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## **The Forgotten Brother: Francis William Newman, Victorian Modernist**

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NUMBER ONE

SPRING 1988

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- The Forgotten Brother: Francis William Newman,  
Victorian Modernist  
By Kathleen Manwaring, Syracuse University Library 3
- The Joseph Conrad Collection at Syracuse University  
By J. H. Stape, Visiting Associate Professor of English,  
Université de Limoges 27
- The Jean Cocteau Collection: How 'Astonishing'?  
By Paul J. Archambault, Professor of French,  
Syracuse University 33
- A Book from the Library of Christoph Scheurl (1481–1542)  
By Gail P. Huetting, Librarian, University of Illinois at  
Urbana-Champaign 49
- James Fenimore Cooper: Young Man to Author  
By Constantine Evans, Instructor in English,  
Syracuse University 57
- News of the Syracuse University Library and the  
Library Associates 79

# The Forgotten Brother: Francis William Newman, Victorian Modernist

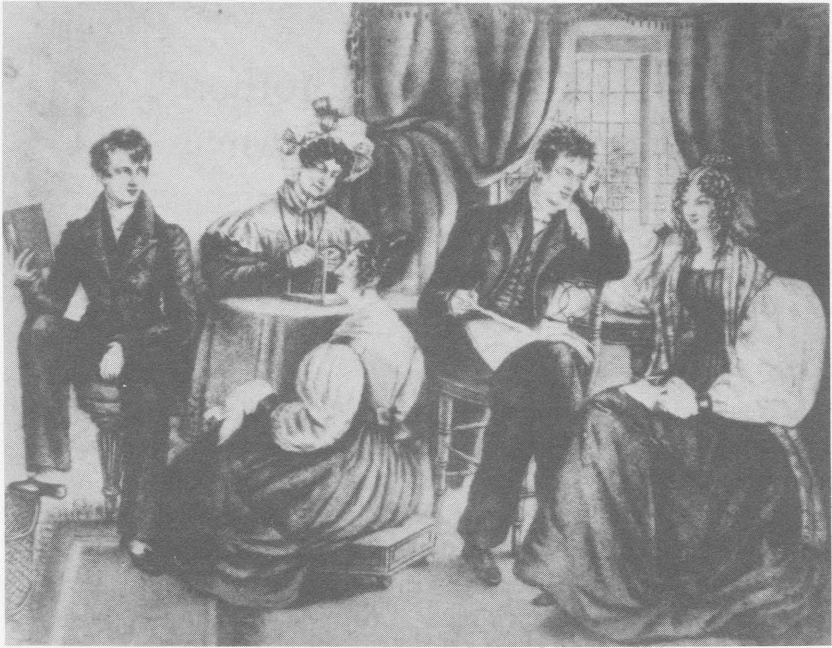
BY KATHLEEN MANWARING

. . . it is not enough to say with some writers that Francis Newman passed the whole of his life in the shadow of his famous brother. Nor is it enough to dwell on his oddities of dress and behaviour, his prosaic cast of mind, his lack of a sense of humour, and the faddishness which dissipated his powers, even to the exasperating extent of clothing one of his best essays, "Christianity in Its Cradle," in the eccentric garb of a reformed spelling. All these factors must be taken into account. But a more fundamental reason for his obscurity is, paradoxically, the progressive direction of his mind. Far more than his brother he was a writer of tracts *for* the times (as Elizabeth Barrett Browning observed, John Henry Newman was a writer of tracts *against* the times) and made his contribution to the secular shape of things to come.<sup>1</sup>

Subtitled "An essay in comparative intellectual biography", William Robbins' book, *The Newman Brothers*, draws attention to the long-neglected sibling of the flamboyant Catholic theologian, John Henry Newman; yet even the author speaks of the task as a difficult one: "To try placing the obscure Francis in any sort of relation to so impressive a reputation and achievement may well seem a wilful attempt to compare a fog-shrouded foothill with a majestic peak".<sup>2</sup> While undeniably the famous cardinal left his mark on both the Anglican faith which he forsook and the Catholic Church which he embraced, no less an admirer than novelist George Eliot wrote of his

1. William Robbins, *The Newman Brothers* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), x-xi.

2. *Ibid.*, x.



A sketch by Maria Giberne (ca. 1830, some six years after the death of Mr. John Newman) shows left to right: Francis, Mrs. Newman, Harriett, John Henry, and Jemima. From Brian Martin, *John Henry Newman: His Life and Work* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

brother Francis: “How much work he has done in the world, which has left no deep, conspicuous mark but has probably entered beneficently into many lives”.<sup>3</sup> As an abolitionist, women’s rights advocate, marriage law critic, land nationalization supporter, vegetarian and teetotaler, Francis William Newman advanced the cause of liberalism and gained for many progressive social movements “a hearing with many who would have been deaf to the appeals of other men”.<sup>4</sup>

The Francis William Newman Papers in the George Arents Research Library comprise 76 letters to Moncure Daniel Conway, American author and preacher, and editor of *Commonwealth* (Boston), “an anti-slavery paper with more literary tendencies than Garrison’s *Liberator*”.<sup>5</sup> The letters span the years 1864 to 1893 and con-

3. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, xi.

4. *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 October 1897.

5. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. “Conway, Moncure Daniel”.

tain Newman's thoughts and arguments, as well as elucidations of his published writings, on a wide variety of social, political, and religious subjects. The collection offers an insight into not only the mind of an original thinker, but also the Victorian conviction that rationalism, coupled with an enlightened morality, can and must lead to social progress.

Born in 1805, Francis was one of six children of John and Jemima Newman. The family was rescued from poverty by the small fortune of John's Huguenot wife after his own calamitous forays into banking and the brewing industry. Later, it was the financial support of the eldest son, John Henry, that enabled Francis to study at Oxford, where his academic achievements outshone even those of his celebrated brother: "On his taking the degree, the whole assembly rose to welcome him, an honour paid previously only to Sir Robert Peel on taking his double first".<sup>6</sup> Elected to a Balliol fellowship in 1826, Francis was expected to follow his brother in taking orders: "Dear Frank, we both are summon'd now / As champions of the Lord".<sup>7</sup> However, a crisis of conscience, instigated by the conflict Francis Newman perceived between the documents and institutions of Christianity and his own reason and moral sensibilities, resulted in the resignation of his fellowship, followed by a sojourn first in Ireland, then in Baghdad, where he worked as an independent Christian missionary. Maisie Ward, author of *Young Mr. Newman*, reports that with this journey, Francis "crossed the Rubicon dividing the Christian faith of his youth from the Unitarianism of his later life".<sup>8</sup> Newman's return to England was coldly received by his family, who found his nonconformist approach to religion an affront to his orthodox, Anglican upbringing, and it can be surmised that John Henry's own simultaneous Romish leanings and subsequent conversion to Catholicism did little to soften that blow.

Teaching posts in Bristol and Manchester subsequently led to his appointment to the Chair of Latin in University College, London, a place he took in 1846 and held until 1863.<sup>9</sup> As a professor of classical literature, he attempted to awaken an interest in Latin through

6. *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Newman, Francis William".

7. John Henry Newman, "To F.W.N.: A Birthday Offering", *Verses on Various Occasions* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1868), 7.

8. Maisie Ward, *Young Mr. Newman* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 165.

9. *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1897, 490.

the use of his own translations of “Hiawatha” and *Robinson Crusoe* as classroom exercises. He also published English versions of Horace’s odes and of Homer’s *Iliad*; the latter, for which he was severely criticized by Matthew Arnold, was intended to make the classics accessible to the working class. (The argument between Newman and Arnold led to the coining of the term “Newmanise”, used to refer to the method of strict translation by which the classics are trivialized.)<sup>10</sup> Newman’s philological publications also included works on Arabic and African dialects.

Meanwhile, Newman published a number of books on religious subjects, including *A History of the Hebrew Monarchy* (1847), *The Soul: Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations* (1849), *Phases of Faith* (1850), an autobiographical account of his religious development, and *Theism, Doctrinal and Practical* (1858). If to the modern reader these volumes would appear as little more than exercises in theological pedantry, it is important to note that even his admiring contemporary George Eliot referred in 1874 to “poor Mr. Francis Newman”. With “affectionate sadness” she recalled the interest which in far-off days she had found in his *The Soul* and *Phases of Faith*.<sup>11</sup> Newman’s *Athenaeum* obituary notes that while these books were sent to the then Roman Catholic Cardinal, Francis “bitterly declared that his brother said he had not time to read them”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while both brothers continued to explore the boundaries of their Christian faith, their quests for personal truth led them on divergent paths.

Yet despite his preoccupation with religious beliefs, perhaps Francis Newman’s most enduring contributions to society lie in his writings on social problems. His long train of publications includes: *The Ethics of War* (1860); *The Permissive Bill* (1865) about liquor laws; *The Cure of the Great Social Evil* (1869) about prostitution; *Lecture on Women’s Suffrage* (1869); *Essays on Diet* (1883); *The Land as National Property* (1886); *The Corruption Now Called Neo-Malthusianism* (1889); and *The Vaccination Question* (1895).

Upon his death in 1897 the *Athenaeum* obituary praised the extensiveness of his enormous output. Yet even in this final tribute Francis failed to escape the shadow of his brother’s reputation:

10. Matthew Arnold, “On Translating Homer”, *Essays by Matthew Arnold* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925), 300.

11. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, xi.

12. *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1897, 490.

In the seventies it used to annoy Dr. [John Henry] Newman to be called “F.” (short for Father) Newman in the *Dublin Review*, “whereas,” he wrote to a friend, “my brother is commonly distinguished from me by this initial. I say this”—and the sentence is an illustration of the decorum of family feeling presented by the Cardinal when he wrote to outsiders—“because, much as we love each other, neither would like to be mistaken for the other.”<sup>13</sup>

It was further noted that Francis had not attended his brother’s funeral and that following the Cardinal’s death in 1890, he had published *The Early History of Cardinal Newman*, “which betrays a theological unbrotherliness rarely met with in recent biography”.<sup>14</sup> (This is a somewhat more charitable, if less colorful, evaluation than that made in Henry Tristram’s *Newman and His Friends*, in which Francis is referred to as “having dipped his pen in slime”).<sup>15</sup> Thus, Francis Newman seemed doomed to be cast, even in death, as a “rebound”<sup>16</sup> of his brother, never fully perceived as an independent freethinker whose increasingly progressive stance had heralded the twentieth century’s secular approach to social issues.

In his autobiography Conway wrote:

. . . the world does not know what a grand man he was. He was so unambitious, so conscientiously free from the rhetorical devices that catch the popular ear, that his reputation is less than that of many inferiors.<sup>17</sup>

Francis’ personal letters to Moncure Daniel Conway reveal a humanitarian who was committed to advancing the morality, rather than the institutions, of religious belief in the interests of social reform:

I have never known a man more absorbed in moral and benevolent work than Professor Newman. The self-devotion that his brother gave to a church, Francis gave to humanity.<sup>18</sup>

13. Ibid.

14. *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1897, 490.

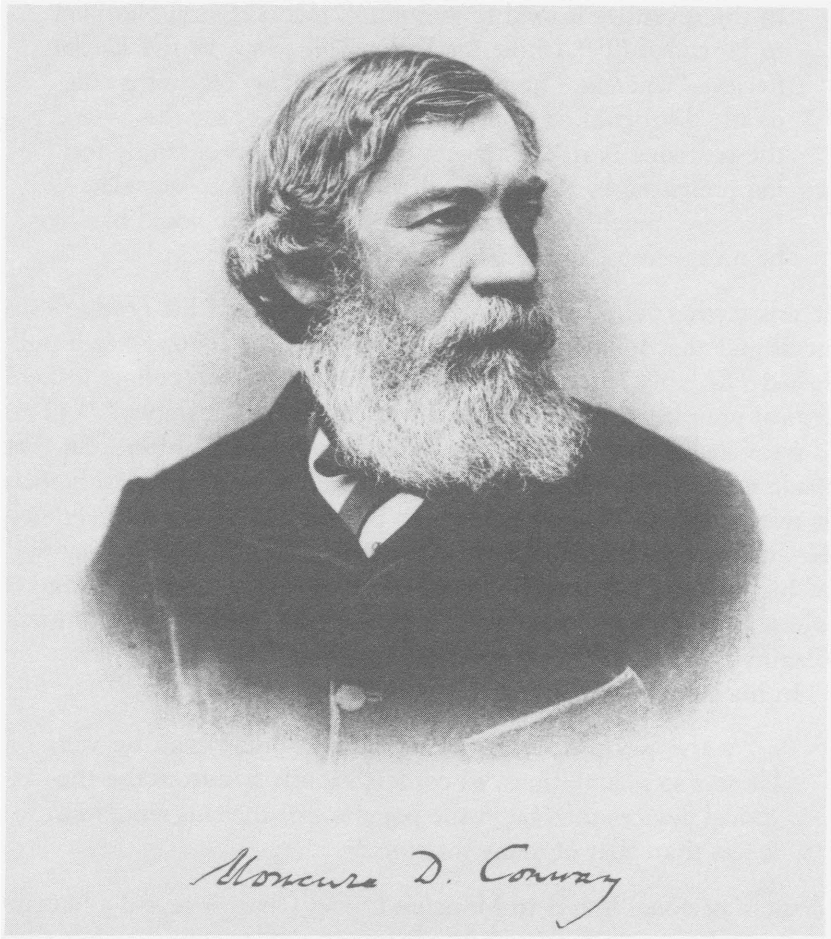
15. Henry Tristram, *Newman and His Friends* (London: John Lane, 1933), 46.

16. *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1897, 490.

17. Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905), 1:442.

18. Ibid., 448.





Moncure Daniel Conway (1832–1907), preacher and author of more than seventy books, including works on slavery, oriental religions, and demonology; two novels; and biographies of Thomas Paine, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thomas Carlyle.

Frontispiece from Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences*, volume 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905).

Despite this lofty retrospective evaluation by Conway, the letters between the two men began with a rather banal appeal by Newman to secure financial advice:

I am counting, [that] they will for your sake, kindly invest in *safe* American funds, according to their discretion, for my

advantage. . . . I do not count anything safe which is *too far* West or South—I prefer New England, or the Federal Govt.<sup>19</sup>

Yet out of this somewhat mundane personal request evolved an exchange which encompassed the entire sweep of political and social issues that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. Significantly, many of these issues—civil rights, prison reform, prostitution, temperance, land nationalization, Irish independence, working conditions, and population control—remain unresolved even today. Thus, there is a special poignancy in Newman’s letters, which provide a window not only into the past but also into the future.

Initiated in 1864, while the Civil War was still raging, the Newman letters register the progress of the conflict and the uncertainty of its outcome. Apprehension concerning European intervention, together with Newman’s lack of confidence in Lincoln’s passive strategy of waiting for starvation to overtake the South, prompted:

I have lost expectation that Grant can succeed. . . . I cherish *hope*, that if that come about which may seem worst,—great ruin to Grant’s army, & an immediate determination of Napoleon to make alliance with the South,—your people will at length understand that half measures *cannot* succeed, & you *must* have a thoroughgoing President.<sup>20</sup>

A subscriber to *Commonwealth*, *The Liberator*, and *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Newman kept abreast of the abolitionists’ cause: “No American could follow the vicissitudes of our struggle with more poignant anxiety”.<sup>21</sup> Concerning the possibility of permanent secession of the slave states, Newman wrote:

Nothing can be more futile than yielding a foot of ground to independence, unless you are willing to yield the *entire* valley

19. Newman to Conway, 24 March 1864, Francis William Newman Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University. All subsequent references to Newman’s letters are from this collection.

20. Newman to Conway, 22 July 1864.

21. Conway, *Autobiography* 1:444.

of the Mississippi, & Pennsylvania. New England with New York might have peace, yet even so would be browbeaten by the mighty South, & your countrymen know it. You will but lose labour & reputation by seeking for anything but justice *under the Union indivisible*.<sup>22</sup>

A critic of Lincoln himself, Newman chastised Conway for his continued opposition to the President following his reelection in 1864:

I should, if I had been an American, greatly have preferred General Benjamin F. Butler to Mr. Lincoln: but as a man and citizen of the world I am quite reconciled to Mr. Lincoln by his last message. The gentleness of his character which degenerated into weakness is of great value in his relations to England & France. With a Butler or a Jackson in his place, irritations might arise highly dangerous to the future. . . . There is no reason to suppose that he does not learn. If he does not go *as fast* as you wish, prick him on; and if others do the same, he will go faster.<sup>23</sup>

As the South approached the final throes before its defeat, Newman reminded Conway that the effort to abolish slavery was but one of many causes for the war, and advised a moderate approach in victory:

In my deliberate judgment, even if no negroes had existed, the North could not have declined this war, without the certainty of national disintegration, & a miserable future of *endless* intestine war & military usurpers; and to talk of allowing a hostile power to establish itself on the mouths of your principal rivers *as a measure of peace* is a deplorable delusion.<sup>24</sup>

Later, while still attempting to neutralize Conway's radicalism, Newman adopted a more philosophical approach:

22. Newman to Conway, 21 November 1864.

23. Newman to Conway, 21 December 1864.

24. Ibid.

It is a real inconvenience to virtuous men that they have fewer tools to work with than rogues use. In contrasting Caesar and Cato, I have often urged that the talents of the former are unfairly exaggerated, since he can be amiable, generous, just, fraudulent, cruel, violent, spiteful, according as one or other *conduces to success*; while Cato, being always like himself & anxiously scrupulous, fights as halfarmed against the whole armed. So your North does not dare to maltreat Southern prisoners, as Jeff. Davis maltreats Northern prisoners. . . . It is a serious difficulty, no doubt, to the more virtuous side; but they must bear it as they best can: for Satan is not cast out by Satan.

So too, in whatever degree the Abolitionists are more virtuous than Mr. Lincoln, in that degree they *necessarily* give him an advantage over them. With moderate shrewdness he is sure to know, that they will not, in mere spite to him, ruin their country; they will not put the negroes into the power of Jeff. Davis. . . . He can calculate exactly how they will act, if he knows them to be intelligent; and unless they will renounce either their intelligence or their virtue, they cannot deprive him of this certainty.<sup>25</sup>

In a statement that is as relevant today as it was in the midst of the emotional turmoil of Reconstruction, Newman provided a perspective on states' rights and the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches of government:

The President has evidently tried to leave to Congress nothing but the privilege of endorsing his measures, after he has made it as hard as he could to alter them. Many of you have understood (what I have all along believed) that the disease of the Union did not consist in *slavery*, but in the extravagant *power of the local States* to establish slavery, which ought to have been ruled down as against the force of Republicanism. But I am disposed to add, that the *extravagant power of the President* was a collateral part of the disease. The States *could not* have worked the Federal power for purposes utterly

25. Newman to Conway, 25 January 1865.

unrepublican, but for the undue independence of the President. . . . I predict a future dangerous struggle between Presidents & Congress; so great power by intrigue & management has every President, unless the nation insist that his business is *solely* Executive.<sup>26</sup>

Convinced that Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies would thwart progress in securing the newly freed slaves "those first rights,—pecuniary and personal justice,—and access to education",<sup>27</sup> Newman advocated impeachment:

You will believe that I mourn over things in the U.S. Yet I think it clear that Andr. Johnson breaks down *morally*. Being neither dignified nor plausible, he does not give to any section of the Republ. Party decent pretext for adhering to him.<sup>28</sup>

Then, as if to close the chapter on his concern with the American politics of abolition, while indicating a growing interest in the European tensions generated by Napoleonic ambitions, Newman wrote:

During your war, English opinion was of great practical importance: now it is of none. To know the facts well, was then to me a duty, now it is a liberal curiosity, a pleasure or pain. I now find danger of giving too much time to it, so deep interest have the events. Yet to know them in the result is now enough for me, or nearly so—one weekly newspaper suffices.<sup>29</sup>

Since, like Newman, Conway was a minister as well as an abolitionist, it is not surprising that a number of letters involve theological discussions. Newman felt that without the doctrine of Free Will "there is no such thing as morality".<sup>30</sup> About the use of the term "Free Christian", he wrote:

26. Newman to Conway, 2 December 1865.

27. Newman to Conway, 28 May 1866.

28. Newman to Conway, 20 May 1866.

29. Newman to Conway, 20 December 1866.

30. Newman to Conway, 2 April 1875.

. . . if any one, entirely agreeing with me, adopts this name to express the fact that he holds in substance the *spiritual* doctrines of the first Christian, but *without* making himself a disciple of Jesus or of the apostles,—I see nothing to censure in it.<sup>31</sup>

Again, on the belief in Immortality, he wrote:

It seems to me more and more that the overwhelming idea of a future eternity so dwarfs the present world that the several and more devoted Christians do not and will not give their energies to improve the Transitory age.<sup>32</sup>

and later:

I publicly avowed that I have no personal *wish* for it, and cannot imagine a world for which *this* one has fitted me.<sup>33</sup>

And concerning the preaching of morality (as opposed to doctrine) from the pulpit:

If 52 times in the year a Morals Lecture or Address is to come forth . . . it even may claim as hearers persons who would not have listened if you advertised it as Religion.<sup>34</sup>

and:

I think that we need, for plain teaching concerning sexual morality, separate church lectures to men and to women, with a woman as church minister to lecture to the women. Then each lecturer will speak with salutary plainness to his or her sex.<sup>35</sup>

31. Newman to Conway, 11 November 1876.

32. Newman to Conway, 12 October 1888.

33. Newman to Conway, 23 September 1889.

34. Newman to Conway, 12 October 1888.

35. Newman to Conway, 10 October 1869.

Thus for Newman, the usefulness of doctrine is relative to the degree to which it affects moral choice. For this unorthodox believer, the contribution of Christianity to humanity lay in providing the guidelines for social behavior rather than the elements of dogmatic belief.

But Francis Newman did not confine his interest to religious topics.

The multiplicity of crusades which enlisted Frank's moral fervour, like his versatile scholarship, and often esoteric linguistic studies, lessened the influence he might have had. Certainly they prevented a fruitful concentration of his talents and energy. He was anti-liquor, anti-tobacco, anti-vaccination, anti-vivisection. He seemed at times, as he ruefully admitted, to be anti-everything.<sup>36</sup>

In his autobiography Conway recalled reproaching Newman for his Spartan tastes and "for undervaluing the flowers and ornamental side of life",<sup>37</sup> to which accusation he responded:

I will remind you that you do not know me by sideview, and hence cannot see all of me. . . . Let me assure you, that there never was a boy or man with more equably elastic spirits. As a young man, & boy, I was full of antics when out of sight. I used to be scolded for all sorts of fancies, as standing on my head; and when quite alone, I used to run & jump with utmost fury, on occasion. Even now, at the age of 65, on a fine day I have to put constraint on myself, from knowing that all expenditure of force violently is imprudent to my heart. (The first warnings I felt in the heart, were from running with the horse on which my wife was riding, and again from drawing her in a Bath Chair.) What are bad spirits, I never know; & my hopefulness is generally thought extreme.—But what are called the "gaities" of life have always oppressed me, because they are *artificially got up*. I like a romp with a dog (& with a cat, but that in play she forgets that my skin will not bear her claws as her kitten's skin does) and

36. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 149–50.

37. Conway, *Autobiography* 1:449.

I enjoy exceedingly the *unpremeditated* merriment of children & gay people on fit occasions. But deliberately to manufacture merriment is to me quite lugubrious.<sup>38</sup>

Considered an extremist by his contemporaries (“Nearly every thing that I write is too eccentric for booksellers to risk money on”),<sup>39</sup> Newman “espoused the unpopular reforms of his time with an almost ascetic zeal”.<sup>40</sup> A teetotaler (“It avails little to say that *you have not felt* mischief from wine. . . . Strength bears many things that are not beneficial but even hurtful”),<sup>41</sup> who opposed the use of tobacco (“Leeches, if put to the veins of great smokers, fall down dead as soon as they imbibe their blood”),<sup>42</sup> Newman also eschewed the theatre and recommended only intermittent reading of novels:

I would not go to an opera, & never have gone, because of what I learn of it from those who go. As to “romances,” no two are alike. . . . But to be a systematic novel reader is, I suppose, good for no man or woman.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps no idea better illustrated Newman’s whimsical faddishness than his vegetarianism,<sup>44</sup> a practice he embraced “on public grounds entirely & with many misgivings”.<sup>45</sup> Years later Newman confessed that the illness from which he had been suffering for several months was not, as Conway had suggested, the result of an “overworked brain”,<sup>46</sup> but was caused by an unmonitored meatless diet:

It seems that I have suffered a slow poison from two perfectly healthy vegetables in excess,—celery & onions! A violent & dangerous attack of dysentery (I use the right word) from a dish apparently harmless, brought out the whole truth. . . .

38. Newman to Conway, 2 February 1871.

39. Newman to Conway, 29 March 1868.

40. Conway, *Autobiography* 1:449.

41. Newman to Conway, 21 March 1867.

42. Newman to Conway, 26 July 1870.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 151.

45. Newman to Conway, 28 March 1868.

46. Newman to Conway, 10 January 1872.



Perhaps I have to regain my normal state tediously; for the evil has been full 18 months sapping me.<sup>47</sup>

Yet to enumerate these puritanical habits is not to trivialize or diminish Newman's dedication to humanitarian causes:

I am sore under the enjoyment of luxuries, while others are wanting necessities; & the closer I can come down to what you call "the baldest utility," the happier does it make me.<sup>48</sup>

For Newman's advocacy of a moderate lifestyle included a commitment to social reform regarding women's issues and to the temperance laws. His progressivism in these areas did not spring solely from an opposition on religious or moral grounds to "pleasures of the flesh", but also from an optimistic belief that a social movement—one which promoted a modification of the marriage laws, a realization of the underlying causes of prostitution, and an understanding of the price in human misery of drunkenness—would foster not only the welfare of individuals but of society as a whole.

Deeply interested in all questions related to women, Newman affirmed in an early letter to Conway his intention actively to support women's rights: "I want to subscribe a donation by way of *testimony* to Lucretia Mott's movement in New York".<sup>49</sup> A believer in equal access to higher education, he helped to promote Bedford College for Women and is cited by the College historian, Margaret Tuke, as "the most important influence after the pioneer founder, Mrs. Elizabeth Reid".<sup>50</sup> Although opposed to marriage laws which divested women of their legal status and property rights, Newman nonetheless criticized those who caused a public scandal by choosing to register their protest by elopement:

They ought to have called together a select body of approving friends, the more the better, to hear and witness their *mutual solemn engagement*, after reciting the reasons why they

47. Newman to Conway, 10 January 1872.

48. Newman to Conway, 26 July 1870.

49. Newman to Conway, 8 December 1866.

50. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 96.

Weston-super-Mare

Nov 4/46

My dear Conway

I have long maintained that persons who are aggrieved by our marriage-laws ought to do as the old Quakers did, — publicly, formally, religiously. By publicly, I mean, before a numerous concourse of with no concealment, whether in a drawing room or in a chapel. Mr G. H. Lewis of Miss Evans, I avowed, grievously and disastrously erred by eloping. They ought to have called <sup>together</sup> a select body of approving friends, the more the better, to <sup>have and</sup> witness their mutual solemn engagement, after reciting the reasons why they could not use the legal ceremony. — It is absurd to say, one

Letter to Conway in which Newman criticizes George Eliot (Miss Evans) for her elopement with George Henry Lewes.

could not use the legal ceremony. . . . When a man & woman call their kinsfolk & the friends whose good opinion they most fear to lose, to witness their solemn & permanent contract, society at large *understands* that they really mean marriage; then society will never confound such conduct with the heartlessness of profligates.<sup>51</sup>

Newman's opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act, a measure legislating medical supervision of prostitutes, may at first glance appear to be an expression of moral outrage for the disregard of the "values of purity and continence":<sup>52</sup>

You speak with pity of a youth thrust upon London, *ignorant of the laws of health*; and evidently mean, "ignorant that he may catch disease from a diseased woman." Whether any are so ignorant as this, I somewhat doubt. But the ignorance which *I* see in youths of this class, is more reprehensible,—ignorance that Love is essential to make sexual union worth having, natural & fitting; ignorance that they degrade their own souls & *aid to trample a woman into ruin*. Nay, this is not ignorance; it is recklessness.<sup>53</sup>

Yet a closer examination reveals that Newman's moral indignation was dwarfed by his wrath over the "callous and often brutal treatment of the women by the medical examiners, and the whole matter of sexual exploitation and degradation":<sup>54</sup>

. . . the Acts subject to horrible *forcible* outrage women who have *no* disease, women who have committed no legal crime, women who are pregnant or recent mothers. Women are outraged every fortnight, not *because* they have disease, but in order to look in & see *whether or not* they have. And to many (those of small & delicate form) the instrument is torture, to nearly all it is odiously humiliating & depressing, it

51. Newman to Conway, 4 November 1876.

52. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 150.

53. Newman to Conway, 27 September 1870.

54. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 150.

risks communicating infection, & the repetition of it must undermine health. So I believe, & so the women feel.<sup>55</sup>

Newman further asserted that the Contagious Diseases Act ignores the immorality of prostitution while sanctioning its practice, provided certain hygienic standards are maintained:

Let Parlt. decree that for a woman to sell her person is a crime, & we shall know what we are at. But to make it an offence *only* when she is diseased, is a law which cannot be carried out, & is *not* the existing law. The only offence now is, not to become worse than slave to the surgeons, *whether she is well or ill*. It is not merely that the CD Act *sanctions* vice (which may be a phrase of uncertain meaning): but it gives a public *warrant* that vice may be practised on a particular woman *with impunity*.<sup>56</sup>

When Conway defended the Contagious Diseases Act as necessary to protect young men from incorrigible prostitutes, Newman declared:

. . . you are pertinaciously blind to the fact that women become prostitutes *by compulsion & against their will*. This is why I tax you with hardness towards them. You say, “if a woman *will* pursue this trade,” she must not complain at being treated as these Acts treat her. You refuse to look at the fact that a large mass of them are mere slave girls, & another floating mass betake themselves temporarily to this hateful mode of eking out a livelihood,—and would never become systematic prostitutes, but for these Acts, which pounce upon, libel them & label them, & do the worst to harden & ruin them.<sup>57</sup>

Thus Newman’s opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act was not merely an exercise in moral self-righteousness, or even a manifesta-

55. Newman to Conway, 26 July 1870.

56. Ibid.

57. Newman to Conway, 27 September 1870.

To Daniel Moncure Conway Esq

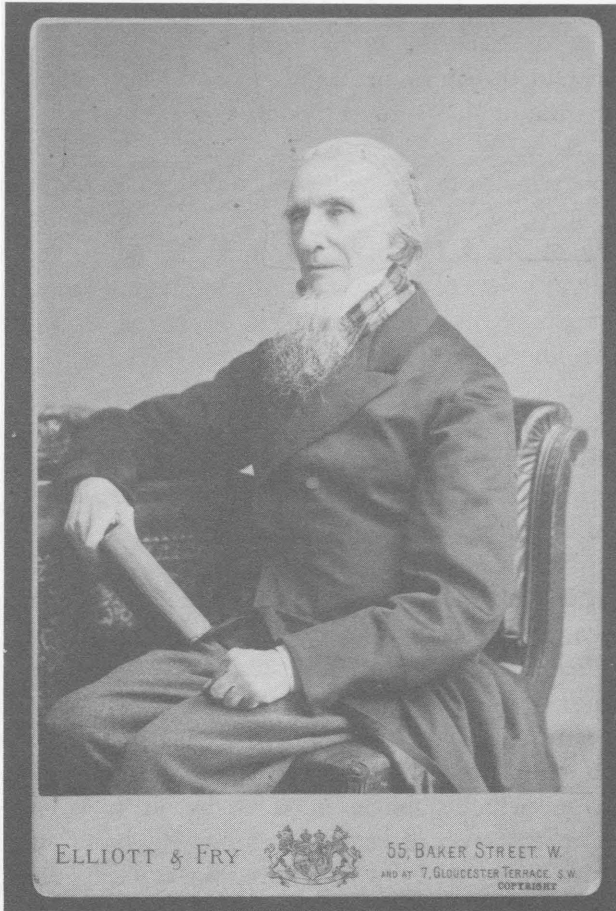
Dear Mr Conway

Dec 5/87

Briefly I will say, that if you saw me, the sight would not reveal any thing to suggest the inroads of time; though I do not pretend that I can prudently act as if I were twenty years younger. I have been solicited by several persons for photographs of myself, and in consequence ordered some recent ones from Elliot and Fry. This left me two in excess. My wife begged one to give away, and now insists that I ought to send the other to you! It did not occur to me that you would be likely to care much for it; but she is sure that you will; so perhaps Mrs Conway will say, it is wiser to obey her. Tomorrow I must think how to pack it safely. I now write late after sunset.

In America, I believe, adversity has nearly

Letter to Conway in which Newman explains his reason for sending an unsolicited photograph of himself.



Francis William Newman (1805–1897). Photograph by Elliott and Fry (London), from the Francis William Newman Papers, Syracuse University Library.

tion of his concern for the civil rights abuses to which those laws subjected women, but a recognition of the underlying causes of prostitution itself. For in his support of equal educational opportunities for women and modifications to the marriage laws (such as enabling women to retain their legal status and property rights and extending the grounds for divorce to include “habitual drunkenness, obstinate desertion, cruelty, and long imprisonment”),<sup>58</sup> Newman demonstrated his understanding that economic dependence and sexual dis-

58. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 150.

crimination with respect to legal protection were the real causes of prostitution.

In his support of temperance legislation, Newman affirmed the link between the use of alcohol and the abuse of women:

Nay, our good rustic lad addressing a clergyman not long ago said: "Sir, put down the Drink Shops, and you will soon hear nothing of Street Harlots." Our medical men, even when themselves lovers of wine, avow that *marriage is defiled* by the beer or gin of husbands, wives are oppressed, and children are born idiots,—from the drink system!<sup>59</sup>

Asserting that "drunkenness causes violent crime, insanity, pauperism, impurity",<sup>60</sup> Newman advocated the enactment of legislation by which the tavern keeper could be held legally responsible for damages caused by a frequenter of his establishment:

. . . there are many subsidiary measures used & useful in America, which we neglect, such as authorizing wives, husbands, parents to warn a publican that he has made *such a one* drunk, & after such a warning give a right of action & damages to the wife so if the evil be repeated. (Of course, when a man drinks one glass in each of a dozen shops, it is hard to say which publican is guilty; but all such laws have a moral effect, even if very seldom brought home to a conviction; & every trial of this nature awakens the public conscience.)<sup>61</sup>

Newman, however, admitted that censure of tavern keepers would not eliminate the problem of alcohol abuse altogether:

I used to think, that the *drinking on the premises* was the great & almost the sole evil, & that if the liquor could only be bought to be carried home, 9/10ths of the evil wd. disappear. I do not know whether this was not true 30 years ago; but

59. Newman to Conway, 17 March 1888.

60. Newman to Conway, 26 July 1870.

61. Newman to Conway, 23 March 1875.

apparently it is false now. . . . I observe that quite of late certain town officers represent that *early closing* (early!!!) has led to the evil of men buying liquor, & taking it home, whereby *the whole family* is made drunken.<sup>62</sup>

Newman expressed outrage with the government's contention that the country's economy would suffer from a prohibition on alcohol:

. . . men called Economists are such *idiots* that they cannot learn Vice to be of all things least Economic; and that a man who does not keep his brain in a *human* state has no right to claim indulgence or privilege as a citizen.<sup>63</sup>

And he was further angered that the legislature's lack of commitment to ban liquor was based on political rather than moral considerations:

*If* Parl't. were sincere in desiring the public welfare as the paramount object, the case would be different: but what they desire is (1) not to offend, but to conciliate, powerful capitalists, which cannot be consistent with lessening the consumption of liquor; (2) not to have trouble from a deficit in the Exchequer, wch might happen from a great & sudden change even towards national sobriety; (3) not to have to give up drinking wine, or to retain the right as an invidious privilege; (4) they have no objection to promote the public welfare, if the other objects be first secured.<sup>64</sup>

Thus Newman's opposition to liquor was based on his belief that its use undermined family life, for which not only individuals, but also society at large, paid a great price in human misery and waste. Furthermore, for Newman it was unconscionable that the government, in sanctioning the use of alcohol through the granting of liquor licenses, failed to provide moral leadership by abdicating its responsibility to promote the public welfare.

Yet, while adopting a liberal stance toward most social reforms,

62. *Ibid.*

63. Newman to Conway, 17 March 1888.

64. Newman to Conway, 23 March 1875.



Newman ran counter to the prevailing progressive attitudes of his contemporaries with regard to a number of issues, some of which are still debated today. On capital punishment, Newman wrote:

I maintain, against Wendell Phillips, that a murderer's life has no more *sanctity* than a wild beast's life, and we have as much a right to use it up as a cheap article for public good, as to confiscate his property. Mr. Phillips is indignant at our killing a murderer *for public advantages*. I say, we have as much *right* to do so, as to kill a bullock. To claim sacredness for human life *as such*, is an enormous & unjustifiable assumption. When it loses moral worth, it is depreciated: when it becomes vile & mischievous, it loses *all* sacredness.<sup>65</sup>

And when John Stuart Mill exhorted people to limit population, Newman claimed that the champion of modern Utilitarianism was distorting the teaching of T. R. Malthus, who “distinctly renounced as *inhuman* the idea of dishonoring fathers for having ‘too many’ children, and said, that when once marriage was entered, the public must have no opinion about limiting numbers”.<sup>66</sup> Newman believed that population control was a matter of individual choice rather than a public policy issue, and that for “rich men to tell poor men not to increase, can only move contempt & enmity: for every poor man feels that the poor have before God & man a greater right to multiply, than any rich man can have to keep a piece of fertile ground idle for his own pleasure”.<sup>67</sup> And furthermore:

The meanest intellect knows that on a limited surface there must at last be an end of unlimited increase; but to fill our heads with alarm about the distant future, while incalculable supplies are within sight, is certainly the way to paralyze us.<sup>68</sup>

On another occasion, in support of his belief that Sundays should be set aside for the “*intellectual* improvement of the working classes”,<sup>69</sup>

65. Newman to Conway, 28 May 1866.

66. Newman to Conway, undated.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. Newman to Conway, 10 February 1874.

Newman found himself at odds with the very individuals he attempted to aid by his advocacy of legislation providing for public access to museums on that traditional day of rest and worship:

I signed a petition to Parliament some 15 or more years ago for the opening—(it was signed almost solely by known scientific & literary men)—but I would not sign it now. As soon as I brought it to the notice of workingmen, I found, that those even of the Holyoake connection were either adverse or lukewarm; from a belief that it would introduce a principle which would enable employers to set their men to work on Sundays, multiply production, lower price, & thereby lower wages; so that they wd. at length get 6 days wages for 7 days work. Their object was the opposite; to *limit* the work time: this made them quite unwilling to stir, or perhaps even opposed to the opening of Museums on Sunday. Since I found this out, I have said: “It is in the working man’s interest that the opening is proposed: let him settle the question: the gentry & the literary men had better not meddle with it.”<sup>70</sup>

Thus, while Newman supported most of the social reforms proposed by his progressive-minded contemporaries, he nonetheless remained an independent and practical freethinker.

A man of keen self-perception, Francis William Newman was aware of his ambiguous public image not only in relation to his brother John Henry, the Catholic cardinal who devoted a lifetime in opposition to the forces of liberalism, but also to many of his peers in those same progressive movements to which he devoted his energies:

Mr. Wilson Herbert in the Examiner speaks of me as keeping myself in the background for many years. It is the Editors who have not liked my freedom of thought, & refusal to go in the beaten track, who have kept me in the background.<sup>71</sup>

Yet Newman felt compelled to publish his work, understanding that while he received scant recognition by his contemporaries, he might fare better with posterity:

70. Newman to Conway, 8 February 1874.

71. Newman to Conway, 10 February 1874.

I am publishing and republishing as only a man can to whom money is of no import; and aim to get my life work in a form accessible to all who wish for it. I know it has a better chance in the future than in the past; and now that I have managed to get enough funds at my disposal, I want to get matters through the press, before life or eyesight fails.<sup>72</sup>

Whereas John Henry Newman was conscious of leaving behind his correspondence as a “document to my heirs”,<sup>73</sup> Francis was not. His biographer writes of him: “He had a theory that letters should not be kept, and many people have told me that he asked for his letters back in order to destroy them”.<sup>74</sup> Given Francis Newman’s systematic attempt to eradicate his personal correspondence, the George Arents Research Library is indeed fortunate to have so rich a cache of documents to illuminate this extraordinary man. If Newman is not remembered as a leader of social reform in the areas of abolition, women’s rights, temperance, or working conditions, it is not owing to his lack of commitment, but rather to his reluctance to focus on one issue. The diffusion of his efforts on so many fronts contributed to his obscurity. And although he is not associated with any particular reform movement, Newman’s legacy rests in his advancement of the trend toward a secular approach to the solution of society’s ills. For however Victorian his belief that the powers of reason and moral force could be yoked to solve human problems, Newman’s conviction that morality could exist apart from religious authority places him at the forefront of the secular humanism of the twentieth century.

72. Newman to Conway, 15 June 1889.

73. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers*, 16.

74. Isabel Giberne Sieveking, *Memoir and Letters of Francis W. Newman* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909), 162.