

The Conservative as Historian: Francis Parkman

S T E P H E N T O N S O R

THE DISCOVERY THAT Francis Parkman was a conservative does not rank as important news. Everyone knows it already. Of the great five of Boston historians, George Bancroft, William Hickling Prescott, John Lothrop Motley, Francis Parkman and Henry Adams, only Bancroft was a democrat whose "every line voted for the democratic party." The others distrusted democracy, hated equality and deplored the prevailing tendency of American politics. Whether the intense psychological problems of these four anti-democrats were a reflection of their fears, or their politics were a reflection of their neuroticism, is impossible to say, though a fellow conservative can only recommend the virtues and uses of neuroticism.

It is not news that Parkman was a conservative. Indeed one suspects that the lackluster biography of Parkman by Mason Wade is a reflection of the liberal inability to understand the motives and the thinking of conservatives. Wade wrote at the high tide of liberalism in America.¹ In his pages, Parkman's conservatism seems an understandable but unfortunate opinion; one which accounted for the eclipse of Parkman in his own time.

I shall argue, and perhaps my view is news, that Parkman's history of the French and English in North America and Parkman's personality were totally informed by his conservatism; that there was system in Parkman's thought and writing, that indeed Parkman was the very model of the conservative as historian and that had there been no conservatism there would have been no history.

I believe it is important to call the attention of students of history to Parkman. Although all of Parkman's books, together with the excellent editions of his journals

and letters, are in print he is hardly read aside from *The Oregon Trail*. John Higham notes that "in 1948 the American Historical Association asked the members of its council to rank the six greatest American historians no longer living. The only trained, academic scholar who received first place on anyone's list was Frederick Jackson Turner. The other front-runners were gentlemen historians: Henry C. Lea, Henry Adams, George Bancroft, William H. Prescott, and above all Francis Parkman."² It is doubtful that Parkman would today even make that list not because American historians had read his work and evaluated him differently, but quite simply because few historians any longer read Parkman. That is a pity, for no historian has had a more comprehensive view of the contest of France and England for the domination of the continent. To be sure Lawrence Henry Gipson's twelve volume *The British Empire Before the American Revolution* is more exhaustive in detail and pedestrian in tone but it too is unread. Moreover, Parkman instinctively and through careful analysis and study, recognized the importance of cultural differences. The triangular conflict between Indian, French and English is a conflict of cultures. Few men knew all three cultures at firsthand. Fewer still could make that act of sympathetic identification which enabled him to see into a culture not his own and understand its power to mold character and move men to action. It is often argued, for example, that Parkman was anti-Catholic and that the struggle for the continent of North America, as Parkman presents it, was really a conflict between Catholic absolutism and Protestant libertarianism. No doubt Parkman can be read in this fashion, though it

obscures Parkman's deep sympathy for, and understanding of, Catholicism, a sympathy which led to a detectable inclination to conversion to Catholicism.³ No one wrote with greater respect for the North American Jesuit martyrs and one can say with certainty that it was Parkman who took the first steps which ended in their canonization. Compared with Parkman's contemporaries, Motley and Prescott, one might even accuse Parkman of a secret Catholic bias.

Parkman wrote at a time when historical study was increasingly dominated by abstraction and positivistic causal analysis. German idealism, English materialism and continental Marxism all took the individual out of history. Nahum Glatzer has said in his biography of Franz Rosenzweig (though it might be said with equal justice of Francis Parkman) ". . . the name it [Rosenzweig's thought] defends is the individual, the suffering, erring, loving, doubting, despairing, and hoping human being whom the classical systems so badly neglected, letting him vanish in the "whole."⁴

For our generation Parkman is the great American historian because he reaffirms the role of the individual as the maker of history. Few men were more aware of the cultural and environmental determinants of history and yet no one, not even Thomas Carlyle, has staked out a more determinative role for the heroic individual than Parkman. Vernon Louis Parrington numbered him among those who created and sustained the "genteel tradition," though it is difficult to see how this vigorous and virile historian fits that rather ineffectual category. The belief that the heroic individual is able to conquer the self and reaching beyond the self to transform the course and texture of history is surely not a part of the genteel tradition. But it is precisely this belief which makes the historical narratives of Parkman so useful to our generation.

The hero, in Parkman's eyes, is first of all a hero to himself. His heroism begins in self-conquest. Van Wyck Brooks in *New England: Indian Summer* came closest to

identifying Parkman's nature and its demand for the conquest of the self. Brooks wrote:

. . . with his cordial dislike of Puritanism, which he thought narrow and bookish, he retained its passionate fervour and its rigorous tenseness. No doubt the isolation and strain of his life intensified his natural harshness. He loved hard truth, and he neither gave nor expected praise or pity; but this with his positive mind, his New England practicality and liking for the useful, limited his sympathies and imagination. Of all the figures in his books, the one he most resembled was La Salle, the stern and self-reliant Roman Frenchman, masterful, martial, serious, austere and shy. For all his distaste for priests, he admired the courage and heroism of the Jesuit martyrs, and he followed the priestly model in his own career. The heir of a long line of divines, like many of the New England writers of the previous age, he shared their sacerdotal temper and all their pride of learning and pride of power. Parkman was a Brahmin of the Brahmins.

This medieval strain of the priest and soldier, marked in Parkman's nature, fitted him for the theme that filled his life. . . .⁵

And we might add this "medieval strain of the priest and soldier" was the core of Parkman's conservative ethos and politics. It was also a position which he had bought and for which he continued to pay in intense personal experience throughout his life.

In an autobiographical letter to his friend Martin Brimmer which Parkman obviously intended for posthumous publication, he wrote the following of himself:

Two ideas possessed me. One was . . . to realize a certain ideal of manhood, a little medieval, but nevertheless good. Feeling that I fell short of it, I proceeded in extreme dissatisfaction to apply heroic remedies. I held the creed that the more hard knocks a man gets,

whether in mind or body, the better for him, provided always that he takes them without flinching; and as the means of forcing myself up to the required standard, I put my faith in persistent violence which I thought energy. I held that the true aim of life was not happiness but achievement; had profound respect for physical strength and hardihood when joined with corresponding qualities of character; took pleasure in any moderate hardship, scorned invalidism of all kinds, and was full of the notion, common enough with boys of a certain sort, that the body will always harden and toughen with exercise and exposure. I remember to have had a special aversion for the Rev. Dr. Channing, not for his heresies, but for his meager proportions, sedentary habits, environment of close air and female parishioners, and his preachments of the superiority of mind over matter; for, while I had no disposition to gainsay his proposition in the abstract, it was a cardinal point with me that while the mind remains a habitant of earth, it cannot dispense with a sound material basis, and that to neglect and decry the corporeal part in the imagined interest of the spiritual is proof of a nature either emasculate or fanatical. For my own part, instead of neglecting, I fell to lashing and spurring it into vigor and prosperity.⁶

Little wonder that on his European trip⁷ he liked best when he visited the Royal Museum in Naples the statues of the Farnese Hercules and Praxiteles' Venus.

It was an enthusiasm for heroic self-conquest which was to be severely tested. Parkman's many encounters with the wilderness, camping trips and canoe journeys culminating in the trip West to the Black Hills in 1846 established clearly enough that he could face and endure hardship and sickness to an unusual degree. Increasingly, Parkman suffered from a loss of sight approaching blindness and a crushing debility of spirit. It is possible to conjecture that he was a manic-

depressive. Whatever the source of his disease, the sufferings were real enough. He found any effort at concentration and study nearly impossible. He had prolonged bouts of headache and insomnia. His journals contain a log of his hours of sleep and the numerous drugs he took in order to induce sleep. Often he simply spent the small hours of the morning walking on Boston Common. Add to this arthritis of the knee joints so severe that he was confined to a wheelchair. "The enemy," as Parkman described his trouble with his head, had to be constantly combatted. Parkman became one of the great gardeners of nineteenth-century America in spite of his arthritis. He gardened from his wheelchair, planting, pruning and cutting grass, and he had a canoe fitted so that in spite of his crippled extremities he could indulge in one of his favorite sports. His trouble with "the enemy" was less easily dealt with. Add to this the early death of his wife and his infant son and disappointment in a later love affair and it is easy to see that the boyhood preference for achievement rather than happiness, while not easy of attainment, was a natural one.

Parkman in his novel, *Vassall Morton*, defined manhood as:

... that unflinching quality which, strong in generous thought and high purpose, bears onward towards its goal, knowing no fear but the fear of God; wise, prudent, calm, yet daring and hoping all things; not dismayed by reverses, nor elated by success; never bending nor receding; wearying out ill fortune by undespairing constancy; unconquered by pain or sorrow, or deferred hope; fiery in attack, steadfast in resistance, unshaken in the front of death; and when courage is vain, and hope seems folly, when crushing calamity presses it to the earth, and the exhausted body will no longer obey the still undaunted mind, then putting forth its hardest, saddest heroism, the unlaurelled heroism of endurance, patiently biding its time.⁸

It should be pointed out that this capaci-

ty to endure was gained at the expense of what Parkman believed to be a flawed and imperfect human nature. He held no Rousseauian estimate of the goodness of human nature nor did he believe the easy Unitarian assurances of the progressive rationalization and amelioration of the human condition. The experience of history and his own confrontation with the natural man disabused him of any such hopeful notions. His hostility to Rousseau was at least as great as that of Edmund Burke. He had no patience with concepts such as the Romantic concept of the noble savage. Parkman had lived with the American Indian and had spent the better part of a lifetime studying the Redman. The Indian he depicts is not James Fenimore Cooper's noble knight of the forest. His historical accounts generally, but particularly *The Oregon Trail* and the eighty-seven-page, introductory chapter to *The Jesuits in North America*, draw a sharp and well defined line between barbarism and civilization. Far from noble, Parkman found the Indian to be savage, cruel, capricious and incapable of rational thought. His total command of *The Jesuit Relations* put him in possession of the greatest body of anthropological data available in the nineteenth century, and these Jesuit observers had been more careful of the truth about the societies in which they were working than had been Margaret Mead. He was so confident of his knowledge of the Iroquois that he could dare to disagree with Lewis Henry Morgan.⁹ The conclusion to which Parkman came was that the natural man was not the good man. Though Parkman held no doctrine of original sin he talks as though both man and nature are fallen. It is the work of civilization to perfect both man and nature and the heroic struggle is a struggle with the inner self and with exterior nature.

It is interesting to observe that Parkman was a contemporary of Thoreau. His journeys had been more extensive than those of Thoreau and while Thoreau had been a good amateur botanist, Parkman was a botanist of international reputation.

It is important to understand their differing views of nature.

It is often argued that Parkman was a Romantic artist¹⁰ and that his sensibility of nature was essentially Romantic. This is true only in a very qualified sense. No one has ever observed the American landscape more carefully, more relished its beauty, more adequately described its splendor. The natural setting of events was most important to Parkman and he had to have a direct experience of the landscape in order to convey the historical event.

One evening, just after leaving Fort Leavenworth, Parkman and his friend Shaw, with whom he made the journey described in *The Oregon Trail*, decided they needed a bath. Here is the way Parkman describes the adventure:

We set out together; and as we approached the bushes, which were at some distance, we found the ground becoming rather treacherous. We could only get along by stepping on large clumps of tall rank grass with fathomless gulfs between, like innumerable little quaking islands in an ocean of mud, where a false step would have involved our boots in a catastrophe. . . . At last I came to the edge of the bushes—they were young water willows covered with their caterpillarlike blossoms—but intervening between them and the last grass clump was a black and deep slough, over which by a vigorous exertion I contrived to jump. Then I shouldered my way through the willows, trampling them down by main force, till I came to a wide stream of water, three inches deep, languidly creeping along over a bottom of sleek mud. My arrival produced a great commotion. A huge green bullfrog uttered an indignant croak, and jumped off the bank with a loud splash; his webbed feet twinkled above the surface as he jerked them energetically upward, and I could see him ensconcing himself in the unresting slime at the bottom, whence several large air bubbles struggled lazily to the top. Some little spotted frogs followed the patriarch's ex-

ample; and then three turtles, not larger than a dollar, tumbled themselves off a broad lily pad where they had been reposing. At the same time a snake, gaily striped with black and yellow, glided out from the bank and writhed across to the other side; and a small stagnant pool into which my foot had inadvertently pushed a stone was instantly alive with a congregation of black tadpoles.

How closely observed, how deftly depicted, one is tempted to say, but what a place to try and take a bath! That fact betrays Parkman's attitude to nature, an attitude which was anything but Romantic. Parkman's attitude to nature was far more like that of Hawthorne. The old Puritan sense of a fallen nature was alive in him. Nature does not stand in Parkman's thought in contradiction to and superior to civilization as it does in the thought of Thoreau.

Parkman's history is the history of the triumph of civilization. Parkman knows that the Indian cultures are doomed and that the wilderness environment will be transformed. In his introduction to *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* he wrote: "The history of that epoch . . . has been, as yet, unwritten, buried in the archives of governments, or among the obscurer records of private adventure. To rescue it from oblivion is the object of the following work. It aims to portray the American forest and the American Indian at the period when both received their final doom."¹¹ It would be a mistake however to regard the historian's perception as tinged with nostalgia. There is an inevitability to the progress of civilization. The contrast is not, in Parkman's thought, between the garden and the city (for they are, in fact, the same thing). The contrast is between wilderness and civilization.¹² The American wilderness is not the "garden of the world." It too is tainted with what Parkman calls the "primal curse."¹³ To be sure, the American wilderness is a natural environment of incomparable richness. Its fecundity and variety is astonishing. But it is a landscape which invites the trans-

forming hand of man. The wilderness is not a place of unalloyed good and men do not become good simply by living in contact with unspoiled nature. One must, in order to correctly understand Parkman, realize that his conception of the "natural man" and the wilderness is not a Wordsworthian romantic or Thoreauvian-transcendentalist vision of man and nature perfected and unspoiled. It is a Puritan-Christian view of man and nature. Nature is the arena in which the tragic-heroic drama is played out and the hero is the man who conquers the self. The garden and the heroic are at the end and not at the beginning of the civilizational process. Should one expect a different theory from a conservative who was a gardener?

In fact gardening was a most important confirmatory experience. In his middle years it provided the empirical base for Parkman's theory of nature and man that his direct experience of the natural man and wilderness had earlier provided. Parkman was one of the greatest and most talented gardeners of nineteenth-century America. He created a garden on his three acres at Jamaica Plain which had in it over one thousand varieties of roses, the first collection of oriental plants in America, lilies and perennials of all sorts and was sufficiently well known to be operated as a commercial venture. Parkman was not a landscape gardener but a plant breeder. The fact is significant for at a time when his contemporary historian Frederick Law Olmstead was designing some of the great natural gardens of the world, culminating in Yosemite National Park, Parkman gardened with the purpose of transforming and perfecting nature. One of Parkman's unread masterpieces is *The Book of Roses* in which Parkman makes explicit his views of nature and nurture, aristocracy in its relationship to natural endowment. Parkman writes:

Like all things living, in the world of mind or of matter, the rose is beautiful, enlarged, and strengthened by a course of judicious and persevering culture, continued through successive genera-

tions. The art of horticulture is no leveller. Its triumphs are achieved by rigid systems of selection and rejection, founded always on the broad basis of intrinsic worth. The good cultivator propagates no plants but the best. He carefully chooses those marked out by conspicuous merit; protects them from the pollen of inferior sorts; intermarries them, perhaps, with other varieties of equal vigor and beauty; saves their seed, and raises from it another generation. From the new plants thus obtained he again chooses the best, and repeats with them the same process. Thus the rose and other plants are brought slowly to their perfect development. It is in vain to look for much improvement by merely cultivating one individual. Culture alone will not make a single rose double or a dull rose brilliant. We cultivate the parent, and look for our reward in the offspring.

The village maiden has a beauty and a charm of her own; and so has her counterpart in the floral world,—the wild rose that grows by the roadside. Transplanted to the garden, and with its offspring after it to the fourth and fifth generation, made an object of skillful culture, it reaches at last a wonderful development. The flowers which in the ancestress were single and small become double in the offspring, and expand their countless petals to the sun in all the majesty of the Queen of Flowers. The village maiden has risen to regal state. She has lost her native virgin charm; but she sits throned and crowned in imperial beauty.

Now, all the roses of our garden have some wild ancestress of the woods and meadows, from whom, in the process of successive generations, their beauties have been developed, sometimes by happy accidents but oftener by design. Thus have arisen families of roses, each marked with traces of its parentage. These are the patricians of the floral commonwealth, gifted at once with fame, beauty, and rank.¹⁴

Parkman goes on to argue that

superiority is a matter of breeding, that culture in the world of roses is the key to excellence. He was no less certain that culture and breeding were the key to excellence in the human world of history. The heroes of Parkman's narrative are the scions of a world of aristocracy of traditional, status society. Parkman's Jesuits, Champlaign, La Salle, Wolfe and Montcalm are none of them frontier types who learn their nobility and heroism from the whispering trees and their noble Indian confederates. They bring their heroism with them into the wilderness from a culture which has made "honor" the cardinal virtue.

Among Indians and frontiersmen, Parkman finds many wild roses but not a single flower of "imperial beauty." These men might act from bravery, out of a spirit of fun or braggadocio or a gambler's contempt for life and limb. They did not act from honor and they could not be described as heroic. Again and again Parkman registers his contempt for the low-life types he found on the frontier. He admired their bravery and their *savoir faire* but he held in contempt their lack of civilized values and the absence of honor in their characters.

"Six years ago," Parkman wrote in *The Oregon Trail*,

. . . a fellow named Jim Beckwith, a mongrel of French, American, and Negro blood, was trading for the Fur Company in a large village of Crows. Jim Beckwith was last summer at St. Louis. He is a ruffian of the worst stamp: bloody and treacherous, without honor or honesty; such at least is the character he bears upon the prairie. Yet in his case the standard rules of character fail; for though he will stab a man in his sleep, he will also perform most desperate acts of daring; such, for instance, as the following. While he was in the Crow village, a Blackfoot war party, between thirty and forty in number, came stealing through the country, killing stragglers and carrying off horses. The Crow warriors got upon their trail and pressed them so closely that they could not

escape, at which the Blackfeet, throwing up a semicircular breastwork of logs at the foot of a precipice, coolly awaited their approach. The logs and sticks, piled four or five feet high, protected them in front. The Crows might have swept over the breastwork and exterminated their enemies; but though outnumbering them tenfold, they did not dream of storming the little fortification. Such a proceeding would be altogether repugnant to their notions of warfare. Whooping and yelling, and jumping from side to side like devils incarnate, they showered bullets and arrows upon the logs; not a Blackfoot was hurt, but several Crows, in spite of their leaping and dodging were shot down. In this childish manner the fight went on for an hour or two. Now and then a Crow warrior in an ecstasy of valor and vain-glory would scream forth his war song, boast himself the bravest and greatest of mankind, grasp his hatchet, rush up, strike it upon the breastwork, and then as he retreated to his companions, fall dead under a shower of arrows; yet no combined attack was made. The Blackfeet remained secure in their entrenchment. At last Jim Beckwith lost patience.

"You are all fools and old women," he said to the Crows, "come with me, if any of you are brave enough, and I will show you how to fight."

He threw off his trapper's frock of buckskin and stripped himself naked like the Indians themselves. He left his rifle on the ground, took in hand a small light hatchet, and ran over the prairie to the right, concealed by a hollow from the eyes of the Blackfeet. Then climbing up the rocks, he gained the top of the precipice behind them. Forty or fifty young Crow warriors followed him. By the cries and whoops that rose from below he knew that the Blackfeet were just beneath him; and running forward, he leaped down the rock into the midst of them. As he fell he caught one by the long loose hair, and dragging him down, tomahawked him; then grasping

another by the belt at the waist, he struck him also a stunning blow, and gaining his feet, shouted the Crow war cry. He swung his hatchet so fiercely around him that the astonished Blackfeet bore back and gave him room. He might, had he chosen, have leaped over the breastwork and escaped; but this was not necessary, for with devilish yells the Crow warriors came dropping in quick succession over the rock among their enemies. The main body of the Crows, too, answered the cry from the front, and rushed up simultaneously. The convulsive struggle within the breastwork was frightful; for an instant the Blackfeet fought and yelled like pent-up tigers; but the butchery was soon complete, and the mangled bodies lay piled together under the precipice. Not a Blackfoot made his escape.

In spite of his spectacular talent for mayhem, Beckwith does not qualify as a hero, does not even qualify as a "wild rose." It should be noted that his language is not the language of Darwinism. Perhaps the connections with Louis Agassiz were too close for any Darwinian influence to break in. Nor was Parkman a racist. The key to Parkman's belief in natural aristocracy was his conviction that culture defines human value and shapes human behavior. Those cultures which encourage the triumph of excellence and inculcate a sense of honor are the breeding grounds of heroic aristocracy. In the greatest of Parkman's heroes, the explorer La Salle, and the one most like Parkman himself, honor and aspirations to greatness are the keys to La Salle's character. La Salle writes in a letter to his friend the Abbe Bernou:

Since I have been in this country, I have had neither servants nor clothes nor fare which did not savor more of meanness than ostentation; and the moment I see that there is anything with which either you or the court find fault, I assure you that I will give it up,—for the life I am leading has no other attraction for me than that of honor; and the more danger and difficulty there is in undertakings of

this sort, the more worthy of honor I think they are.¹⁵

La Salle was Parkman's typical hero. He was the scion of an aristocratic and hierarchical social order motivated by honor. It was Parkman's lot however to live in a republican political order in which the society was drifting into democracy and in which equality rather than honor was the motive force. It is doubtful that Parkman had read Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, especially Volume I, Chapter XVIII, which Tocqueville entitled "Of Honor in the United States and in Democratic Communities." Like Parkman, Tocqueville saw in the aristocratic sense of honor the source of so much which had been valuable in past historic eras. Those highest spiritual qualities characteristic of noble societies, the dedication to extra-personal objectives, the cultivation of the arts and sciences, the dedication to beauty, poetry and fine manners, the pursuit of extraordinary grandeur, all Tocqueville recognized, as did Parkman, were absent from democratic societies. But whereas Tocqueville believed that be stripping off the noble artifices of aristocracy, democratic societies permitted the natural man governed by a universal law of sorts to emerge, Parkman saw no such gain in democratic society.¹⁶ Both the natural man and natural law were abhorrent to Parkman's attenuated Puritan view of the world.

For Parkman as for Tocqueville, the absence of honor and heroism was an empirically derived fact rather than a rational abstraction. Parkman's journals and *The Oregon Trail* reveal Parkman's very early awareness of egalitarian rudeness and vulgarity. Democracy was in conflict with the heroic. The outbreak of the Civil War seemed to Parkman to promise redemption and a rebirth of the heroic in American society.¹⁷ In a letter to the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (September 4, 1861), Parkman noted that the United States was "a *parvenu* nation with the faults and follies of a *parvenu*." He continued, "Already,

like a keen fresh breeze, the war has stirred our clogged and humid atmosphere. The time may be at hand when, upheaved from its depths, fermenting and purging itself, the nation will stand at length clarified and pure in a renewed and strengthened life."¹⁸

Parkman's belief in the possibility of national renewal and the recovery of the heroic did not last long. The postwar era brought, if anything, an intensification of the processes of egalitarianism and democratization. The mindless quest for wealth, political corruption, vulgarity, criminal self-interest and the total absence of the heroic and aristocratic drove Parkman to despair. He saw ostentatious wealth and single-minded money-getting as the chief villains in the piece.

In the July-August 1878 number of *The North American Review*,¹⁹ he published an article, "The Failure of Universal Suffrage," an article which must be one of the most extreme attacks on democracy and equality in nineteenth-century American political literature.

Perhaps there is an element of the Puritan doctrine of election in Parkman's distinction between the higher and the lower natures to be found among men, though one ought to be cautious in ascribing patterns of belief and behavior to remnants of ideas in the unconscious.

Parkman wrote:

The highest man may comprehend the lowest, but the lowest can no more comprehend the highest than if he belonged to another order of beings, as for some purposes he practically does. A single human mind may engender thoughts which the combined efforts of millions of lower intelligences cannot conceive. This is not the faith of Demos. In a vague way, he fancies that aggregated ignorance and weakness will bear the fruits of wisdom. He begins to think that science, thought and study, are old time illusions; that everybody has a right to form his own opinion as to whether the world is round or flat, and that the votes of the majority ought to settle the question.²⁰

Worse still, Parkman believed, was the fact that natural talent and aristocracy were led astray and corrupted by the quest for wealth and the pursuit of "political notoriety."

. . . the lower forms of ambition among us are stimulated to the utmost. The prizes held before them are enormous. The faculties that lead to money-making, and those that lead to political notoriety as distinguished from political eminence, have every opportunity and incentive. Ability, poor and obscure, may hope to win untold wealth, rule over mines, railroads, and cities, and mount to all the glories of official station. As a consequence we have an abundance of rich men and an abundance of clever politicians. . . .²¹

Before and after him that equality is always purchased at the price of liberty. It is well to permit Parkman to speak in his own words.

We have said that intrinsic equality is inconsistent with liberty. It is so because, in order to produce it, very unequal opportunities of development must be granted to different kinds of mind and character, and an even distributive justice refused to human nature. The highest must be repressed and the lowest stimulated in order to produce a level average. In such an attempt no political or social system can completely succeed; but in so far as it tends this way it is false and pernicious. If it could succeed, or approach to success, it would be an outrage upon humanity. . . .²²

Parkman's solution was, as we might expect, a call to the American elite to take its proper place in civic leadership. "Nobility obliges" is the Parkmanian solution. The path to political reform was through educational reform, for Parkman believed that the political elite needed a new educational preparation. The education he envisaged would prepare them for heroism and a life of honor.

There can be no doubt that Parkman

saw his account of the contest between the French and English for the control of North America as a part of that education to heroic service. When at the end of his historical account and virtually at the end of his life he penned the conclusion of *Montcalm and Wolfe*, he wrote:

. . . the disunited colonies became the United States. The string of discordant communities along the Atlantic coast had grown to a mighty people, joined in a union which the earthquake of civil war served only to compact and consolidate. Those who in the weakness of their dissensions needed help from England against the savage on their borders have become a nation that might defy every foe but that most dangerous of all foes, herself, destined to a majestic future if she will shun the excess and perversion of the principles that made her great, prate less about enemies of the past and strive more against the enemies of the present, resist the mob and the demagogue as she resisted Parliament and king, rally her powers from the race for gold and the delirium of prosperity to make firm the foundations on which that prosperity rests, and turn some fair proportion of her vast mental forces to other objects than material progress and the game of party politics. She has tamed the savage continent, peopled the solitude, gathered wealth untold, waxed potent, imposing, redoubtable; and now it remains for her to prove, if she can, that the rule of the masses is consistent with the greatest growth of the individual; that democracy can give the world a civilization as mature and pregnant, ideas as energetic and vitalizing, and types of manhood as lofty and strong, as any of the systems it boasts to supplant.²³

More than a century after Parkman wrote this conclusion to his great epic, conservatives still labor to turn his advice and hopes into a practical program. That they have not succeeded does not diminish the grandeur of his vision.

¹Mason Wade, *Francis Parkman, Heroic Historian* (New York: Viking Press, 1942). ²John Higham with Leonard Krieger and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 56. ³Howard Doughty, *Francis Parkman* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962). ⁴Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1955), p. xxiii. ⁵Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865-1915* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 181. ⁶Quoted in full in H.D. Sedgwick, *Francis Parkman, American Men of Letters Series* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), pp. 329-330. Unfortunately the full text of the letter is not included in Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Letters of Francis Parkman* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960). ⁷Mason Wade, ed., *The Journals of Francis Parkman, Vol. I* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 163. ⁸Francis Parkman, *Vassall Morton: A Novel* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1856), p. 362. ⁹Francis Parkman, *The Jesuits in North America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1897), pp. 44-45. ¹⁰David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959). ¹¹Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada* (Boston: Little,

Brown and Co., 1898), p. ix. ¹²Lee Clark Mitchell, *Witnesses to a Vanishing America: The Nineteenth Century Response* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981). ¹³Howard Doughty, *Francis Parkman* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), pp. 191-197. ¹⁴Francis Parkman, *The Book of Roses* (Boston: Tilton, 1866), pp. 95-97. ¹⁵Francis Parkman, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1897), p. 335. ¹⁶The best analysis of Tocqueville's concept of honor in relation to democratic society is to be found in Zetterbaum, Marvin, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967). ¹⁷For an analysis of Parkman's attitudes to the Civil War, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). ¹⁸Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., *Letters of Francis Parkman, Vol. I* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), pp. 141-143. ¹⁹Francis Parkman, "The Failure of Universal Suffrage" in *The North American Review*, July-August 1878, Vol. CXXVII, pp. 1-20. ²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6. ²¹*Ibid.*, p. 17. ²²*Ibid.*, p. 6. ²³Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe, Vol. II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), pp. 428-429.