its importance, etc., etc., ought to be in every speech. Talk to our Southern friends about it. My correspondence from the South indicates that it may be of value there also."³³ Hayes became increasingly aware that the "people *do dread* a victory for the united South" and stressed the sectional issue accordingly, but he continued to emphasize the Catholic question to the end:

Know-nothing charges made by the Democrats, the people here care nothing about. It is perfectly well known that I do not favor the exclusion of foreigners from the ballot or from office, and that I *do oppose* Catholic interference and all sectarian interference with political affairs, and especially with the schools. This last point is influential, particularly with non-Catholic foreigners. It has not, I suspect, been sufficiently urged in the canvass.³⁴

The tone of the canvass may have influenced Hayes' Cabinet selections. At least, Thompson's stand on the Catholic issue appears to have been no liability to his candidacy for a Cabinet post. Almost all students of the Hayes administration agree that Thompson was the president's worst Cabinet selection. It was certainly the most nakedly political one. Expertise did not recommend Thompson; he came from a landlocked state and knew nothing of naval matters.³⁵ Most historians

³² *Congressional Record*, 44 Cong., 1 Sess., 5589, 5590, 5592, 5594.

³³ Rutherford B. Hayes to James A. Garfield, in Williams, *Diary and Letters of Hayes*, III, 338.

³⁴ Rutherford B. Hayes to William Henry Smith, October 5, 1876, *ibid.*, 365; Rutherford B. Hayes to R. C. McCormick, October 14, 1876, *ibid.*, 367.

³⁵ H. Wayne Morgan recites the popular story of Thompson's surprise at finding the hulls of ships were hollow in *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse, 1969), 13; Harold and Margaret Sprout call Thompson "densely ignorant of naval affairs" in *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton, 1967), 181. Barnard's *Hayes and His America* calls the appointment of Thompson

agree that Hayes' choice was dictated by Indiana's Senator Oliver P. Morton and that Morton's choice of Thompson was dictated by his fear of Benjamin Harrison, whose name had been mentioned for a Cabinet post.³⁶ Thompson, who was sixty-seven years old, was much less a threat than the promising Harrison; Morton wanted no Republican presidential contender from Indiana on the horizon besides himself. Moreover, Morton was in Thompson's debt. Thompson had not challenged Morton for the Republican senatorial nomination in 1876 and had even given a nominating speech for Morton at the Republican convention.³⁷ Still, Morton undoubtedly had other political friends or creditors, so what Thompson had to offer as a Cabinet appointee is worth considering.

Although he is never mentioned in Woodward's *Reunion and Reaction*, Thompson's political profile suggests worthy credentials for a president interested in sectional compromise on the 1877 model. Thompson was, of course, a former Whig interested in internal improvements and especially in railroads. He also held conservative views on the race issue.³⁸ Southerners grasped the significance of Thompson's appoint-

"almost whimsical" (p. 416). Charles Richard Williams calls Thompson "the weakest appointment" in his *Life of Hayes*, II, 31. Davison's *Presidency of Hayes* says Thompson's was the "only" appointment made primarily "for partisan reasons, and Hayes ultimately dismissed him in the public interest" (p. 95). He characterizes Thompson's naval policies as "unimaginative" (p. 113). Eckenrode's *Rutherford B. Hayes* agrees (p. 242). Barnhart and Carmony give a more favorable impression of Thompson's fitness for Hayes' cabinet in *Indiana*, II, 311. They stress his agreement with Hayes' policies on reconciliation with the South and sound money, and discuss his administrative accomplishments as secretary of the navy.

³⁶ Roll refutes the charge on page 211 of his biography of Thompson. William R. Holloway acted as Morton's intermediary in the Cabinet negotiations, but nothing in his papers at Butler University or at the Rutherford B. Hayes Library gives a clue to the nature of the negotiations.

³⁷ Bradsby, *History of Vigo County*, 401; Foulke, *Life of Morton*, II, 398; Davison, *Presidency of Hayes*, 28; Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 206-207.

³⁸ In the *Speech of R. W. Thompson upon the Political Aspects of the Slavery Question, Made at a Public Meeting of the People, in Terre Haute, Indiana, on the 11th Day of August, 1855* (Terre Haute, 1855), Thompson admitted only that the slavery question was a moral one in the abstract (p. 6). He approached endorsing the biblical argument for slavery on page 7 of the pamphlet: "In this form it existed in the days of Moses, and yet there is not one word in all his writings that condemns it as immoral. It existed as a political institution—intertwined with the Jewish polity, and as such, he let it alone, except so far as he regulated it by law." Thompson's appropriateness for Hayes' sectional program is discussed in Davison, *Presidency of Hayes*, 112, and Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson*, 212-13.

ment immediately. Joseph Hodgson of Mobile, Alabama, wrote the Hoosier in November, 1877: "To me, not the least of the President's good offices to the South & the whole Union, has been your own accession to the Navy office. The Whigs of the South remember you with pleasure and you may rest assured that no member of the cabinet stands higher in our esteem than you."³⁹ Another southern correspondent recognized Thompson's virtues and endorsed Hayes' suspicion that the Catholic issue had been noticed in the South. An Atlanta man named Mitchell wrote Thompson as early as April, 1877, advising him that Hayes really had "no following amongst ex-Confederates." To disrupt "the Confederate and Papal Coalition," Congress "should grant you aid to transport all colored persons to Africa who desire to go." Only in this way could southern whites be weaned from the Democrats to fight "Rome and Rebellion." Mitchell, at least, recognized Thompson's sectional and religious attributes immediately.⁴⁰

Thompson and Hayes were in substantial agreement on the religious question, though Thompson was a former Know Nothing and Hayes was not. Indiana's Know Nothing party had been much more anti-Catholic than antiforeign. Know Nothing Schuyler Colfax, for example, held "that Principles and character, not birth place, are the true test of genuine Americanism—that Protestant foreigners, who join sincerely in the vindication of Spiritual Freedom, a Free Bible, Free Schools and Free Labor as pillars of a Free Republic, should not be proscribed, but on the contrary, welcomed."⁴¹ The 1856 *Address of the Fillmore State Convention to the People of Indiana*, which Thompson signed, denounced "foreign influence . . . in our elections" in general but seems to have meant only "that exercise of any temporal authority by the Pope, in this country, in the control of our elections, would be attended with the most alarming consequence."⁴²

³⁹ Joseph Hodgson to Richard W. Thompson, November 14, 1877, Thompson Collection (Lincoln Life Foundation). Thompson even had some connections with Thomas A. Scott of the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company, a key institution (according to Woodward) in the Compromise of 1877. See Thomas A. Scott to Richard W. Thompson, March 24, 1873, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ J. Mitchell to Richard W. Thompson, April 24, 1877, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Quoted in Smith, *Schuyler Colfax*, 59-60.

⁴² Richard W. Thompson et al., *Address of the Fillmore State Convention to the People of Indiana* (n.p., n.d.), 15. The pamphlet can be found in the Pamphlet Collection (Lincoln Life Foundation).

Thompson shared Hayes' anxiety over the question of the use of the Bible in the public schools, as his manuscript entitled "An Examination into the Relationship which the State bears to our Common School System and its responsibilities, obligations, and duties in reference to it" shows. Writing during or just before 1876, Thompson defined the primary purpose of the common school system to be the socialization and not the intellectual stimulation of students:

it is the duty of the state to see that they are so trained and educated as to fully understand all the complex machinery of our government, so that if hereafter another impartial De Tocqueville shall visit this country he may transmit to Europe the intelligence that there is not one man amongst us who, on the score of intelligence, is not worthy of American citizenship. Of course, I do not here mean education in its enlarged sense, but that which is necessary to fit them for intelligent action upon all public affairs.⁴³

To discharge its duty properly the state had to compel every person to receive a common school education or its equivalent. Hayes always claimed to be warding off a sectarian assault on the public schools, and his posture was defensive. Thompson's recommendations were stronger in tone. Asserting that the child must be educated "in the duties of American citizenship," Thompson sharply denied any man the "right to stunt and dwarf the intellect of his child, or to prevent him from acquiring intelligence enough to discharge all his duties to Society and the State . . ." And, Thompson went on, "if he defiantly asserts such right it is the duty of the State to provide by law that he shall subordinate his own selfish interests to the public welfare."⁴⁴ Thompson's conception of the "duties of American citizenship" was not at all secular. He declared that "to my mind it is clearly the duty of the State, imposed by the ordinance of 1787, & by the spirit of our institutions, to provide that our children shall be educated as Christians & not as Pagans, that is that they shall be taught the kind of religion which the fathers meant which inculcates a sense of duty to God as the creator, and the virtue & morality which is its necessary fruit."⁴⁵ Thompson clearly saw the Protestant Bible

⁴³ Richard W. Thompson, "An Examination into the Relationship which the State bears to our Common School System . . .," undated manuscript in the Richard W. Thompson Collection (Rutherford B. Hayes Library, Fremont, Ohio), 20-21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. Thompson attempted to put a moderate face on his proposals by saying, "I would not consent even if it were possible under

as part of this crucial faith of the founding fathers: "The Bible was put in its present [King James] form,—shorn of its former errors,—just in time [1611] to be brought to America by the colonists at Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, and thereby to become the basis of our institutions;— for as we learn by its teachings that no human authority has the right to intervene between our Creator and ourselves, so we are impressed with that degree of personal responsibility which induces the enactment of wholesome laws and inculcates obedience to them."⁴⁶

Election year 1876 witnessed an especially prodigious output on the Catholic question for Thompson, for it was the year his book *The Papacy and the Civil Power* was published. Thompson attempted some moderation in tone in the book by distinguishing between clergy and laity to the advantage of the latter and devoting some 500 of the book's 750 pages to a fairly detailed explication of European church history. Lyman Abbott found the book "strong without being rancid—a rare thing in anti-Catholic literature."⁴⁷ Thompson meant the book, however, not for "the educated classes, who have the means of making like inquiries for themselves," but "for *the people*." Though many could remember "when there were very few Roman Catholics in the United States, compared with the bulk of the population," the startling increase in the decade of the 1860s had made them one sixth of the population. A similar rate of increase, Thompson warned, would have them outnumbering the Protestants by 1904. He did not fear risking the "animosity and anathemas of such as pay for the protection our institutions give them by Jesuitical plottings to establish a 'Holy Empire' upon their ruins" in order to warn the nation of the rising Catholic menace.⁴⁸

the constitution to do it, to see the particular faith of the Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic or any other Church taught." But to exclude a sectarian outlook was not to exclude a generally Protestant outlook.

⁴⁶ Richard W. Thompson, ["Bible"], undated, untitled manuscript, Thompson Collection (Hayes Library). More than likely this and the "Examination" cited in footnote 43 above were texts for "lay sermons" which Thompson delivered before audiences. There is a series of "lay sermons" (so called) in the Thompson Collection (Hayes Library).

⁴⁷ Lyman Abbott to Richard W. Thompson (n.d.), Thompson Collection (Lincoln Life Foundation).

⁴⁸ Richard W. Thompson, *The Papacy and the Civil Power* (New York, 1876), 8, 19, 20. A copy can be found in the Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.

To be sure, Thompson admitted, the vast Catholic laity were still loyal to the United States and had fought to save the Union in the late war, but the priests were loyal only to Rome. A "large" number of priests had "sympathized with all the measures which were designed to break up the Union and destroy our institutions" during the Civil War. Their ends remained the same still, as the pope's 1864 Syllabus of Errors and the 1870 declaration of papal infallibility revealed. The former condemned essentials of the American Constitution: free speech, freedom of the press, and religious freedom. The latter, according to Thompson, meant that those views must be appropriated by the American clergy and laity.⁴⁹

According to Thompson, the recent developments in papal policy represented an attack on the American Constitution. This was not because "religion, in the Protestant sense, is established by law" in America, but because Protestantism, which "recognizes no system of faith and worship to the exclusion of others," had given America the fundamental principle of religious toleration. America, he claimed, was so careful to protect this principle that it "confides the public schools to men of every faith, and of none. It maintains 'unChristian,' or, as they choose to call them, 'godless schools.'" Thompson was being less than candid. If there were "unChristian" public schools in America, he did not approve of them. His manuscript on the relation of the state to the common schools had urged that it was the imperative duty of the state to provide religious instruction. In truth, it was not the constitutional purity but the religious identity of the United States that Thompson was intent upon maintaining. He even defended the description of the United States as "a Protestant country."⁵⁰

Thompson's ability to recommend specific measures to counter the Catholic menace was constantly impeded by his public pose; he was supposed to be saving American religious tolerance from Catholic intolerance. Whenever he formulated a specific policy (as on the public school question), Thompson involved himself in inconsistencies. Thus *The Papacy and the Civil Power* confined itself largely to a lengthy retelling of the Protestant version of history and to vague threats: "Let us begin in time to guard our national heritage, and, while we

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 55, 57, 183.

are not required to do any thing in violation of the tolerant principles of our Government, we can so shield them from the assaults of foreign imperialism, that the blows aimed at them by their assailant will rebound upon their own heads." Short of prescribing a specific program, however, the following threat must have had as clear a meaning to Catholics as the "House Divided" doctrine had had for the antebellum South: "if these principles [embodied in Pope Pius IX's encyclical and Syllabus of Errors of 1864] should prevail here, our institutions would necessarily fall. The two can not exist together. They are in open and direct antagonism with the fundamental theory of our Government, and of all popular government everywhere."⁵¹

Thompson always identified the Catholic menace as a political rather than a religious problem, that is, as an assault upon the American Constitution rather than upon the religion of the Protestant majority. The state and not the church, therefore, possessed the proper means of defense. With this argument Thompson preserved his fidelity to religious toleration. He did not attack any religious doctrines (having to do with the sacraments, for example); he attacked only "politico-religious" doctrines dictating Catholic interference in the government.⁵²

Thompson concentrated on papal claims to temporal power, especially as outlined in the 1864 Syllabus of Errors and the 1870 decree of infallibility. These not only violated traditional American notions of separation of church and state, but, he intimated, identified Catholicism with monarchism. Thompson admitted that the accusation "that the pope desires to absorb in his own hands *all* the powers of civil government elsewhere than in Rome" was probably too broad. Yet only thirty-two pages later, he said that Pope Pius IX was "endeavoring to break down the lines of separation between all the nations, and to resolve the world into one great 'Christian commonwealth'—a grand 'holy empire'—subject to his single will, and bowing before his single sceptre!" To Thompson's mind the eightieth article of the Syllabus of Errors, which stated the pope's hostility to progress, liberalism, and modern civilization, seemed to be aimed directly at the United States, for the United States had carried those principles the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 194, 209.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

farthest. A conspiracy against the United States was implicit in the sixty-third article as well because it condemned "the principle that 'it is allowable to refuse obedience to legitimate princes, nay, more, to rise in insurrection against them.'" This identified the Catholic cause politically with the opposite of the American political system:

Our Declaration of Independence asserts this right of resistance to unjust princes . . . it would follow, if his [the pope's] teachings should prevail, that, as our Revolution was against God's law, therefore all the rights we have acquired by it are void, and it will be his duty, if he can, to remit us back again to our original state of dependence, and compel us to admit the divine right of kings to govern all mankind, and of the pope to govern the kings!⁵³

Thompson associated Catholicism with monarchism by means of a familiar historical myth. As in his speech before Terre Haute's New England Society, Thompson found lessons for America even in English history because "we trace the birth of our popular institutions back to the great uprising of the people" in the English Reformation. "The native Britons," he asserted, "had their own form of Christianity, existing apart from their Druidical worship, which, in whatsoever way it was acquired, they believed to be of apostolic origin." This meant definitely that "the monk Augustine" did not bring Christianity to Britain in 597 (as Catholics claimed) and that the apostle Paul *may* have brought it much earlier (and in a much purer form).⁵⁴ From this point on, the story was more complex than it had been in the New England Society address. The Saxons, who conquered the native Britons, were pagans, but they were a source of political virtue, for "they were not then governed without their own consent, even by their kings." There was "no evidence that they ever interfered with" the religion "of the native Britons until after their kings yielded to the influence of Rome!" Thompson suggested that the Saxons influenced the Britons with their "Teutonic" political genius for liberty, and the Britons influenced the pagan Saxons with their pure Christianity. So powerful was this progressive amalgam that eventually the pope could no longer trust the Saxons to rule and had to encourage the Norman invasion to carry "into England a fresh supply of papal influences." The English Reformation later

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 164, 196, 212, 219.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 423, 423-24, 424.



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Reproduced from *Richard W. Thompson
Memorial* (St. Joseph, Mich., 1906), [154].

rejected this alien, impure religion and this alien, illiberal political system.⁵⁵

There is no direct proof that Thompson's anti-Catholicism had any effect on Hayes' selection of Thompson as secretary of the navy, or even that Hayes knew of it. Hayes' personal library does contain a copy of *The Papacy and the Civil Power* inscribed by Thompson to the president, but the inscription is dated 1878.⁵⁶ Although most accounts agree that Morton played an important part in the decision, Morton's desiderata are also unknown. Morton was well aware, however, of the importance of the Catholic issue to the Republican party.

The Indiana senator had played a part in the debate on Blaine's proposed amendment. When one senator had protested that the danger the amendment was supposed to meet was nonexistent, Morton had thundered: "Well, Mr. President, in my judgment there is danger. That cloud is looming above the horizon; it is larger than it was a few years ago." When even "one State" supported "denominational schools" with public funds, it endangered "the perpetuity of the nation," Morton had claimed. Accused of trying to create a new issue as a substitute for the race issue, Morton had replied that the amendment was drawn "for the purpose of meeting a strong feeling throughout the nation, for the purpose of allaying a great fear."⁵⁷

Whatever the considerations of Morton and Hayes in deciding the composition of the Cabinet, they certainly would not have deemed Thompson's anti-Catholicism a liability, for it meshed perfectly with the recent thrust of the Republican party and the personal political stances of both men. And at least one Catholic critic did not overlook the fact that Thompson's book appeared "during the Presidential canvass."⁵⁸

As secretary of the navy, Thompson could not influence policy toward Catholics very strongly, but he did have a chance to attack foreign influence in America. The only policy besides economy in government with which he was strongly identified as navy secretary touched familiar themes: Thomp-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 438, 442, 439.

⁵⁶ The copy is in the Hayes Library.

⁵⁷ *Congressional Record*, 44 Cong., 1 Sess., 5585, 5592.

⁵⁸ F. X. Weniger, *Reply to Hon. R. W. Thompson, Secretary of the Navy, Addressed to the American People . . .* (New York, 1877), 1. A copy can be found in the Hayes Library.

son became an advocate of reducing the navy's dependence on foreigners for seamen. Naval reformers had been trying to make the service more attractive to native Americans for at least fifty years. John Quincy Adams' secretary of the navy, Samuel Southard, had recommended as early as 1825 that even naturalized immigrants be excluded from naval service. In 1837 Congress tried to solve the problem by passing a bill providing for the recruitment of naval apprentices, eighteen years of age, who they hoped would be native Americans. Enlisting only with their parents' consent, these boys would serve as apprentices until they reached twenty-one years of age, at which time, it was hoped, they would reenlist to become the crews of America's men of war. By and large, the plan failed. Recruited from the large cities on the coast, the apprentices were themselves frequently of foreign birth or parentage and usually failed to become dependable sailors.⁵⁹

Thompson brought renewed administrative energy to the old program. Although his immediate predecessor in the office began the new effort at the behest of Congress, Thompson emphasized the apprentice program in all of his annual reports. He tried to remedy the proven fault of the older program by initiating a program of enlistments in the country's interior. He seemed to take a special interest in the program, inspecting the training ships personally and awarding meals to promising boys. He procured passage of a law increasing the number of apprentices. There was nothing overtly anti-Catholic in the apprentice program, and one historian of naval reform specifically denies that the apprentice movement was akin to political nativism ashore: "Unlike the later Native American political movement in the country, the concern of the naval reformers over the foreigners was not connected with religion. It was more a matter of national pride and of wondering how reliable such types might be in the event of war."⁶⁰

Thompson's last annual report injected a new note: he would make the program more effective by giving to it a reformatory character. Naval regulations already forbade the

⁵⁹ Harold D. Langley, *Social Reform in the United States Navy, 1788-1862* (Urbana, 1967), 88, 95.

⁶⁰ U.S., *House Executive Documents*, 46 Cong., 2 Sess. (U.S. Serial Set 1909), 19-20; *ibid.*, 45 Cong., 3 Sess. (U.S. Serial Set 1849), 30-32; Langley, *Social Reform in the Navy*, 275.

boys to draw the normal rations of tobacco and grog. There was nothing specifically religious in Thompson's statement; he may have had nothing more than tobacco and grog in mind. However, Thompson had invited naval chaplains to submit recommendations for the service in 1878, and one, Chaplain W. O. Holway, had advised him to create a head of the Chaplain Corps "to assist in [among other things] the scheme of training boys for the naval service." Whether Thompson followed up on the recommendation or contemplated religious instruction for the apprentices is unknown, but he did believe that the state was obliged to give religious training to America's youth. Had such a program been instituted, it would have provided Protestant training; until 1888 there were no Roman Catholic chaplains in the United States Navy.⁶¹

None of Thompson's actions described thus far was unrelated to politics. Know Nothingism was itself a party movement. The subjects of Thompson's speeches and writings in the 1870s were the stock in trade of midwestern Republican politicians; *The Papacy and the Civil Power* even appeared in an election year. There is no direct proof that Thompson's career as secretary of the navy involved actions aimed specifically at Catholics. But his writings of the 1890s provide substantial evidence that Thompson was a sincere anti-Catholic and that therefore at least one midwestern Know Nothing found the party's anti-Catholicism as congenial as its nationalism. By then he was over eighty years old. He had claimed as early as the 1850s and 1860s to have given up political ambitions. His claim seems premature in light of his actions in 1876, but surely he no longer lusted after public office by the 1890s. He no longer needed to think of the electorate or the party when he made public utterances. He could then, if he had not done so before, speak his own mind.

⁶¹ U.S., *House Executive Documents*, 46 Cong., 3 Sess. (U.S. Serial Set 1958), 23-24; Langley, *Social Reform in the Navy*, 108, Clifford Merrill Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy*. Volume I, 1778-1939 (Washington, 1949), 111, 100. Prior to 1862 attendance at shipboard religious services was required; after that date the navy merely recommended it. Catholics complained of having to attend Protestant services. When Thompson inspected Captain S. B. Luce's training ship in 1879, Luce "pointed to the large number of Bibles it contained, and said he stated with regret that they had not been generally used, most of them never having left the shelves." See "The Great Naval Function," clipping from the *Army and Navy Herald*, October 19, 1879, in the Thompson Collection (Hayes Library).

The result was an outpouring of anti-Catholic literature that exceeded even his product in the turmoil of the 1870s, when the Syllabus of Errors, the declaration of papal infallibility, attacks on the use of the Bible in the public schools, attempts to provide Catholic priests in public institutions where only Protestants had been available before, and attempts to divide public school funds had seemed to indicate a Catholic plot to capture America. In 1894 Thompson still feared a conspiracy, and in that year he published a new book, *The Footprints of the Jesuits*.

The book began as an attack on the Jesuits, showing that the order had been condemned even by some popes, hinting that the Jesuits might have poisoned Pope Clement XIII because he was about to dissolve the order, condemning their insincere "Jesuitical" methods of infiltrating other organizations, and accusing them of commitment to monarchism. In the end *The Footprints of the Jesuits* was a repetition of familiar themes, flowering into an attack on the Catholic church in general because the reigning Pope Leo XIII was Jesuit trained. In particular, it sounded the alarm for the public schools. The Jesuits' favorite *modus operandi*, said Thompson, was "to obtain the sole direction of education," to hold the young "down to the low standard of passive and 'uninquiring obedience,'" and thus to "fit them to become subservient slaves of monarchial and papal power."⁶²

By 1898 Thompson, practically ninety years old, had produced yet another manuscript for an anti-Catholic book. Entitled "Christianity and Imperialism," the manuscript consisted of almost three hundred pages written in a hand grown shaky with age. Political ambition now certainly played no role, as Thompson himself asserted: "I have reached the period of life when all the ambition I ever possessed has died away,—leaving nothing in my heart or mind upon which either envy, hatred, or malice, can feed." He repeated his willingness to live with people who believed in the real presence of Christ's body at the eucharist, as long as they did not owe allegiance to a foreign power or demand that the state interfere with the religious practices of others. He warned Americans about the dangers to the public schools but devoted the bulk of the book to refutations of Catholic assertions that

⁶² Richard W. Thompson, *The Footprints of the Jesuits* (New York, 1894), 336, 120.

the first church was in Rome, that Peter was the "primary" apostle, and that Peter alone possessed apostolic powers.⁶³

It would be wrong to conclude from the evidence in Thompson's case alone that previous evaluations of midwestern Know Nothingism were wrong. Nothing in this article proves, even in Thompson's single case, that the major appeal of the Know Nothing party in the 1850s was its anti-Catholic platform. On the other hand evidence is as conclusive as history could demand that Thompson was a life long anti-Catholic. It is safe to say, at the very least, that the anti-Catholic platform of the Know Nothing party was no hindrance to Thompson's joining the movement. It also seems safe to say that Thompson's relationship with the Know Nothing party has been wrongly interpreted in the past.

Roll knew that Thompson wrote *The Papacy and the Civil Power* and *The Footprints of the Jesuits* when he wrote Thompson's biography. Yet so powerful was the reigning interpretation of the midwestern Know Nothing movement that he attempted to force Thompson into it despite evidence to the contrary revealed by his own research. Instead of attempting to belittle the phenomenon of anti-Catholic Know Nothingism, perhaps historians should begin to take note of its vote getting power and the persistence of its message later in the century. In light of historians' interest in the attempts to revive Whiggery in the 1870s, Thompson's career may suggest even that there was an attempt to revive Know Nothingism in the same period.⁶⁴ At least it can be said that Know Nothingism never died in the hearts of some of its adherents.

⁶³ Richard W. Thompson, "Christianity and Imperialism," 1, 206, 47, 85-86, Thompson Collection (Hayes Library).

⁶⁴ Allan Peskin's "Was There a Compromise of 1877?" dismisses as a "crank" a man who wrote James A. Garfield in 1877 claiming "that he could control the Know Nothing vote, insisting that 'the Knownothing party was still in existence in full blast, lying back like a couchant lion waiting to spring when the time comes'" (p. 69).