

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

The Leatherwood

Godにおけるハウエルズの宗教批判

メタデータ	言語: 出版者: 琉球大学法文学部 公開日: 2008-10-20 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Akamine, Kenji, 赤嶺, 健治 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12000/7547

William Dean Howells' Criticism
of Religion in *The Leatherwood God**

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I

In his later years, Howells' creative imagination was turning backward toward the Western frontier of his boyhood. In 1890, when he was fifty-three, Howells returned to his Ohio experiences and wrote *A Boy's Town*, an autobiographical sketch of his family's life in Hamilton, Ohio, in the 1840's. Howells' nostalgia for Ohio scenes and history also led to his writing such autobiographical works as *My Literary Passions* (1895) and *Years of My Youth* (1916).¹ *The Leatherwood God* (1916) is a product of this "Indian Summer mood," and is "nearly his most beautiful writing . . . often illumined with an intense inner glow of elevation that came to Howells only with advancing years."² It is rated among Howells' "ten best novels,"³ and is also considered "his last important statement on religion."⁴ In this novel, Howells shows how the innocent people of a peaceful backwoods settlement, Leatherwood Creek, Ohio, are rent asunder by the irresponsible act of a religious impostor, Joseph Dylks, who, proclaiming himself a god, threatens their peace and comfort, and precipitates spiritual and moral crises among them.

Being a product of the Ohio frontier village of Martin's Ferry, Belmont County, Howells was familiar with the life in the backwoods settlement. He gives a vivid picture of the life in Leatherwood Creek through his narrative of spiritual disorder based on an account of the actual incident in 1828, nine years before he was born. When he was a

boy, Howells heard a version of the history of the "Leatherwood God" from his father, who had known the person in his own youth. This history interested Howells so much that he kept it in mind for some fifty years, hoping to use it in a story.⁵

Howells actually took up the story of the "Leatherwood God" in about 1903, but he hesitated to go on for about ten years.⁶ Presumably he was aware of the dangers of offense which the story contained.⁷ Howells admitted that he liked the story and the "notion of making it [his] last great novel."⁸ The completed story, *The Leatherwood God*, contains Howells' bitter criticism of religion, as do several of his other novels including *A Foregone Conclusion* (1875), *The Minister's Charge* (1887), and *Annie Kilburn* (1889).

Although the scope of the present study is limited to an analysis of *The Leatherwood God*, an overview of what Howells accomplishes in these four novels as a whole would be here in order. The widely ranging years of publication of these novels, from 1875 to 1916, reflect Howells' lifelong interest in religion as actuality in man's life. In *A Foregone Conclusion*, Howells presents the plight of a skeptical priest, Don Ippolito, who unsuccessfully attempts to forsake his office, and points out that there are many unfit men in the Catholic Church. He attacks the Church for its failures to keep abreast of the times, to perform ethical duties, and to represent Christ as He ought to be represented in Christian churches. The two Protestant ministers, Sewell in *The Minister's Charge* and Peck in *Annie Kilburn*, propose the Howellsian doctrine of complicity with insistence on universal brotherhood. But both of them fail to practice the fine precepts they preach. They are also portrayed as being unfit for the church. In these three novels, Howells condemns a Christianity that has no room for constant brotherly care, and implies that established churches are incapable of becoming guiding forces in the world. In *The*

Leatherwood God, Howells shows the failure of a newly revealed religion, Dylksism, and expresses his contempt for a religion which takes advantage of ignorant people's fanatic and often blind beliefs. Joseph Dylks, the founder of Dylksism, is an impostor and is ineffectual as a religious leader. In short, Howells in these novels points out and sharply criticizes the failure of religious organizations (or organized religions) and their ministers to make significant contributions toward the making of better men and better conditions of living in the world.

The purpose of this study, then, is to see how effectively Howells, in *The Leatherwood God*, develops his criticism of religion through the interactions and utterances and the psychological development of the characters, and to determine why he criticizes religion as he does.

II

As the story opens, Joseph Dylks, a "religious mountebank"⁹ and impostor, appears in the raw Ohio settlement of Leatherwood Creek, sometime in the 1820's. Leatherwood Creek is a remote community, and people are materially poor. But they live in peace and comfort, free from the commercial and industrial problems which harass the political centers and growing cities of the young Republic. Religion is their chief interest, and revival meetings are attended by most of the villagers. The residents' orderly and diligent lives express the seriousness which they inherited from their Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Moravian ancestors. Naturally, different sects have had their different services—their ceremonies of public baptisms, revivals, and camp meetings. But they all have gathered as one Christian people under the roof of a log-built edifice which they call the Temple.

Joseph Dylks is an evangelistic impostor. As soon as he arrives at Leatherwood, Dylks starts preaching a new religion, a religion abstracted

from Christianity, and his cult soon causes people to lose satisfaction in life, stirring the stillness at the settlement. Joseph Dylks is a horse-like creature, a "stallion," Howells calls him, with a long black mane of hair, always dressed in broadcloth. One evening, Dylks appears at a religious meeting in the Temple "with all the thrill of an apparition."¹⁰ Toward the end of the evening service, Dylks suddenly gives out the thrilling shout of "Salvation!" followed by a kind of snort. Then he towers over those sitting near him, with his head thrown back, and his hair tossed like a mane on his shoulders.

The minister in charge of the service invites Dylks toward the pulpit, calling him "Brother Dylks."¹¹ Taking the opportunity, Dylks runs quickly up the pulpit steps, and takes over the service. He gives out passage after passage from the Bible and impresses the congregation:

[Dylks'] memory in [biblical passages] was unerring; women who knew their Bibles by heart, sighed their satisfaction in his perfectness; they did not care for the relevance or irrelevance of the passages; all was scripture, all was the one inseparable Word of God, dreadful, blissful, divine, promising heaven, threatening hell. Groans began to go up from the people held in the strong witchery of the man's voice. (p. 21)

With his "witchery" and amazing charismatic power, Dylks succeeds with hardly any difficulty in increasing the number of believers in his cult, not only among orthodox Christians, but also among many one-time agnostics. Howells clearly presents the psychological evolution of people. They think that no common man would so fearlessly trust his dignity. They fanatically throng upon Dylks, and women, old and young alike, tremble before him in strange ecstasy.

As the time goes on, the converts to the Dylksian cult, in their fanatic belief, drive Methodists, Moravians, Baptists and all the rest out of the Temple, while Dylks himself passes swiftly from teacher to prophet and to

Messiah with sure steps. At last, Dylks proclaims before a large congregation of his believers at the "stolen Temple" that he is God and there is none else. As if they had been anxiously awaiting this moment, his followers press around Dylks and worship him as he goes on:

I am God and the Christ in one. . . . In me, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are met. There is no salvation except by faith in me. They who put faith in me shall never taste death, but shall be translated into the New Jerusalem, which I am going to bring down from Heaven. (p. 53)

Moreover, Dylks reveals that Enraghty, an intelligent schoolmaster and former Moravian, is in reality Paul the Apostle. Exalted, Enraghty accepts the role of St. Paul, and begins to spread his accounts of a number of miracles allegedly wrought by Dylks, Dylks' encounter with and victory over Satan in the nearby woods being one of them.

Thus, with his unusual strength of character, coupled with his mysterious manner and physical appearance, Dylks progressively captures people's minds and easily converts them to his false religion. And his believers are deeply convinced of his supernatural power. The situation of the village goes from bad to worse as Dylks' religion becomes a creed for people to quarrel over. Now they are divided into two opposing groups, the believers and the unbelievers. The newly revealed religion has thus destroyed the just social order founded in the spirit of fraternity, altruism, and justice, which Leatherwood had formerly enjoyed for generations. People have been driven irrational, and differences of opinions among them have parted husbands and wives, parents and children, and set strifes between brothers and neighbors.

But day after day increases the number of Dylks' believers, whom Dylks calls the "Little Flock." The ironical situation is that all the educated dignitaries of the community have become the foremost believers, at the expense of their respectability and honorable positions.

The two leaders of Leatherwood, the schoolmaster Enraghty, who has become St. Paul, and Hingston, a respectable miller, who has been appointed St. Peter, are good examples. Unbelievers, on the other hand, consist of the less respectable people, whom Dylks calls the "Herd of the Lost." They and the "Hounds," veteran disturbers of camp meetings and revivals, stand against the multitude of Dylksites, for the prevention of a further spread of the Dylks fever. Howells, however, does not show much of his criticism of the new religion through those unbelievers. The one who acts as Howells' mouthpiece is Squire Matthew Braile, a "genial agnostic"¹² and an "infidel" (p. 11), who is justice of the peace at Leatherwood.

III

Squire Braile is precisely the third element in the present affair: he keeps himself away from the current religious fanaticism. Through Squire Braile, Howells displays his idea of what religion should be. A Thomas Paine freethinker, and an extremely humorous and ironical character, Braile sits on a splint-bottom chair on the porch, and his serenity is a "somewhat hawklike repose" (p. 5). He has scarcely attended the revival meetings, and his quiet life with his wife Martha is undisturbed by the current turmoil caused by Dylks. Braile possesses a "sense of justice and fair-play" and the "infinite humanity that clothes his poor philosophy."¹³ Braile moves from place to place to meet people in trouble and offer help. He has a profound knowledge of the Bible, and lives according to the teachings of the gospels, but does not want his religion institutionalized. What is more, his practice of law has taught him not only how to manage men, but also how to discipline his mind, and he possesses a clear understanding of the inner nature of a human character.

In order to start with his criticism of religion, Howells makes Abel

Reverdy, a naive villager, drop in at Squire Braile's. When Abel comments that Braile's double log-cabin house is half as big as the Temple, Braile retorts with strong emphasis: "This *is* the Temple: Temple of Justice—Justice of the Peace. Do you people think there's only one kind of temple in Leatherwood?" (p. 11). With his brilliant insight, Braile perceives that Dylks is a rascal (p. 23), and this proves to be true. Howells generously endows Squire Braile with sarcasm, sense of humor, and irony, and unfailing judgment of right and wrong. In effect, Braile is a good religious critic on his own, and critics agree that he is Howells' spokesman.¹⁴ In Howells' own words, Braile is a "sort of grim chorus, but he has his part in the action."¹⁵ The agreement of the expressed religious views of Squire Braile and Howells convinces the reader that Braile is the aged Howells himself.¹⁶

In the first place, Braile is sarcastic about Dylks' miracles. When Sally Reverdy, Abel's wife, asks if he believes in Dylks' miracle, Braile's ready answer is: "Oh, yes, *I* believe it. But you know *I* believe *anything*. If Dylks did it, and Enraghty says he did it, why there we've got gospel for it—right from St. Paul himself" (p. 52). Sally and Abel Reverdy are involved in the current religious turmoil, and their common role in this novel is that of the reporter of the goings-on at the Temple and elsewhere in the village. Braile himself goes to the Temple on two occasions, but most of what he knows about Dylks' activities he hears from the Reverdys. Braile, after listening to Sally's report on the scene of a meeting at which Dylks first captured people's minds, gets angry and asks:

... did they [the unbelievers] just look ashamed of you, down there on your knees before a man that you worshipped for a God because he snorted like a horse? Didn't anybody in their senses say anything, or couldn't those that were out of their senses hear anything but their ravings? (p. 55)

Sally is completely lost in Squire Braile's blasphemous irony. Being

a faithful believer of Dylks, she feels it irreverent to call her God by plain Dylks. Seriously trying to find a proper name for Dylks, Sally says, "Mr. Dylks wouldn't do; or Brother Dylks, wouldn't. Father Dylks don't sound quite the thing." "Might try Uncle Dylks," suggests Braile with a sardonic smile (p. 56). In this manner, Howells, in tragi-comic scenes, skillfully mixes his bitterness with sardonic humor.

Behind his sarcasm and irony, Braile hides a pessimistic idea about the newly revealed religion, Dylksism. Following his wife's comment that the people seem to have gone crazy, Braile says with a heavy sigh:

. . . there is no doubt about that. And it's a pity. For such a religious community Leatherwood Creek used to be a very decent place to live in. They were a lot of zealots, but they got on well with one another; that Temple of theirs kept them together, and they didn't quarrel much about doctrine. Now with the Dylksites driving the old fashioned believers out of the sanctuary and dedicating it to the exclusive worship of Dylks, the other denominations are going to fight among themselves; and there'll be no living with them. (p. 57)

Braile's account gives a good idea of how badly Dylks' religion has influenced the people of Leatherwood. Braile bewails the fact, and criticizes the wrong which Dylks has committed. His disapproval of Dylks' religion is based on his belief that it has neglected teaching morality and conduct of life. An enthusiastic reader of Thomas Paine, Braile believes in Paine's idea that religion should stress the ethical aspect of the gospels as a prime cause.

David Gillespie, another important character in the novel, shares Braile's opinion. Except for his sister Nancy, he is the only person who knows Dylks' past. Dylks had married Nancy, and lived on her money till it was all gone. Then Dylks deserted Nancy and their child, and let her believe that he was dead somewhere in Philadelphia. Nancy later married humble Laban Billings, and they had lived happily before Dylks came back. With Dylks' appearance, Gillespie made Nancy part with Laban,

because he believed that a woman with two husbands sinned against God's law. Gillespie's fear that Nancy might be charged with bigamy prevents his revealing Dylks' identity to the villagers. Gillespie is a devoted Christian and believes, with Braile, that religion is a way of life. He laments ethical corruption of the people of Leatherwood and says:

We loved one another—in the Scripture sense—and now look! Families broken up, brothers not speaking, wives and husbands parting, parents cursing the day their children were born, and children flying in the face of their parents. (p. 62)

Gillespie is also lamenting his own misery. His daughter Jane is now a Dylksite, and has "gone crazy after a thief and a liar," that is Dylks (p. 61). Because of the difference of opinions, Jane and her father quarreled. She has also broken up with her boy friend Hughey Blake, a leader of the unbelievers. Gillespie's pathetic utterances are highly illustrative of the trouble caused by Dylks. According to Gillespie, the only decent man left in the village is "that red-mouthed infidel," Squire Braile. Gillespie feels a strong urge to go to see Braile and ask what "Tom Paine" would do in his place. His sister Nancy says that Braile believes in "some kind of a God that wants people to do right," but that he does not accept the Biblical religion at its face value (p. 63). Braile's religion is a sort of social religion: he believes that religion should ideally teach people how to live in the right way.

IV

After thus introducing the nature of the recent event that has shaken Leatherwood, Howells comes a step forward to comment on various situations. Nancy Billings endures her sad plight and takes the responsibility of raising her son Joey, the son of Dylks, and a little child by her second marriage. Like most of the main characters, Nancy accepts God's rule as the way of life. She grows stronger day by day in her adversity, and

becomes, as it were, the spiritual backbone of her family as well as of the community.

One day, Dylks visits Nancy at her cabin, and proudly tells her, "It's been step by step with me: first exhorter, then prophet, then disciple, then the Son, then the Father: but it's been as *easy*!" (p. 71) Dylks is self-deluded that since he has converted with little difficulty such a number of people, if not the entire community, he must have a real power. He has no sense of right or wrong. He advocates that with God there is nothing but one kind of thing, the thing that God allows. Nancy, of course, knows that Dylks is a wicked man who has not only deserted her, but become the wedge of her separation from her second husband. In fact, Dylks is a thief and impostor who intends to acquire wealth by deceiving the innocent people of Leatherwood (see pp. 26-27 and p. 57), and that fact alone makes it impossible for the reader to expect anything good from him and his religion.

Later, Nancy meets Braile. Their encounter gives Howells a good opportunity to express his opinion on religion. Asked by Nancy if he believes in the Bible God, Braile answers that he believes in the Bible God as much as the Bible will let him, and that he will believe in a miracle depending on who did it. "Well," Squire Braile asks back, "do *you* believe in God?" Nancy answers, "A God that would let Joseph Dylks claim to be Him, and let them poor fools kneel down to him and worship him? Would an all-wise and all-powerful God do that?" Braile admits that he believes in sin, but sin to him is simply "going against what you knew was right at the time being" (pp. 76-77). God, after creating man in His own image, left him to do good or evil as he chose. Braile continues:

The way I look at it, He doesn't want to keep interfering with man, but lets him play the fool or play the devil just as he's a mind to. But every now and then He sends him word. If we're going to take what the Book says, He sent him Word made

flesh, once, and I reckon He sends him Word made Spirit whenever there's a human creature comes into the world, all loving and all unselfish—like your Joey, or—my—my Jimmy [who died]. (p. 78)

Howells does not present the whole idea of Braille's criticism yet, but the latter's agnosticism is clearly expressed even at this point.

Turning back to the main plot of the story, Howells this time scoffs at Dylks' failure to perform a miracle. After parting with Braille, Nancy meets a large number of people going toward Hingston's mill to witness the miracle that Dylks promised to perform. For it has become necessary that Dylks prove his supernatural power by showing a miracle to people at an open meeting. Everyone is invited to the meeting, and at the meeting, both the believers and the unbelievers wait patiently. In their common expectation, the two opposed groups are now in a sort of truce, Howells tells. But after two hours of waiting in the night air, the people become restless, and Jim Redfield, a leader of the unbelievers, decides to go after Dylks.

Just at that moment, Dylks' voice comes from the darkness outside, announcing in an elevated mode of speech that the miracle has already taken place:

The miracle that ye wait to see has been wrought already unseen of you. The cloth before you has been touched by my Power, and turned into the seamless raiment which ye seek as a sign. But it shall not be shown to you now. Ye shall see it seven days and seven nights hence on the eighth night at the Temple. Till then, have patience, have faith. Thus saith the Lord. (p. 90)

Dylks' believers are easily convinced, but the "Hounds" rush to the roll of cloth on the table to ascertain the miracle with their own eyes. Suddenly, a cry comes from a woman who had offered to provide the cloth when she heard that it would be needed for the seamless raiment of Dylks' miracle. Watching her bolt of cloth being maliciously rent by the "Hounds," she

cries, "Oh, I don't care for the miracle . . . but what are my children going to wear this winter?" (p. 92) In that simple cry of a poor woman, Howells reveals his sympathy with the victimized people, which forms part of the basis for his satire, criticism, and attacks on false religions.

Losing their reason, the unbelievers turn into a mob, and decide to catch Dylks, who has fled from them for his life. The searchers find Dylks, who was hiding half way up the chimney of the kitchen in the Temple. Excited captors almost lynch Dylks, but Jim Redfield suggests that Dylks be taken to Squire Braile for a trial under the law of Ohio. The captors assent unanimously, but none can stop the spontaneous accusations from the victims who suffered the consequences of Dylksism. One angry husband says:

Did the law keep my family from bein' broke up by this devil?
My wife left me and my own brother won't speak to me because
I wouldn't say [Dylks] was my Savior and my God. (p. 100)

One father says: "[Dylks has] spread death and destruction in my family. My daughters won't look at me, and my two sons fought about him till they were all blood" (p. 100). Similar accusations and upbraidings thicken upon Dylks, who sits silent, giving out a low groan seemingly of remorse. Here Howells once again vivifies that Dylks' religion has caused the deterioration of the characters of gentle people. But he leaves the judgment on the issue to Squire Braile.

By the request of the large group of maddened people, Braile puts Dylks on trial. The plight of Dylks here is not dissimilar to that of Jesus Christ on trial before Pilate, but being too intelligent to let the impostor Dylks become a martyr, Braile insists that there must be a regular legal charge against him.¹⁷ Braile asks the crowd if Dylks has stolen anything, or assaulted anybody, or set a tobacco-shed on fire. Of course there are no such charges. After carefully going through the index of the Laws of

Ohio, Braile delivers his decision:

There don't seem . . . to be any charge against the prisoner except claiming to be the Almighty; he pleads guilty to that, and he could be fined and imprisoned if there was any law against a man's being God. But there isn't, unless it's some law of the Bible, which isn't in force through reenactment in Ohio. He hasn't offended against any of our statutes, neither he nor his followers. In this State every man has a right to worship what God he pleases, under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to molest him or make him afraid. With religious fanaticism our laws have nothing to do, unless it be pushed so far as to violate some public ordinance. This I find the prisoner has not done. Therefore, he stands acquitted. (p. 103)

Following Braile's judgment, a roar of protest and a shout of joy go up from the crowd according to their belief and unbelief. Braile tells the unsatisfied "Herd of the Lost," ". . . you let these folks worship any stock or stone they've a mind to; and you find out the true God if you can, and stick to Him, and don't bother the idolators. I reckon He can take care of Himself" (p. 105). Braile tells Jim Redfield that justice is one thing and law is another, and that he gave Dylks his legal deserts. Braile philosophizes, ". . . so long as we look after our own souls, we can't do better than let others look after theirs in their own way" (p. 106).

In Braile's generosity, Howells shows that one should not be punished for his belief, whatever it may be, but he should be rational enough to keep himself out of religious fanaticism. Howells also suggests his attainment of his personal religious conviction. Thus, Howells in this novel shows his disapproval of certain aspects of religion and demonstrates their harm to individuals and society.

Meanwhile, Dylks is released and escapes into the woods. Knowing that he is in danger of being lynched by the unbelievers who are keeping their watch everywhere in the village, Dylks hides in the thick of the woods, and endures hunger and pains from his wounds. In the quietness of

the night, Dylks now faces his conscience, and finds that he has been deceiving himself as well as others. He promises that if God will show him a little mercy, he will go forth before his followers and declare himself a false god. Shortly, however, he manages to slip out of the woods and goes to Nancy, who is obliged to take him into her cabin and wash his wounds. Nancy pleads with Dylks that he go to Braile for advice as to what can be done. Dylks agrees to do so, but at the same time, fears that he might be killed by his fanatic believers this time, if he denies himself to be a god.

V

In the second meeting of Dylks and Braile, Howells finds another good opportunity to make important statements concerning religion. The sarcastic Braile receives the now crest-fallen Dylks with "Why, God, is that you?" Dylks now opens his mind to Braile. Braile listens seriously and attentively to Dylks as he says:

You think I had to lie to them, to deceive them, to bewitch them. I didn't have to do anything of the kind. They did the lying and deceiving and bewitching themselves, and when they done it, they and all the rest of the believers, they had me fast, faster than I had them. (p. 117)

But he nevertheless admits:

The worst of it is, and the dreadfulest is, that you begin to believe it yourself. . . . Their faith puts faith into you. If they believe what you say, you say to yourself that there must be some truth in it. If you keep telling them you're Jesus Christ, there's nothing to prove you ain't, and if you tell them you're God, who ever saw God, and who can deny it? You can't deny it yourself. (p. 118)

In his futile self-defense and reproach, Dylks pictures himself as a victim of self-deception and self-delusion, suggesting that he is also a victim of group delusion. But Howells shows that Dylks is basically an impostor, who aimed to acquire wealth for himself, taking advantage of

the restlessness which he caused. Braile takes his turn and makes an obvious attack on the very basis of the Biblical religion in behalf of Howells.¹⁸ Braile states:

Why you poor devil, you're not in any unusual fix. It must have been so with all the impostors of the world, from Mahomet up and down! Why, there isn't a false prophet in the Old Testament that couldn't match experiences with you! That's the way it's always gone: first the liar tells his lie, and some of the fools believe it, and proselyte the other fools, and when there are enough of them, their faith begins to work on the liar's own unbelief, till he takes his lie for the truth. (p. 118)

As Arnold Fox points out, Braile's use of the expression "from Mahomet up and down" seems to be an obvious device on Howells' part to avoid any specific statement of Christian dogma, but it still indicates that Howells rejects the divinity of Jesus.¹⁹ As does Howells, Braile maintains a belief in God the Creator, but does not seem to accept the all-powerful, all-knowing God of the Bible and the doctrinal religion. Howells' satire is also shown in Braile's pointing out the fact that when Dylks prayed to God after he had promised to work a miracle before people, he actually prayed to himself because he was God Himself at that time. Braile suggests that in order to restore order, Dylks must leave Leatherwood, but without causing any further commotion. Dylks takes Braile's fatherly advice obediently, and determines to leave Leatherwood as soon as possible.

One evening, Dylks preaches for the last time in the Temple that the New Jerusalem will not be brought down to Leatherwood, because, he explains, the "Herd of the Lost" stoned him. Dylks tells people that he will leave the village to go "Over the Mountains," where he will bring down the New Jerusalem which he promised. Enchanted by Dylks' description of the New Jerusalem with diamond-built houses, golden walls, and silvery gates, his followers plead with him that they be taken with him.

Dylks, knowing that it is the only solution left, agrees to take them. Naturally, not all believers can afford to go with Dylks, but many follow him after mortgaging their lands and setting their houses in order.

The voice of reconverted people comes from Sally Reverdy as she says to Braile: "There's such a thing as gittin' enough of a thing, and I've got enough of strange gods for one while" (p. 139). Presently, the tragic death of Dylks is reported by Joey, who, out of a boy's curiosity, joined Dylks' company. Joey tells his mother about his experiences with Dylks. Joey reports that Dylks was kind to him, and that Dylks had continued praying for God's help before he drowned in the river.

Toward the end of the story, Howells takes the reader to the Leatherwood of the 1850's, some thirty years after Joseph Dylks' death. Social order, of course, has been restored, and the activities associated with Dylks have become a series of legendary stories. One day, a reporter called Thomas Jefferson Mandeville, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, comes to Leatherwood. Mandeville meets the old Braile and expresses his wish to hear all about the Leatherwood God. The first thing Mandeville wants to know is if there are any of the "Little Flock" left in the village. Braile answers that there are still some left, and that they are "as strong in the faith as ever." Braile goes on: "The dead died in the faith; the living that were young in it in the late eighteenth-twenties are old in it now in the first of the fifties" (pp. 154-55). Braile tells that Dylks' failure to perform his miracle has had no adverse effect whatever on his followers, and that they have remained fast in the faith.

Analyzing with perception the psychology of the frontier people, Braile says: ". . . life is hard in a new country, and anybody that promises salvation on easy terms has got a strong hold at the very start" (p. 156). Mandeville says, "I can't see why [Dylks] didn't establish his superstition in universal acceptance, as say, Mahomet did." Braile's answer is simple,

but to the point:

For one thing, and the main thing, because he was a coward. He had plenty of audacity but mighty little courage, and his courage gave out just when he needed it the most. And perhaps he hadn't perfect faith in himself; he was a fool, but he wasn't a crazy fool. Then again, my idea is that the scale was too small, or the scene, or the field, or whatever you call it. The backwoods, as Leatherwood was then, was not the right starting point for a world-wide imposture. Then again, as I said, Dylks was timid. He was not ready to shed blood for his lie, neither other people's nor his own; and when it came to fighting for his doctrine, he was afraid; he wanted to run. And in fact, he did run, first and last. No liar ever had such a hold on them that believed his lie; they'd have followed him any lengths; but he hadn't the heart to lead them. (p. 157)

Mandeville finally asks:

How about the obscurity of the scene where Joe Smith founded his superstition, which bids fair to live right along with the other false religions? Was Leatherwood, Ohio, a narrower stage than Manchester, New York? And in point of time the two cults were only four years apart. (p. 159)

To this final question, Braile answers wisely: " Joe Smith only claimed to be a prophet, and Dylks claimed to be a god. That made it harder, maybe for his superstition" (p. 159). With this undertone of satire on religion, Howells concludes the story of the "Leatherwood God."

VI

Howells' attacks in *The Leatherwood God* are directed toward the dogma and schism over the minor differences of opinion which religion as such carries. Howells recognizes the efficacy of religion only so far as it is good for man's life, putting him on the right track. With his interest in the moral aspect of religious teachings, Howells develops his idea of a social religion through utterances of Braile. Like Braile, Howells admits the existence of God but does not accept the orthodox concept of God.

Howells tells that the one phase of religion which he considered paramount—performance of ethical duties—is in danger of being slighted and even buried under a mass of theological doctrine, and “it was this which he protested against.”²⁰

Howells shows his contempt for the ethical corruption of the believers involved in religious fanaticism, while exhibiting with emphasis the orderly lives of the unbelievers who stay out of it. In various problems which he presents, Howells finds enough reasons for his attacks on organized religions, and his attack is mainly on their failures to meet their ethical duties. After reading Thomas Paine, Braile seems to have developed his idea that man’s moral duties should be to observe the real and ever-existing Word of God in the Creation, and to strive to imitate this beneficence. Thus, Howells in *The Leatherwood God* bitterly criticizes, and clearly expresses his views on, religion, masterfully utilizing and without sacrificing the artistic medium.

Notes

* This is an expanded version of a chapter of my unpublished M.A. thesis titled "William Dean Howells' Criticism of Religion: His Motive and Method," submitted to the University of Colorado in 1962.

I thank Professors Chotoku Higa and Kozen Nakachi of the University of the Ryukyus for giving me valuable suggestions for improvement of the paper. I also thank Mr. Elmer H. Graham, who teaches English at the University, for a native check on the manuscript of the paper.

¹ Eugene Pattison, *Introd., The Leatherwood God*, by W. D. Howells, ed. David J. Nordloh (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), pp. xiv-xvi.

² Walter Fuller Taylor, "William Dean Howells: Artist and American," *Sewanee Review*, 46 (July-Sept. 1938), 295-96.

³ Edwin H. Cady, *The Realist at War* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1958), p. 269. The other nine of his ten best novels are: *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), *Indian Summer* (1886), *Annie Kilburn* (1889), *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), *The Shadow of a Dream* (1890), *The Quality of Mercy* (1892), *The Landlord at Lion's Head* (1897), and *The Son of Royal Langbrith* (1904).

Reviewers generally praised the novel. An anonymous reviewer—"New Books Reviewed," *North American Review*, 204 (Dec. 1916), 939—said, "Perhaps Mr. Howells has never written a more vital story." Arthur H. Quinn—"The Thirst for Salvation," *Dial*, 61(14 Dec. 1916), 535—stated, "There is a unity of plot, a coherence of motive, and a pictorial quality in the character drawing that make a real contribution to our novels of American life."

⁴ Arnold B. Fox, "Howells as a Religious Critic," *New England Quarterly*, 25 (June 1952), 205.

⁵ Anonymous, "The Leatherwood God," *New York Times Review of Books*, 29 Oct. 1916, p. [453]. It is said that the "historical outline of this story is largely taken from the admirable narrative of Judge Taneyhill in the *Ohio Valley [Historical] Series*, Robert Clarke Co., Cincinnati." See Publisher's Note, *The Leatherwood God*, by William Dean Howells (New York: The Century Co., 1916). The "admirable narrative" was Richard H. Taneyhill's "The Leatherwood God. An Account of the Appearances and Pretensions of Joseph C. Dylks in

Eastern Ohio in 1828," published in 1871. Pattison, *Introd.*, *The Leatherwood God*, p. xi.

⁶ See a letter to his older brother Joseph A. Howells, 22 June 1912. *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, ed. Mildred Howells (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1928), II, 323-24. Hereafter cited as *Life in Letters*.

⁷ Anonymous, "The Leatherwood God," p. [453].

⁸ In a letter to Joseph A. Howells, 24 Feb. 1907. *Life in Letters*, II, 235.

⁹ Oscar W. Firkins, *William Dean Howells* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1924), p. 203.

¹⁰ Delmar G. Cooke, *William Dean Howells* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922), p. 253.

¹¹ W. D. Howells, *The Leatherwood God*, *introd.* Eugene Pattison, ed. David J. Nordloh et al. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), p. 20. All further references to this novel appear in the text and are to this edition.

¹² Cooke, p. 253.

¹³ Cooke, p. 253.

¹⁴ Fox, p. 206. See also John T. Frederick, *The Darkened Sky* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 223.

¹⁵ *Life in Letters*, II, 356.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Howells' religious views, see my paper, "The Religious Background of W. D. Howells," *Ryudai Review of Language & Literature*, No. 26 (Dec. 1981), pp. 55-74.

¹⁷ Cady, p. 268.

¹⁸ Fox, p. 206.

¹⁹ Fox, p. 206.

²⁰ Fox, p. 208.

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The Leatherwood God におけるハウエルズの宗教批判

赤 嶺 健 治

The Leatherwood God (1916) は Howells 晩年の労作であり、宗教に関する彼の最後の重要ステートメントと目されている。この小説で Howells は、1820年代に Ohio 州の辺境 Leatherwood で、自らを神と名乗る詐欺師 Dylks に生活の平和を乱される住民の苦境を描き、より良い人間の育成とより良い社会の建設に貢献しない宗教に対する手きびしい批判を展開している。従来この村のキリスト教徒達は宗派を超えて協力一致し、同じ教会を共用してきたが、勢力を増した新 Dylks 教の信者達に教会から締め出され、内部抗争と分裂に追いやられる。聖書の教えを守り愛の絆で結ばれていた隣人達や親子兄弟も、Dylks 教の教義のことで口論し、多数が反目しあい、離散するようになる。Howells は啓示宗教が Dylks 教のように、当事者達の自己欺瞞・自己妄想および集団妄想から生まれる可能性があることを示唆し、制度化し組織化された宗教の独善的教義、宗派对立や分裂、道徳的義務の等閑視に批判の矛先を向け、きびしく糾弾している。