

# *John Lothrop Motley and the Netherlands*

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IT is fitting—indeed, supremely fitting—that a study of John Lothrop Motley (1814-77) should begin with a superlative: his admirers and adversaries would be largely at one on that. Here it is: The case of Motley's historical writing on the Netherlands would seem to be unique in the force and nature of its initial impact in international cultural relations. There are, happily, innumerable examples of historians of one country making the history of another their professional life's work. Often the result of their work will be to awaken readers limited to the language in which they write to interest and excitement respecting the country under investigation where hitherto ignorance and indifference were the only reactions. But seldom if ever can the thing have been as violent as it was in Motley's case. When *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* was published in 1856, the Dutch historical profession possessed a science and a sophistication superior to historical scholarship in the English-speaking countries, but its achievements were virtually unknown to them. The *Edinburgh Review*, in a lengthy article for January on Motley's book and Prescott's *Philip II*, alluded with assurance, knowledge, and respect to the archival publication, editing, and commentary of Groen van Prinsterer, but the anonymous review was the work of Guizot, who was to translate and introduc  Motley for a French audience. Robert Jacobus Fruin, who has been termed the Ranke of the Netherlands, had to wait until the twentieth century for even fragmentary translation into English, and his lengthy, kindly, and devastating commentaries on Motley never reached an English-speaking readership at all. A few readers in the British Isles and North America would have seen the translation of Schiller's unfinished *Revolt of the Netherlands*, led to it perhaps by the characteristic vehemence with which it is trumpeted in Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*; fewer would have looked at Watson's eighteenth-century work which provided the chief source for



John Lothrop Motley (1814-1877)—after an engraving  
in the Dutch magazine *Eigen Haard*, 1877

Schiller (who, in common with Watson, and the present writer, knew no Dutch). So little was a market assumed to exist that Motley had to pay the expenses of his work's publication by John Chapman of London: it then sold 15,000 copies (each containing about 600,000 words) in a single year. It remained a best seller for decades in both the British Isles and the United States; it was adapted into school editions, illustrated editions, text editions, de luxe editions, cheap editions, popular editions, and was still reaching a wide public one hundred years later. It was a prime favorite at (Protestant) school prize-givings, decked out with engravings of Dutch landscapes considerably inferior to the work of the artists of that country, and sometimes concluding with a view of an assassinated William the Silent keeling over with an expression of acute dyspepsia, in which presumably piety, statesmanship, and martyrdom were felt to be nicely blended. As a general rule it was also distinguished by a total absence of maps, save occasionally for a general representation of the possessions of Charles V, a point which, however irritating to the conscientious reader, did at least symbolize that lack of local geographical understanding which was the foremost point in the future indictment of Motley by the scholar who ultimately supplanted him, even in the parochial hearts of the English-speakers, Professor Pieter Geyl. But although it was on Motley's own launching pad, London, that Geyl and his lieutenants in England such as G. J. Renier and S. T. Bindoff commenced the campaign which so utterly called into question the conclusions of the American writer, their work only began to reach a wide audience by the 1930's. For about three quarters of a century, when British or American readers thought about the Netherlands, it was the prose of Motley's *Dutch Republic* they had in mind.

This last fact alone merits a fresh look at Motley and his place in American cultural history. He and he alone had created a Dutch awareness on a wide scale: before his advent, when the great American reading public had thought of the Dutch, it did so in the comic if affectionate terms associated with Father Knickerbocker, Rip Van Winkle, and, presumably in less comic terms, Vanderdecken of the *Flying Dutchman*: the editor of Motley's *Correspondence*, George William Curtis of *Harper's*, was to declare that Motley's work was an act of atonement for the belittlement of the Dutch in American eyes by Washington Irving. Certainly nobody could suggest that Motley's Sunday-school hero portrayal of William the Silent had the slightest intention of being anything but an essay in the utmost reverence: indeed William became the first competitor George Washington had to date received in the United States, in edification of character, profundity of statesmanship, and nobility of intellect. However, despite the significance of competition in Dutch and American history, Wil-

liam and Washington were not in competition really, any more than Moses and Elijah had been. In any case, Irving himself heartily welcomed the new evangel and wrote Motley on July 17, 1857: "The minute and unwearied research, the scrupulous fidelity and impartial justice with which you execute your task, prove to me that you are properly sensible of the high calling of the American press—that rising tribunal before which the whole world is to be summoned, its history to be revised and rewritten, and the judgment of past ages to be cancelled or confirmed." Here was the imperialism of historiography with a vengeance!

And indeed, for all of Motley's fulmination against Philip II and his alien invasion of the Netherlands, the hard-working Dutch historians of his day might well be forgiven for seeing him as almost as alien an invasion himself. Irving's bombast was not prompted by similar tones in Motley's preface: he was gentlemanly, and civil, by nature, where his temper was not aroused—he was, in fact, a very likable and kindly person—and he knew his manners in thanking librarians and archivists. His sense of obligation to Dutch historiography, one might say his sense of its existence and achievements, is less evident in the *Dutch Republic* than in his later work; the successor volumes to it, *The History of the United Netherlands*, contain references to Fruin of an almost embarrassed respect, as though Motley had become sensible that his best seller might seem a jay in eagle's feathers, or, at best, the moon to a sunless audience benighted in their Anglophone ignorance. It was his tragedy that at his historiographical christening the bad fairy might have been thought to declare that he would only succeed by failing, and fail by succeeding. For *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* is far and away the worst as well as the most popular of Motley's three works on Dutch history. Superficially, it possesses more artistic cohesion, taking its readers from the grand spectacle of Charles V's abdication (after a lengthy introduction opening with Caesar's Gallic wars) and concluding with the high drama of the murder of William the Silent; the *United Netherlands* merely spanned the period from that murder to the synod of Dort, hardly a comparable end game in American eyes, and *The Life and Death of John of Barneveld* was, as even its dimmest critics realized, no biography but rather a view of the last ten years of Oldenbarneveldt's life ranging loosely through the European diplomacy observed in his correspondence and the circumstances of his fall and death. Yet as history the progress in quality moved inversely to the decline in popularity: by the last book, Motley was operating almost entirely from archives, much of it manuscript material unused by any scholars, where in the first his dependence had been very largely on published sources. Likes and dislikes he could never refrain from asserting and

reiterating, but by *Barneveld* he was showing capacity for drawing complex and even somewhat subtle portraits, in which darkness and light were impressively mixed, whereas the *Dutch Republic* is famous or infamous for its obsessiveness about the utter goodness of William the Silent and the utter badness of Philip II. Henry IV of France, in particular, is drawn with skill, appreciation, and real humor in both the *United Netherlands* and *Barneveld*, followed by the writer with evident equal zest whether in the skill and foresight of his diplomacy or in the absurdity of his passion for the Princesse de Condé, with all of its far-flung political repercussions. Sir George Clark, in his lecture to the British Academy in 1946 on the revolt of the Netherlands, remarked that even then neither English nor Dutch historians seemed fully to realize how much the English owed the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the Dutch immobilization of Parma's forces; that was no fault of Motley, who harangued his English-reading audience on the point at great length in the *United Netherlands* over eighty-five years before Sir George's paper. The recent work of Professor Charles Wilson has reaffirmed Motley's indictment against Elizabeth's failure to give sufficient support to the Netherlands, and its decisive role in the loss of Antwerp, despite the anger that Motley's strictures aroused in admirers of the Tudor Queen ever since he wrote, and it is arguable that the vociferous American maintained a perspective on the reality of Elizabethan Dutch policy which the neo-Elizabethan votaries of supposedly more scientific historical days have lost. Greater depth in research and greater confidence revealed Motley's gifts for comedy, even for Gibbonian satire, in place of the stark moralism of the *Dutch Republic*; the comedy, like the moralism, readily strayed into caricature, but caricature of a much more suggestive and intellectual kind. And, most of all, Motley's struggle to defend and vindicate Oldenbarneveldt really was a superb service to historians, and commenced the modern re-evaluation of a European statesman whose achievement had been unjustly obscured and traduced for two and a half centuries. Geyl deplored the vehemence of Motley's partisanship on this as on so much else, but he threw the weight of his judgment on the side of Motley rather than on that of his opponent and great defender of Maurice of Nassau, Groen van Prinsterer.

The fact remained that the *United Netherlands* and *John of Barneveld* scarcely survived into the twentieth century on the general market, and neither of them joined the *Dutch Republic* in cheap mass popular reprint. Motley was in any case by now respected more than read, one of the few points on which Woodrow Wilson and Henry Cabot Lodge agreed with one another (fortunately they were unaware of it), but where he was read after World War I, it was the *Dutch Republic*. The growing preference for publishing extracts from authors

favored the earlier book; the subtleties of the later two, and they contained many, offered less opportunities to the anthologizer than the simplistic purple passages of the *Dutch Republic*. Its name was identified with him. His American audience—although, as we shall see, not so much himself—readily identified the rise of the earlier republic as precursor to the rise of their own (William the Silent's Mosaic qualities thus extending to failure to inhabit the Promised Land). In the late 1920's Samuel Eliot Morison chose to call the enormously successful textbook he was writing with Henry Steele Commager *The Growth of the American Republic* and might indeed have said "Rise" instead of "Growth" had the term not been pre-empted a few years previously by his great historiographical opponents Charles and Mary Beard for their *Rise of American Civilization*; Morison was born almost exactly ten years after his father had written the obituary of Motley for the *Unitarian Review*, the intellectual journal of Motley's religious sect.

*The Rise of the Dutch Republic* thus became Motley's Nemesis as well as his triumph, and when in the twentieth century Geyl did his work, the consequences for its reputation and Motley's were disastrous. Geyl's insistence that the division of the Netherlands had been dictated by geography, specifically by waterways, made Motley not merely wrong but irrelevant. His insistence on ending with William the Silent's death had created a wholly unhistorical view of the outcome; despite Motley's later work, despite his unstinted admiration for the services of Oldenbarneveldt during the war as well as the subsequent truce, he left firmly in his readers' minds the sense that the future partition of the Netherlands in the form it would take was inevitable, give or take the inadequacies of Elizabeth and Leicester with respect to Antwerp. (In some ways the *United Netherlands* seems to question the earlier assertion of inevitability, but for the mass of Motley's readers, who never got beyond the *Dutch Republic* into its much larger and more unwieldy sequel, the damage had been done.) Geyl indeed remarked sarcastically that none of William the Silent's enemies had charged him with anything quite as inept as his greatest admirer Motley had unintentionally done, in that to end the story with William's death was, given Motley's terms, to indict William for the irreparable losses of Flanders and Brabant, in reality anything but inevitably lost at the time of his assassination. And as Geyl acknowledged, he was not the first to make that criticism: Fruin had already done so, in gentler terms. Fruin's essays, however much a product of the religious-dominated historiography of the nineteenth century, had made it all too clear that Motley virtually lacked a Dutch sense. His lack of geographical awareness was perhaps the main thing; but the reader of Fruin was led to realize that Motley's great sweep took him

from history into polemic where Fruin showed the real points of detail which added up to a very different and far more real picture. In that sense the symbol of Motley's downfall was exhibited when G. M. Trevelyan, an obvious English heir to the historical attitudes associated with Motley, introduced to an English audience in 1924 Fruin's account of the siege of Leyden, ruefully admitting the appalling crudity of the American writer once compared with the Dutch master. Fruin held much in common with Motley, notably in his liberalism, his hostility to Catholicism, and his reliance on both to account for the independence of the north and reconquest of the south: Geyl and his disciples were to stress how Motley was but the most extreme of the Protestant historians of the nineteenth century in failing to see the tremendous significance of the Catholic revolt against Philip II. But the violence of Motley's anti-Catholicism worried historians much more ferociously Protestant than Fruin. James Anthony Froude, the disciple of Carlyle, himself then coming before an admiring public with his paean in praise of Henry VIII, otherwise his *History of England*, actually declared that "the fault throughout Mr. Motley's book is the want, absolute and entire, of all sympathy with Catholicism, in its vigour as well as in its degeneracy," in his famous notice in the *Westminster Review* for April 1856 which described *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* as "the result of many years of silent, thoughtful, unobtrusive labour, and unless we are strangely mistaken, unless we are ourselves altogether unfit for this office of criticizing which we have undertaken, the book is one which will take its place among the finest histories in this or any other language."

Froude also asserted: "Mr. Motley uses no sweeping colours, no rhetorical invectives; there is scarcely a superlative or a needless expletive in the book," which would qualify as the most staggering comment on Motley penned by anyone were it not for the light it throws on the yardsticks employed by Froude. In fact, Motley's sweeping colors and rhetorical invective, superlatives and expletives, easily rode their way into the welcome of audiences wallowing in the North Atlantic high-flown romanticism of the 1840's and 1850's. Despite the publishers' failure to recognize the fact, a public nurtured on Carlyle's *French Revolution* and Macaulay's *History of England*, was joyfully ready to lap up another installment in a fresh world as newly opened for literary conquest as the lands of the American interior. Carlyle had taught them to seek for heroes; Motley obliged with William the Silent. Macaulay had broken from his normally critical portraiture of personalities to make an icon of William of Orange; Motley provided an earlier William of Orange. If his style was scarcely the equal of either, especially given the signs it exhibited of excessive emulation of both, he was not wholly inferior to either.

He connected the progress of events with a logic foreign to Carlyle; his William of Orange, if unreal, seems slightly less unreal than that of Macaulay. The difference was, in part, that Motley showed some sense of perspective in keeping his hero and his narrative in some suitable proportion to one another, which Carlyle never really succeeded in doing, while Macaulay, unlike Motley, was not so much canonizing a prince as the embodiment of a presumed constitutional principle. If Motley's William was basically an embodiment also—of worship of freedom, defiance of tyranny, hostility to superstition, and belief in toleration—it was the embodiment of ideas, albeit largely eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas, which are more easily assimilable into the likeness of a hero than is a constitutional principle.

But Motley's excesses stood naked before his audience, however much they admired him. Carlyle's speed of movement, Macaulay's judicious argument, were both outside his scope. Again, Motley, especially in the *Dutch Republic*, weakened himself dangerously by his want of interest in social and economic questions, his impatience with religious complexity, and his apparent indifference to cultural achievement. This was a retrograde attitude: Macaulay and Froude had won romantic responses, but they had been responses conditioned by the historians to demand accounts of human life and economic movement as well as of battles, sieges, and personalities. William Dean Howells in his *Literary Friends and Acquaintances* records meeting Motley before reading his work, liking him enormously and yet being disappointed when coming to his books by their curiously old-fashioned quality. The recent biography of Motley by J. Guberman (The Hague, 1973) comments in general that "Motley was, in fact, an anachronism," and more general critics at the time noted that his work stood strangely between pre-scientific partisanship and archivally dominated modernity of approach. Even in America, where Motley's old schoolteacher George Bancroft had thoroughly saturated the public with chauvinistic bias in his volumes on the birth of the United States, such figures as William H. Prescott had shown that obvious prejudices on the part of the historian did not need to be urged with vehemence of tone. Yet Motley was supposed to be almost the lineal successor of Prescott; the historian of seventeenth-century Spain and its empire had fortunately insisted on his continuing his work on the Dutch revolt against Philip despite being engaged himself in a large general account of Philip, had more fortunately welcomed the forthcoming appearance of Motley's work in a footnote to the preface to his own work, and had most fortunately of all died three years after the publication of the *Dutch Republic*, thus leaving Motley the foremost American historian in active practice.

And Motley's crudity was to have its repercussions. He would



have agreed with much of the savagery of the exposure of British (and American) society in the Gilded Age which Anthony Trollope revealed in its corruption and greed in *The Way We Live Now*—after all, his successor as minister to the Court of St. James's, whence he had been so humiliatingly ousted in 1870 by the Grant administration became involved in drawing his hosts into questionable speculation of the kind so well described in that novel—yet the first lines of *The Way We Live Now* are a ruthless exposure of what nonsense had been made of popular history once moral judgment was opened up to any literary hack employing rhetoric to conceal poverty of scholarship. The comments of Lady Carbury in quest of a puff for her ludicrous *Criminal Queens* are the product of worthless quilting from hastily grabbed and ill-assorted patches: "I am afraid that I have been tempted into too great length about the Italian Catherine; but in truth she has been my favourite. What a woman! What a devil! Pity that a second Dante could not have constructed for her a special hell. How one traces the effect of her training in the life of our Scotch Mary. I trust you will go with me in my view as to the Queen of Scots. Guilty! guilty always! Adultery, murder, treason, and all the rest of it. But recommended to mercy because she was royal. A queen bred, born and married, and with such other queens around her, how could she have escaped to be guilty? Marie Antoinette I have not quite acquitted. It would be uninteresting—perhaps untrue. I have accused her lovingly, and have kissed when I scourged." All of this may seem far from Motley, in whose views of Alva or Philip II no reader could detect surreptitious osculation, and in whose formation of those views hard work (if not as hard as for later volumes) had provided the basis, yet the insistence on the repetition of reprehension inevitably bred its inadequate imitators. And if (like Lady Carbury's Scotch Mary) he could be little else given his training, in a world where Carlyles, Macaulays, and Froudes hurled their judgments with such freedom, he stood below them, and invited lower descent still, by the substitution of his sloganeering in place of their appeal to intellect.

Motley's intentions were taken to be those of providing a landmark in the development of the future United States of America; admirers and critics have assumed that he saw the Dutch Republic along the lines of what he took the United States to be, a republic conceived in liberty and rooted in a Puritan heritage, he being the child of Massachusetts. There is a natural readiness on the part of commentators, including the perceptive David Levin, in his *History as Romantic Art*, to see the unity of thought in Prescott, Motley, Bancroft, and Francis Parkman, and certainly there is much unity to see. But Motley was in many respects different from the rest, and nowhere more than in his choice of subject. Prescott's field was that of the origin and

development of the territories an expanding United States might draw under its flag or its powerful influence, in place of the base Iberian antecedents he recorded. Parkman concerned himself with conquests of British over French North America which might ultimately end in American supremacy over British. Bancroft dealt directly with his own republic. Motley seems to have been drawn to the Dutch by a very different route. If anything, his emphasis is to fight the parochialism of his fellow countrymen. In discussing the sufferings of the Netherland heretics under the Inquisition, he goes to some lengths to remind votaries of the so-called persecuted Puritan exiles of England how much milder their experience had been. "The reader will judge," he declares at the close of Book II, Chapter I, of the *Dutch Republic*, "whether the wrongs inflicted by Laud and Charles upon his Protestant ancestors were the severest that a people has had to undergo, and whether the Dutch Republic does not track its source to the same high origin as that of our own civil and religious liberty. . . . The Puritan fathers of the Dutch Republic had to struggle against a darker doom." The whole thrust of all of his work is in protest against the parochialism of the English-speaking peoples, that parochialism which ironically gave him a reputation he could not have sustained had contemporary Dutch scholarship been open to his readers. If he did not understand the Netherlands well, at least he understood it was worth study and that such study should not be limited to forerunner status for the Republic, or to American roots, or to labored comparisons. Hence his insistence on doing justice to the Dutch contribution to the defeat of the Armada—where an English-speaking readership in the United States or in Britain would have thought of a single achievement by their own putative ancestors. Hence his demand for recognition of the genius of a statesman like Oldenbarneveldt, whose hold on American self-interest must be limited to his general contribution to the cause of international Protestantism, liberty, and hostility to intolerance. Certainly in *John of Barneveld* Motley did sketch the origin of the Pilgrim Fathers' voyage, but in a curiously perfunctory way, rather in the manner of the references to the insanity of the English included in *Hamlet* to get a laugh from the pit; he makes little connection of them to his larger story. His intention seems to have been to cultivate in Americans an enthusiasm for non-American history. In this he failed. His general arguments were accepted, bar some minor Catholic objections (of which the most interesting, led by Orestes Brownson, absolutely refused to identify Philip II with the Catholic cause—in fact Brownson, and later the *Dublin Review* of April and October 1878, show signs of awareness of the case against Motley, Fruin, and the Protestant historians put forward by Catholic critics in the Netherlands). The official historical seal of approval on his overall picture

was placed by John Fiske, in his "Spain and the Netherlands" (an essay of 1868-69, reprinted in Fiske's *The Unseen World* (Boston, 1876). Yet Fiske himself would be given the credit by Charles M. Andrews in his Presidential Address to the American Historical Association, "These Forty Years" (*American Historical Review*, XXX, January 1925), with bringing American history "out of its isolation into touch with the forces of world history . . . he turned the American people from Prescott, Irving, Parkman, and Motley, and others, whose subjects lay chiefly outside the limits of the present United States, and caused them to read with enjoyment books that dealt with their own origin and growth." That such a claim could be made in such a way is a tragic indication of how far Motley had failed. His history had been pragmatic, in that it sought to teach lessons about liberty and intolerance he regarded as essential to Americans, but his pragmatism had been one of idealism rather than the additionally chauvinistic motivations of his contemporaries. Now, in his wake, he was assumed by Fiske to have settled Netherlands history, and by Andrews to have been a stage in a historiographical digression whence the country was rescued by Fiske. And Motley in his evangelization of the significance of Dutch history had few disciples, even if the lengthy magazine essays on his work produced a plethora of regurgitations. His only notable American successor was Ruth Putnam, of the publishing family, who produced a life of William the Silent which appropriately appeared in the "Heroes of the Nations" series. Certainly he held sway where readers did turn to the revolt of the Netherlands; the chapter on William the Silent in the *Cambridge Modern History* by the Rev. G. Edmundson, the author of a monograph on Dutch history of a later period, was largely a paraphrase of Motley including the time limits of the *Dutch Republic* (hence moving a specific denunciation from Geyl, but in all probability the dates indicate the influence of Acton as planner of the enterprise). Motley had failed to make cosmopolitans of his fellow countrymen, and the British more or less remained as he had left them until the advent of Geyl.

To understand the significance of Motley's American antecedents in the shaping of his work, we must look back at his specific heritage. As Mr. Guberman reminds us, he was an anachronism; which means that he was a Federalist living in a world at best Whig and later Republican. This assumed an ideological inheritance of devotion to liberty, but an oligarchic and not a democratic outlook, albeit the oligarchy would be assumed to be a large and educated one. The Netherlands, then, attracted him because it was oligarchic, although for all of his difficulties in seeing the divergences in ideology over centuries, he admitted in *John of Barneveld* that the oligarchy with which he was dealing in the Netherlands was proportionately much

smaller in relation to its mass of population. For mob rule in general he had the utmost revulsion. He would be criticized for his indulgence to mob excesses from time to time, provided the cause was libertarian and the mob seemingly Protestant; but behind his excuses there is evident distaste and fear. He avowedly shared much of the cultural outlook of his contemporary Hawthorne, whose "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," raises its doubts about mob cruelty in the cause of liberty. His remarks on the Anabaptists, even in the *Dutch Republic* with its firm identification of Protestantism and liberty, are the writing of a hater of democratic extremism, and the offspring of other haters. Part of the Federalist heritage was a historical sense. The future Federalists, most notably John Adams, had supplied a view of the causes of American revolt in their pamphlets at the time which was extraordinarily historical in approach. In its simplest form, Motley could readily identify the American with the Dutch insurgents: at the back of his elaborate if loosely constructed recital of ancient Netherlands liberties against new and alien despotism being introduced by an outside tyrant with a title of descent but the destruction of any right of rule by conduct, lie the arguments adduced in Massachusetts by John Adams and his associates against George III. But on a deeper level, the force of Adams' arguments lies in his conviction that he and his fellow actors are a part of a European historical process and a European heritage. Federalists by other names in the nineteenth century followed Federalists and their ancestors of the eighteenth in invoking that heritage, and in the internationalism of their outlook. They repudiated Paine, and Jefferson, and world revolution, yet more than either of them they would have held with Donne that no man was an island. This does not mean that Motley was seeking to Americanize the world, any more than he would have agreed with Froude's intended compliment that *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* proved that "in truth and reality the Americans are nearer to the English in heart, in sympathy, in their deepest and surest conviction, than to any other nation in the world"; admittedly, that does unkindly underline how far the origins of the Dutch Republic could become a crude ideological device with little reference to the contemporary Dutch themselves in the eyes of certain English-speaking readers, and if Motley had not asserted that, his book, with its distance from Dutch realities, inspired it. In fact, Motley approached the Dutch experience with a sense of the European dimension of his thought, but his affection seems at that stage to have been much more strongly directed toward Germany than to either Britain or the Dutch Netherlands.

For Motley had made his initial European landfall at a very young age, eighteen, when he went to study at the University of

Göttingen. There is a pleasing irony there, in that Göttingen has been singled out by students of historiography for a great place in the establishment of scientific historiography. "The dynamic ideas which helped to transform historical study may have arisen outside the universities; but in Göttingen we see them critically considered and carefully combined so as to form a system of historical scholarship. Whether we envisage the attitude adopted to this kind of scholarship, or the treatment of universal history, or the revision of national and regional studies, or the teaching of contemporary politics, or the development of historical method and the editing of texts, the school of Göttingen seems to bring us to the very brink of the modern world." Thus Sir Herben Butterfield in his *Man on His Past* (Cambridge, 1955), but it has to be said that if Göttingen seems to bring us to that brink, it certainly did not bring Motley. Indeed it is clear that the process he describes was one Motley did not find, and probably did not anticipate, until he arrived in the Netherlands in 1851 with the intention of adding some local detail to a work already largely written. A remarkable dispatch to the *Athenaeum* from The Hague, by A. C. Loffelt, printed on June 9, 1877, points out that on his arrival with two volumes of the *Dutch Republic* in manuscript he found himself obliged to rewrite the entire thing; that is to say, when he discovered the advanced state of scientific history in the Netherlands, the achievements of Bakhuyzen van der Brink, who afterwards edited with notes his work in Dutch translation, and the archival work of Groen van Prinsterer; and, as I have stated, he clearly discovered after his initial success that he had even more to learn and deeper humility to discover the more he saw of the Dutch achievement. The fact that the Dutch were extraordinarily kind to him in hospitality, advice, and welcome for his egregious work (admittedly, it probably did much for Dutch tourism) only increased that sentiment. Yet he had established the framework of the *Dutch Republic*, however much he might rewrite it, by the time of his arrival. And while Motley said all the interesting scholars were too old or had died when he was in Göttingen (as Butterfield noted), it is clear that from there and from his subsequent residence at Berlin, in 1832-34, he encountered a very different influence. He became steeped in Goethe, Schiller, and the Romantic movement; he moved much in society; he got drunk, was briefly locked up, and embarked on a lifelong friendship, all with Otto von Bismarck.

Much too much can be made in biographies when the subject falls over a Great Man (even when he does so literally, as no doubt happened in the present case on late nights). In any case, Motley met his fair share of them: he grew up with the future abolitionist and greatest American orator of his time, Wendell Phillips; Longfellow so wanted to advance him as to propose to review his first novel if it

proved good but apparently decided it was not; Charles Sumner was his friend and patron for forty years at least; he briefly found himself "in Abraham's bosom," as he irreverently phrased a presidential audience during the Civil War; Grant he learned first to admire and then to detest; to Henry Adams he foolishly confided admiration for London society, for which he was ultimately served up in a marvelously malicious and hilarious dissection in *The Education of Henry Adams*; the young Henry Cabot Lodge called him Uncle and seems to have been more deeply moved by compassion for him than for almost anyone in his malevolently patrician life; in his last days his daughter married Sir William Harcourt, afterward the Leader of the Opposition in the British Parliament. This formidable range of acquaintances and friends was of importance in his writing of history and helps to account for the touches of realism even in his most unrelieved portraiture—for instance, the variations of his theme of Philip II as monster of depravity by revealing him as an asinine and pedantic civil servant and, indeed, as a figure of indomitable courage in facing the incredible pain of his last illness. It is easy to see him as stereotyping his characters, but he knew enough of the many-sidedness of the great to respond to impulses which left him open to charges of inconsistency but not of lightness. For all of his rhetoric, he impliedly leaves it to the reader to cast up the sum of judgment in different forms than his hortatory conclusions suggest. He leaves Parma with a harsh word, yet more than one reviewer saw him as the hero of much of *The History of the United Netherlands*, as zeal for his skill of generalship stills the Rhadamanthine excoriations. All of this played its part in the making of the historian, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. In *John of Barneveldt* Aerssens is cast as the Iago who betrays Oldenbarneveldt, as Professor Levin has shrewdly pointed out; but Motley's own experience as the victim of malicious gossip led to at least one very sympathetic passage on the victimization of Aerssens during his French mission and the effect of the calumnies in circulation against him in giving him a grievance against his former patron. On the other hand, the account of Oldenbarneveldt's misfortunes at the hands of Maurice of Nassau clearly owes something of its passion to Motley's own dismissal as minister to London by another great general in civilian life, Grant. Yet the personal element does not wholly fault the wisdom of certain observations and their relevance to both situations: "all history shows that the brilliant soldier of a republic is apt to have the advantage, in a struggle for popular affection and popular applause, over the statesman, however consummate. The general imagination is more excited by the triumphs of the field than by those of the tribune, and the man who has passed many years of his life in commanding multitudes with necessarily despotic sway is often

supposed to have gained in the process the attributes likely to render him most valuable as chief citizen of a free commonwealth. Yet national enthusiasm is so universally excited by splendid military service as to forbid a doubt that the sentiment is rooted deeply in our nature, while both in antiquity and in modern times there are noble although rare examples of the successful soldier converting himself into a valuable and exemplary magistrate." In any case, this is not wholly the product of his fate at the hands of Grant: his first real political disappointment must have been the rejection of John Quincy Adams by the electorate in 1828 in favor of General Andrew Jackson. No doubt Washington was one of his "noble although rare examples"; equally without doubt Jackson, Grant, and Maurice of Nassau were not.

Bismarck is so readily identified in the popular mind with militarism that it must come as a shock to realize that if he had any impact at all on the portraiture of *John of Barneveld* it would have been on that of Oldenbarneveldt himself: although the most obvious parallel was not effected until 1890, when Motley had been dead for thirteen years. Certainly the venerable Dutch statesman would have had little in common with the dueling, wenching blood-brother with whom Motley removed from Göttingen to share lodgings in Berlin. But the overwhelming affection between Bismarck and Motley survived years of separation and long gaps in correspondence until the final meeting, at Bismarck's silver wedding celebration in 1872, when Motley, at the insistence of Bismarck's daughter, proposed the toast of the Chancellor in a speech in German lasting twenty-five minutes. (Motley's command of languages was so good that when he presented his credentials as minister to the Court of Vienna, the Emperor Franz Josef took him for a German and was vastly relieved to discover his mistake.) He seems to have been one of the two or three men for whom Bismarck had utter trust and affection, not particularly mingled with respect for his political ideology. Together from student days upward they argued about liberalism, tolerance, democracy, and everything under the sun. It was the attraction of opposites, mental and physical: Bismarck seems from the first to have impressed Motley with his extraordinary ugliness of appearance, while the Prussian himself, dictating a brief sketch of Motley for use by his biographer Oliver Wendell Holmes the elder, remarked, "The most striking feature of his handsome and delicate appearance was uncommonly large and beautiful eyes." The pledging and swearing of eternal fellowship through which the students went persisted in their mode of address: Motley remained "Lieber Mot" to "Dein treuer Freund," while the American, less capable of finding an absolute intimacy of expression, compromised on "My dear old Bismarck." For all that, their corre-

spondence took fairly significant turns at times; whatever the value of Motley as a minister in Vienna to Austro-American relations (and it is certain he occupied most of his time in archival research, having accepted the Austrian mission in lieu of The Hague, which he really wanted, for similar reasons), he certainly did the United States good service by succinct answers to Bismarck's personal inquiries as to the realities of the American Civil War. Less successfully, he pleaded, with much apology, for clemency in the treatment of France after Sedan; it would, he said, help to restore international confidence in Germany. "*Damn confidence,*" scrawled Bismarck in the margin, which, said Theodore Roosevelt in a letter to George Otto Trevelyan on October 1, 1911, was what Motley ought to have expected. But it was clear while Bismarck had no intention of transplanting Motley's soft heart into his own ferrous bloodstream, he liked his idealistic friend to be himself. Apparently at their last meeting Motley did get some assurance that his dear old Bismarck cherished no sanguinary intentions at the expense of the Netherlands. The totality of their association in any case gave Motley a vision of this extraordinary administrator, controlling his own country, the complexity of its foreign policy and expansionist intentions, and the private and official correspondence throughout Europe his ambitions for mastership entailed. It is this which in part gives such strength to the portrait of Oldenbarneveldt as a European statesman, although the diffusion of Oldenbarneveldt's diplomatic correspondence so painstakingly deciphered by Motley justified the emphasis, however much he may have overvalued the strength and power enjoyed by the Advocate in other European courts. The deciphering was so daunting a task that Motley, for all his literally personal anguish at Oldenbarneveldt's execution, wrote to Lady William Russell on July 13, 1871: "If they had cut his head off on account of his abominable handwriting, no creature would have murmured at the decree who had ever tried to read his infinite mass of manuscripts."<sup>4</sup> But the labor involved had the advantage that it ensured Motley would keep his Oldenbarneveldt as much as possible within his own character as revealed in his writing. For the rest, Bismarck kept alive within him the magic of the administrator and enabled him to transmit much of that magic respecting a period in history when imaginations such as his own were more conspicuously fired by men of physical action. However suspicious of generals Motley had always been, he was not immune to the excitement of their achievements, as the case of Parma shows.

Oddly enough, given the cold-blooded realism of Bismarck's statesmanship, the main intellectual effect of those student years seems to have been a thorough immersion of Motley in German romanticism. It was not binding absolutely; he showed much more initial response



to Goethe than to Schiller, and had indeed produced a graduation essay on Goethe at Harvard, but his cold delineation of Egmont's vanities and follies in the *Dutch Republic* has little echo of Goethe's conception even if the drama of his martyrdom catches an echo of Beethoven's music. But Schiller's fragment on the revolt of the Netherlands virtually dictated the contours of *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*. From Schiller he took the absolutes of William the Silent and Philip II as "freedom, democracy, integrity" against "despotism, feudalism, hierarchy, intolerance," as the Dutch critic Deric Regin has summed up the polarization in his study of Schiller whose title, *Freedom and Dignity* (The Hague, 1965), equally sums up what Motley found at the heart of his inquiry. Dr. Regin, indeed, reminds us that as early as 1859 Julian Schmidt, in his *Schiller und seine Zeitgenossen*, noted that Motley had incorporated many of Schiller's phrases verbatim into his recently published work. It launched Motley on his subject in an utterly unhistorical frame of mind, with his prejudices asserted before he commenced a line of research. His own assets of persistence and linguistic facility, both points decidedly lacking in Schiller, were placed at a discount in his intoxication with the grandeur of the gospel laid before him.

But Schiller's influence on Motley was not limited simply to enlisting him in the cause of freedom and dignity. From the German Romantics, and no doubt from Bismarck also, Motley emerged with the deepest of convictions as to German racial superiority. In the present context this meant that Motley followed Schiller's lead in opening his story by an airy survey of the spirit of resistance as seen among the inhabitants of the Low Countries accountable to their Germanic origin, with scant interest in alterations in their bloodstock over the vicissitudes of a millennium and a half. After all, as Pieter Geyl pointed out, the Netherlanders themselves after the struggle sought to symbolize their achievement by commissioning Rembrandt's "Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis": "The barbaric, the savage, the vigorous, the passionate—in the countenances and in the attitudes of the plotters who crowd about the table lighted up by torches in the vast dark room—it has all been grippingly evoked, and the effect is embodied in the mighty one-eyed figure, who, sturdily and fatefully seated, holds his sword aloft while the others touch it with theirs. That blunt presentation of the first Dutch warrior for freedom apparently offended the chastened convention . . . At any rate," concluded Geyl (in the last lines of his tragically unfinished "Shakespeare as a Historian"), "the burgomasters of Amsterdam refused Rembrandt's largest historical painting. Today only the central fragment survives—in the museum in Stockholm!" Motley's depiction of Civilis as the forerunner of William the Silent has rather more in

common with the spirit of the burgomasters of Amsterdam than that of Rembrandt, but at least he did a service in reminding his audience how the sixteenth-century struggle was idealized even if he identified the idealization with his own views instead of those of the heirs of the Dutch insurgents. However, he went on from there to take the lessons of German racialism dangerously farther. Schiller left it as a historic and glorious tradition. Motley made it the key to the ultimate partition of the Netherlands. He drew heavy distinctions between Gauls and Germans: "In Gaul were two orders, the nobility and the priesthood, while the people, says Caesar, were all slaves. . . . With the Germans the sovereignty rested in the great assembly of the people. . . . The Gauls were an agricultural people. . . . The truculent German, Ger-mann, Heer-mann, War-mann, considered carnage the only useful occupation . . . The Gauls were a priest-ridden race. . . . The German, in his simplicity, had raised himself to a purer belief than that of the sensuous Roman or the superstitious Gaul. He believed in a single, suprême, almighty God, All-Vater or All-Father. . . . The Gaul was singularly unchaste. . . . The German was as loyal as the Celt was dissolute. . . . The funerals of the Gauls were pompous. . . . The German was not ambitious at the grave . . . The characteristics of the two great races of the land portrayed themselves in the Roman and the Spanish struggle with much the same colours. The Southrons, inflammable, petulant, audacious, were the first to assault and to defy the imperial power in both revolts, while the inhabitants of the northern provinces, slower to be aroused, but of more enduring wrath, were less ardent at the commencement, but alone steadfast at the close of the contest. . . . The Batavian republic took its rank among the leading powers of the earth; the Belgic provinces remained Roman, Spanish, Austrian property."

It says little for the intelligence of the scientific historians among the English-speaking peoples that this balderdash did duty as an explanation of the division of the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries until Geyl's work, in translation, came to sweep it away like the flood waters on whose significance his interpretation relied. But in fact Motley's racism was one of the most fashionable legacies he transmitted to the professional historians in Britain and America. The emerging graduate schools at Johns Hopkins and Columbia drew in more of it with the historical methodology they sedulously copied from the German, and their English colleagues supported them. Edward Augustus Freeman, who was invited from Britain to launch the Johns Hopkins series in Historical and Political Science, was a devotee of the same type of approach, and Herbert Baxter Adams, his host at Johns Hopkins, sought to put it on a scientific basis by tracing the early Teutonic origins of American

political institutions. The hero worship formed part of the package; Freeman, indeed, took Motley's excesses to the auction block by announcing at the commencement of his mighty *History of the Norman Conquest* that Alfred the Great was "the most perfect character in history," specifically pointing out his superiority to both Washington and William the Silent because of his writing ability. (Motley could hardly have cited William's *Apology*; it remains one of his points of common sense in the *Dutch Republic* that he does not base himself on the hysterical and indiscriminate accusations made in that document at his hero's darkest hour.) It is hardly surprising to recall, in the light of this, that Freeman stated what a grand country the United States would be if every Irishman killed a Negro and was hanged for it; it is a sad commentary on the whirlwind Motley was reaping on his racial wind, for he himself was a fervent enemy of slavery and advocate of the blacks, despite his belief in their innate inferiority. He might, however, have sympathized with the anger, if not with the final solution, implicit in Freeman's view of the Irish. His experience of Massachusetts politics during an ill-starred term in the legislature in 1849 would have done nothing to alleviate that sentiment, and his stress in the passage quoted above on the priest-ridden Gauls or Celts no doubt owed force to this. It was understandable that such a descendant of old New England on his mother's side (his great-great-grandfather was killed in an Indian raid on Haverhill and his great-great-grandmother spared by being hidden in a cellar) and great-grandson of an Ulster Protestant on his father's, would view with horror the advent of the barbarian invasion from Ireland in the wake of the great famine of the late 1840's, and view with rage the effects of the invasion on the political life of the state. *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* was planned and its initial draft written in the Massachusetts of those years, years which yielded their fruit in the bitter nativist movement of the mid-1850's. Motley had some reason to fear the slavish hordes of Rome, as he doubtless saw them, and this, too, is an obvious point of origin for the burning anti-Catholicism of the book. His sentiments were not, in theory, modified in later works, but in practice he made far less of them, and he alternated them in the *United Netherlands* with some nasty remarks about Elizabeth's persecution of Catholics and cruelty to Mary Queen of Scots (for which Schiller again may deserve some credit).

But on the basic question of the partition of the Netherlands there was a different point of origin. On December 17, 1844, Motley wrote a letter to his brother-in-law Park Benjamin which his biographer Oliver Wendell Holmes professed himself not venturing to quote in full a third of a century later; but Benjamin himself printed part of it in *Harper's* for September 1877, although it was omitted both from

Curtis' edition of the *Correspondence* and from the subsequent *John L. Motley and His Family*. Motley was in a state of rage over Polk's narrow victory at the expense of Henry Clay, a man whom he put second only to John Quincy Adams in experience. Polk, the unknown from Tennessee, succeeding Tyler of Virginia, was "the lowest of the low" whose administration "will be even worse and more low-lived than that of Tyler. . . . As to Texas, if it be annexed, the result will inevitably be a separation of the Free States from the Slave States—a dissolution of the Union, which will, I think, ensue much sooner than we have been accustomed to believe. This is, perhaps, a result not very much to be deprecated; so that, so far as we of the North are concerned, it does not matter much whether Texas is annexed or not. . . . There is no attachment to the Union, no loyalty any where. The sentiment of loyalty is impossible under our institutions. Loyalty implies both respect and love; and who can respect or love institutions of which the result is four years of Tyler followed by four years of Polk?"

If we take this into account with the overview of Gaul and German in the introduction to the *Dutch Republic*, the problem of its assumptions on the inevitability of partition becomes much clearer. Motley's overriding motivation was a concern to find European precursors less for the creation of the American union, than for its impending dissolution. Naturally Motley, like many another Northerner, rallied to Lincoln's call and vociferously supported war to maintain the Union. But in the mid-1850's the southern Democrats were effectively in control under nominal and acquiescent northern leadership, and Motley had no reason to think better of Pierce than of Polk. His Gauls, then, were no doubt Irish-Americans, but they were even more the future Confederates. His first point of description was to stress their being a society utterly dependent on slavery, his next to emphasize their agricultural character, his third their lack of chastity. The last point was a characteristic neo-Puritan view of the would-be Cavaliers below the Mason-Dixon line. Although Professor Levin does well to stress the racist character of the passage, along different if allied lines to my analysis, the relevance to the crisis of the Union seems to me a new and even more important feature of it. Particularly notable is the use of "Southron," by which term the devotees of Sir Walter Scott in southern literary society loved to style themselves. The final point that the Southerners were the first to rise took care of the pride of place of Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson—and even George Washington—in the coming of the American Revolution. New Englanders, led by John Adams, had jealously protested against the cult of Virginia patriots at the expense of the New England forerunners in the struggle against Britain. Motley, writing in dis-

illusionment, is prepared to let them have their first cry in the field; it is the honest, chaste, freedom-loving North which would prove the more enduring. The slave mentality would be the mark of the slave society in the end.

Viewed from this perspective, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* becomes a very different book, and the urgency and even hysteria of its writing acquires a new meaning. The retention of slavery in the South and the acceptance of "slavery" under the Spaniards acquire the same force, and render impossible the continuation of any union. Certainly the imagery is flickering from point to point in anger and fear. Motley brought a whole variety of personal anxieties into his writing. Even the hostility to his Unitarian faith in the Massachusetts of his youth, so urgent a motive for his sympathy for the Arminians (which would much have displeased them) in *John of Barneveld*, receives a side-flick of his lash in this passage: the Germans, it would appear, were the original Unitarians. But the most important point of all is the inevitability of disunion. The shrewdness of Fruin and Geyl pinpoints the matter with their consciousness of the oddness of Motley's assurance on it as exemplified by his conclusion at William's death. I do not know whether Geyl took the point farther—he wrote extensively in four languages and I have read him only in one—but he certainly picked up an aspect of it, without referring to Motley, in his "The American Civil War and the Problem of Inevitability," written about a century after Motley started work on the *Dutch Republic*. Examining the American crisis, Geyl noted the small numbers of abolitionists and compared the necessity for the Dutch dissidents to exaggerate the small number of Calvinists. Elsewhere, Geyl had remarked how deeply Motley in the *Dutch Republic* exaggerated the numbers of Calvinists: did not Motley, thinking about the desirability of a break with the slave power, find it necessary to tell himself that there were far more followers of his friends Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner than was actually the case? Motley's stress on William the Silent's wisdom in delaying so long to declare for the new religion again echoes his own retention of status as Whig (and hence deliberate blindness to Henry Clay's Kentucky residence and slaveholding status). From this angle, Motley's defense of William's caution is not so much special pleading for his hero as rationalization of his own conduct. Here he, and perhaps his brother-in-law, constitute his sole audience to the inner meaning of his analysis. On the other hand, he would have expected an audience which had recently devoured *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to read his meaning from references to slavery, Southrons, agricultural pre-eminence of Gauls, and the like. In its way, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* had work of a similar kind to that of *Uncle Tom* to do, and the gratifying response to it may have

owed something to analogies evident to Motley's generation if not to ours. The very horrors listed and lingered on in his pages have their counterpart in the horrors of slavery so successfully ladled out by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The book, then, was a concealed party pamphlet. Motley had, in his earlier, unsuccessful work as a novelist, disguised concerns and anxieties of his own in fictional forms, as well as let himself go with such figures as Otto von Rabenmark in *Morton's Hope*, directly modeled on his closest German friend. But, as more than one commentator has tactlessly observed, he was bad at plotting, and history offered him a plot already written. It was for history to provide the concealment hitherto offered by fiction for the cause of inevitability of disunion he wished to preach. Unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe, it was not a door he had the slightest intention of opening with a *Key*. In their way, the speeches of Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner were giving the same covert message at the same time.

The election of Lincoln changed all that. Disunion was inevitable, but now in the eyes of the white Southerners. The opponents of slavery, apart from brief waverers, insisted on the integrity of the Union. Ironically, Geyl's essay on the American Civil War picked up an analogy which Motley, having killed off William, could no longer make in his time. To Geyl, Lincoln's insistence that the cause was the Union and not abolition of slavery paralleled that of William that the cause was liberty and not Calvinism. Motley certainly was quick to identify himself with Lincoln's view in letters to the London *Times* and formal pamphlet work. (Privately, he was among the earliest diplomats to urge emancipation.) His friends were on the threshold of power, and his austerity was not proof against the temptation to follow countless others in pursuit of patronage under the new administration. The secession of the South involved the departure of countless Southerners from the office-hunting ground. But Motley's gentle hope in his letter to Moses Grinnell of November 2, 1860 (he had even got off the mark before the election itself), "that the new government might be willing to give a literary man, who has always been a most earnest Republican, ever since that party was organized, the post of minister at the court at the Hague" (quoted in Barry J. Carman and Reinhard J. Luthin, *Lincoln and the Patronage* [New York, 1943], p. 4 n.), was foredoomed. James Shepherd Pike, who had done the state (or rather the party) some service in Maine, fully ensured that they would know it. He was disappointed in his turn in his hopes for Brussels—Henry S. Sanford had diplomatic experience, which was more than could be said for Pike (or Motley)—and so The Hague became his consolation prize. Ironically, Pike had openly preached northern recourse to disunion after the assault of Preston Brooks on Charles Sumner, and he cited Sumner in favor of his

Belgian claim. Motley, having returned to the United States disheartened, found some hope when the Austrians rejected Congressman Anson Burlingame (who had to be compensated with China). This time Sumner came to the rescue, and Lincoln, grinning at the greed of Massachusetts, obliged. Motley wrote his wife on June 20, 1861, that Lincoln seemed "sincere and honest . . . and steady"; he was struck by one remark "about the military plans in progress" when Lincoln "observed, not meaning anything like an epigram, 'Scott will not let us outsiders know anything of his plans.'" It would appear that Motley could be as immune as Sumner to the President's glint of humor. The interest of the point for him reflected a quality of ten present in his writing—that distrust and even dislike of the civilian for the military. It was not that he feared General Winfield Scott, then more or less at the end of his tether, would be putting himself above the civil power, but he clearly noted the implication that he considered himself superior to it. Again, this view would be later reflected in his view of Maurice; but it was also exhibited in the distaste for military heroes that constantly shines through Motley's narratives, whether the object of disapproval be Egmont, or Don John of Austria, or Maurice. In part, this derived from his awareness of what military heroes such as Jackson could do to his own heroes, such as Adams; in part, it stemmed from their potential prowess as demagogues; in part, it derived from the very strong tradition in Massachusetts of opposition to standing armies and, more recently, the powerful crusade against war in general in which Sumner had been particularly prominent. With the advent of the war Motley, like Sumner, had perforce to put all the old anti-militarism behind them, but his picking up of Lincoln's remark about Scott shows its closeness to the surface.

Motley's place as servant of the Lincoln administration meant a rapid and secret burial for his former disunionism. His historical writing reflected it. The emphasis would become more and more the importance of the preservation of union. It became more urgent when a quarrel with Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, resulted in his dismissal from Vienna. Johnson, at war with Republicanism at large and especially with Phillips and Sumner, had little time for dreaming up charges against Motley, but the quarrel had arisen from gossip about Motley's allegedly Anglophile social pretentiousness. Johnson had taken an early opportunity to charge Phillips and Sumner with enmity to the Union—indeed, adverse comment of Motley on Johnson, peddled to the President, which caused their rupture, had probably originated in that attack on his friends. Motley had been harsh enough about English policy toward the Netherlands in the earlier volumes of *The History of the United Netherlands* which appeared in 1860, but the gossip about Anglophilia offered him strong incentive to lose

nothing of that harshness in his later work. The blistering remarks in *John of Barneveld* about James I's academic pedantry dictating his meddling in Dutch theological bickering, no doubt owed something to the need for self-defense, for by the time of that work's appearance, 1874, Motley had also fallen foul of the Grant administration and the Anglophile charge had been renewed. In fact, Motley as minister to London in 1869 had given offense principally by his support of the highly anti-British attitude over the *Alabama* dispute as noisily expressed by Senator Sumner, to whose industry on his behalf Motley owed his new position. But any stick was enough with which to beat him once his dismissal became a matter of public controversy. Even on Motley's death it was too early for frankness as to his past, at least for the protective Curtis and Holmes; his enemy Hamilton Fish, Grant's Secretary of State, had loyal minions ready to impugn the illustrious minister (who had in fact been driven from office in an administration campaign to humiliate Sumner). Fish's protégé J. C. Bancroft Davis was in the field against Motley's memory, and so also was Adam Badeau, Grant's devoted amanuensis, who as secretary to the London legation had done much to poison the atmosphere against Motley and leave him so sensitive to the plotting against Oldenbarneveldt.

But Motley himself had effectively reversed the crypto-disunionism of the *Dutch Republic* in the first volumes that appeared from his pen after the Civil War, the third and fourth installments of his *United Netherlands*, carrying the story from 1590. Barely into his narrative, he took a rare stance on the significance of geography in the destiny of the Dutch Republic, arguing that its commitment to human liberty led it to economic triumph over enormous natural disadvantages on land. He then addressed his fellow countrymen: "What a lesson to our transatlantic commonwealth, whom bountiful nature had blessed at her birth beyond all the nations of history and seemed to speed upon an unlimited career of freedom and peaceful prosperity, should she be capable at the first alarm on her track to throw away her inestimable advantages! If all history is not a mockery and a fable, she may be sure that the nation which deliberately carves itself in pieces and substitutes artificial boundaries for the natural and historic ones, condemns herself either to extinction, or to the lower life of political insignificance and petty warfare, with the certain loss of life and national independence at last. Better a terrible struggle, better the sacrifice of prosperity and happiness for years, than the eternal setting of that great popular hope, the United American Republic."

Yet however much autobiographical rewriting Motley, in common with so many other Americans, might find necessary, he was not prepared to dishonor the generous anger of the book which had won



him his reputation. "I speak in this digression only of the relations of physical nature to liberty and nationality, making no allusion to the equally stringent moral laws which no people can violate and yet remain in health and vigour." It was worthy of him. He was outspoken by nature, generous in instant wrath; and he had a hatred of back-sliding. In some respects, indeed, his denunciations of repudiations of past loyalties and actions as expressed in his history—there is a hard word for Grotius' moment of wavering under the threat of death in a chapter otherwise written with the utmost affection for him at the end of *John of Barneveldt*—were something of self-flagellation for such evasions and concealments as his circumstances had forced him to make. Motley was not a perpetual judge, and he tried not to be a hypocritical one: his description of the results of intoxication in the ranks of the "sea-beggars" in the early chapters of the *Dutch Republic* are less to be read as the sniffs of a Puritan than as the understanding of the former student in Germany who knew what to be drunk meant and what weight was to be put on its consequences. Above all, he retained his generosity of emotion, never better expressed than in his love for Oldenbarneveldt. "Rarely, in all his writings," wrote the historian of the early Stuarts, Samuel Rawson Gardiner, in the *Academy* February 21, 1874), "has Mr. Motley's personality come out so distinctly. We feel him eager, if it were possible, to break out through the distance of time and to stretch out his hand to stay the progress of the mischief." There is a strange echo of that passion in his repudiation of its converse when speaking to the young Cabot Lodge, recorded by the latter many years later in his "Some Early Memories" published in *Scribner's* for June 1913: "I cannot bear moonlight on the snow. I hate it. It is so cold, so cruel, so unfeeling." Lodge could never forget the vehemence of him.

After he died his friends wrote several bad poems in his memory, among them William Wetmore Story; but Story caught something of reality in the lines

with a half excess  
As of one running in great eagerness,  
And leaning forward out beyond the poise  
Of coward prudence

That was Motley all right, even in his refusal to observe the cautions which avowed partisans brought into the historical writing of his day. Inevitably he paid the penalty for it. In certain respects his excesses led to the defeat of what he believed. The new scientific generation of American historians shared many of his racial and religious attitudes, and expressed them in a much more insidious form, but the nakedness

of his bias left him a target for any neophyte anxious to display his pedantic powers. It did not, outside of the Netherlands, result in any worthwhile contribution to the revision of his historical scholarship, until Geyl's major work was translated by Bindoff and others. It did have serious effects on history for the masses as his generation had written it. The new generation wrote for their own profession. Motley had cheapened the grand manner by his vehemence, and in so doing had brought it into disrepute. Curiously enough, he may have had a salutary effect on Catholic scholarship. He forced it to answer questions as to its commitment to liberty, and his Protestant crusading made more astute Catholics realize that they did their cause no good in blanket defenses of ostensible Catholic champions who were in fact as political as their enemies. Acton is an obvious figure reflecting this tendency. In the next century the increase in racial tension brought with it extreme ethno-religious defensiveness in scholarship. The rabid indictments of all Protestant regimes by Hilaire Belloc invited imitation by American Catholics embittered at the widespread anti-Catholic sentiment of the 1920's, and such writers as W. T. Walsh essayed defenses of Philip II which were all too reminiscent of Motley at his worst. Indeed Motley, read or unread, bears responsibility for the renewal of anti-Catholicism in the public domain, and the readiness to imagine the lures of the Inquisition were about to be rekindled on the White House lawn owed something to his violence echoed in sermons in the Bible Belt. More directly, the involvement of the United States in a contemptible war against Spain, a war bitterly opposed by some of the intellectuals in politics with whom Motley shared most in common, derived from the common stock of anti-Spanish prejudice established by his fulminations. A distinction has to be made here with the cooler prose of the historian of the Inquisition, Henry Charles Lea, whose dislike of the institution was as great as Motley's, but who was much more careful to guard against arousing modern Protestant intolerance.

But Motley retains certain calls on our respect. His cosmopolitanism may have been unfashionable, but it remained an example. His self-training in archival work, and the punishing lengths to which he took it, remains even more instructive, especially since his attempts to deepen and strengthen his historical activity followed a premature success which might have led a lesser man to continue churning out popular material with little effort. In fact, it would probably have been impossible for him to have maintained the pitch of urgency of the *Dutch Republic*, born as it was of the anger, fear, and doubt of a crisis situation. His very excesses stimulated wise and judicious response, notably from Fruin, which may have provided an impetus for Dutch historical scholarship to increase its already spectacular

gains. His straddling across the way undoubtedly moved much of the urgency of Geyl, Renier, Bindoff, and their associates in the next century, and if Motley failed in his attempts to deparochialize the English-speaking historiographical world, Geyl proved far more successful. Geyl's recognition came later in America than in Britain, but after World War II, his methods and preoccupations became famous. Ved Mehta in *The New Yorker* singled him out alone of European historians as a force impossible to ignore if Americans were to understand *British* historiographical preoccupations. It would be an amusing paradox to be able to quote Pirenne in the context of Dutch historiography and imply that if there had been no Motley, there would have been no Geyl, as he had said of Mohammed and Charlemagne. Of course, this is not true; Geyl's main preoccupation lay with revising the accepted conventions in Dutch historiography, not in disposing of the extremism of an American vulgarizer of far less repute in the Netherlands. But Motley did supply him with an incentive to bring professional Dutch historiography so firmly to the attention of the English-speaking world.

I would leave you with one final thought. Some four years after Motley's death, in the winter of 1881-82, a Scottish doctor of twenty-two was serving morosely on board ship off the African coast when the newly appointed American minister to Liberia came on board. The minister was black, and was old; old enough to have been born in slavery, to have escaped from it, and to have won a position second only to Frederick Douglass among black abolitionists. Henry Highland Garnet had in fact only a few more weeks to live, and the beginning of their conversation may have been medical and fairly grim. But to the book-starved Scot, the opportunity of talking to a literate American about the historical writing from the country he had never seen, was too good to be missed. Garnet had read Motley, and so had the doctor, and eagerly they discussed his work as they sat on deck while the ship moved on. Little by little they moved from historians to history. The Scot had been born a Catholic, had left his faith, and had been fascinated by the commitment to liberty in the writing of some of its most famous opponents, such as Macaulay and Motley. The transition of the conversation from books to personal experience may well have derived directly from discussion of Motley's passionate advocacy of freedom, and from there it would have been natural to talk of the deeper meaning of freedom which only a former slave can know. "This negro gentleman did me good," wrote the Scot many years later, "for a man's brain is an organ for the formation of his own thoughts and also for the digestion of other people's and it needs fresh fodder." He said no more of the fodder, beyond the fact that they had spoken of slavery, but the results are clear enough. In 1884 the Scot won his

first great literary success, a short story called "J. Hababuk Jephson's Statement," which among other things told of the abominations practiced under slavery. Ten years after their meeting he had become famous across the North Atlantic for his short stories of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, two of which turned on the history of American blacks, "The Yellow Face" being a defense of interracial marriage and "The Five Orange Pips" an attack on the Ku Klux Klan. Certainly Conan Doyle's work acquired new depth and significance from those conversations with Garnet; and that is but one story of the many which might be told of the unknown harvest which many may have reaped by reading and talking of John Lothrop Motley, his saga of the Netherlands, and his identification of its history with the cause of liberty. For whatever his faults, he tried so far as he could to extend human freedom. I think the text on which to leave him, bearing in mind that he thought his country should be synonymous with liberty, is that from the climax of his greatest work:

The statesman then came forward and said in a loud, firm voice to the people:

"Men, do not believe that I am a traitor to the country. I have ever acted uprightly and loyally as a good patriot, and as such I shall die."

# *"This, Here, and Soon"*

## Johan Huizinga's *Esquisse* of American Culture<sup>1</sup>

MICHAEL KAMMEN

i

To offer yet another essay on Johan Huizinga may understandably seem superfluous. Several fine articles about him have appeared in the United States, even more in Europe, and a great many in his native land. Huizinga has hardly been neglected since his death in 1945. His books remain in print. Indeed, most of them have been translated into various languages, which befits one of the masters of modern historical thought. In the familiar portrait (made in 1936 by H. H. Kamerlingh-Onnes), we see the scholar in his study, notice the inquisitive but calmly reflective face, long and upward-curving lines at the outer edges of his eyes, a short neck, rounded shoulders, and the humped upper back of a desk-bound man, age sixty-five, who had spent so much of his life reading and writing.<sup>2</sup>

Our sense of Huizinga's temperament is equally familiar, for it has been sketched often: anti-Freudian and anti-Marxian because both of those value systems were anti-Christian in their implications, and because Huizinga's mind was too subtle to be trapped by any mode of determinism. Then there is the conservative Huizinga: the man of delicate aesthetic sensibility, the harsh critic of technology (so mechanistic in its social implications) and of mass culture. At a conference held in 1972, at Groningen, to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Huizinga's birth, E. H. Gombrich remarked upon his plea for renunciation. The stoic historian "wanted to persuade his contemporaries to exercise restraint, to practise austerity and to seek the simple life."<sup>3</sup>

Huizinga has been criticized for romanticizing the past, for anthropomorphizing culture, for elitism, for a lack of conceptual rigor, and for undue pessimism about the human conditions and its prospects.