Evolutionary Theist

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An Intellectual Biography of Minot Judson Savage, 1841-1918

By

W. Creighton Peden

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DEDICATION

TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

Jason Hollis Foster
Beau Peden Foster
Taylor Mark Patzer
Laci Rose Patzer
Kylie Shae York

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POEMS OF M. J. SAVAGE

PREFACE

This intellectual biography of Minot Judson Savage is part of a larger project dealing with different voices in American liberal religious thought who supported "Free Religion" as expressed in the Free Religious Association formed in 1867. This project has also included intellectual biographies of Francis Ellingwood Abbot, William James Potter , and David Atwood Wasson. Savage is of special interest because of his reputation as great preacher and intellectual voice, attempting to establish a form of Christianity in concord with evolution.

TIPS FOR READERS: The purpose of this book is to present the thought of Minot Judson Savage, from his view of early humans to his role in Unitarianism. Because Savage developed his thought in different publications of sermons, the weaving of these different threads of his thought from various sources will require some repetition of points previously considered. Quotations will be included in order for the reader to gain an understanding of his style of speaking. In order to keep footnotes at a minimum, a reference will be given at the end of the quote, such as (SP 28). In this reference SP stands for the publication and 28 refers to the page number. A symbol guide for publications can be found in Works Cited listing found at the back of this book on page 195. If one or more quotes from the same page are used following the original reference, the reader will understand that the following quotes are not referenced and refer to the previous reference. If there is some distance between quotes from the same page, a reference may be repeated for the sake of continuity. The reader will occasionally find a reference given that does not refer to a direct quote. The purposes of these references are to refer the reader to a source, which I have considered, for a broader understanding of a person or of an idea or concept. Savage wrote poems and hymns, as well as publications which dealt with the religious view of different American poets. An analysis of his work in the area is not included, yet several poems are included at various places to acquaint the reader with his poetic style.

I would like to express my appreciation to Anthony Heacock of Meadville Theological Library; Francis O'Donnell of Andover-Harvard Divinity School; Harvard University Archives for both their research help and for the picture of Minot Judson Savage; Bangor Public Library;

University of Georgia Library; Hudson Library of Highlands, NC; David A. Comstock–owner and editor of Comstock Bonanza Press; Bruce Southworth–senior minister of Community Church in New York City; Debra Madera of Pitts Theological Library at Emory University; the Concord Free Public Library; John Gaston for his computer assistance; Kelly Smith for his critical reading of the manuscript; and Karen Hawk for editing the final manuscript.

—Creighton Peden, 2009

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many of us find our thinking locked into the period in which we live. If our discussion of Minot Judson Savage is to be worthwhile, it is necessary that we project ourselves imaginatively into nineteenth century American liberal religious thought. To assist our efforts in this imaginative leap, we will briefly explore the developing principles in Unitarianism and Universalism and the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century.

Liberal religious thought in America emerged in the Congregational Church or "standing church" in New England, although it was not limited to these communities. This church, which was strongly Calvinistic, originally served the community and was supported by public taxes. Following the American and French Revolutions, there was developing a split in many congregations between those supporting Calvinism and those who had adopted principles from the Enlightenment. This division centered on the inherent tension arising from Calvin's doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God.

For an example of this struggle, let us briefly consider the town of Wilton, New Hampshire at the beginning of the nineteenth century (PFR 1-3). Wilton, like many communities, was impacted by the diversity of free thought in several ways. It shared the growing fear in America that the forces of the French might undermine the social stability. Many in Wilton suspected a conspiracy afoot to destroy the true faith and its rational evidence. Fiske, minister of the standing church in Wilton, spoke against those who "wish to lessen the credit, and destroy the influence of revealed religion." Wilton was also becoming exposed to an increase in religious diversity in the form of various "free" Christian sects. Of primary concern to Wilton was the emerging Arminian controversy, which, by 1815, was being labeled Unitarianism. Arminianism" meant the doctrine that humans are born with the capacity for both sin and righteousness.

When Thomas Beede was ordained in Wilton in 1803, as minister of the standing church, William Emerson, the father of Ralph Waldo,

preached a lengthy anti-trinitarian sermon. Emerson expounded the view that Jesus taught the unity of God, just as Moses had. He further contended that one could be saved by following Jesus' teachings and examples. The free thought of Unitarianism was being preached in Wilton to a congregation which had guaranteed in its rules for membership the "right of private judgment."

By 1818, the standing church in Wilton was entering a state of crisis over the issue of accepting members without them having to sign the traditional confession of faith. After an intense internal struggle, a Council, composed of representatives from area churches, was formed to resolve the dispute. The result of the crisis was the formation of the Second Congregational Church in Wilton, only several hundred yards from the original congregation. This division split families and negated the mutual confidence which lies at the foundation of domestic happiness.

As these struggles spread through New England, Unitarianism was beginning to formulate principles which reflect its evolving. Building on the Enlightenment, Charles Chauncy, an early Unitarian, insisted on logic and reason being applied in a theology, on Biblicism based on critical and historical analysis rationally interpreted, and on moral aspiration as the focal point of Christianity. One can judge a religion by its moral values, with nature serving as the source of religious knowledge. The idea that God's will is expressed through the laws of nature was being explored. Even the denial of eternal punishment was being raised. Soon Unitarian though focused on a theology of personal growth and moral perfection, as liberals began to equate intellectual life and spiritual life. Some congregations stressed building a moral culture and rejected John Calvin's doctrine of humans' innate depravity. Human perfection became the goal, based on an understanding of the human nature of Jesus.

In what has been called the Classical Period in Unitarianism, William Ellery Channing focused on the divinity within each of us. This Period is noted for its emotional character and its convictions based on reason and grounded in emotions. There was movement toward an absolute separation of church and state, as well as the tendency to re-evaluate social problems in light of changing economic situations. The Universalist Church, which eventually merged with Unitarians, was antis creedal and supported universal salvation. Hosea Ballou, the most noted Universalist, insisted humans must accept the unity of the universe, with God's plan being revealed in it. For Ballou, salvation was viewed as character formation, with life being a probationary state requiring spiritual education and character formation. Theodore Parker, a pre-Civil Warradical

Unitarian minister in Boston, proclaimed that many of the traditional forms of religion were transient, just as the divine Christ was dispensable.

As the Classical Period, with its emphasis on self development, came to a close, two opposing emphasis began to appear in Unitarianism. The dominant emphasis was to establish Unitarianism as a strongly organized national denomination with ties to Christianity. A new constitution was adopted in 1865, which included a preamble that referred to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A group of young ministers objected, to what they considered a creedal statement endorsing Jesus, on the basis of free inquiry and formed the Free Religious Association (FRA) in 1867. This group supported a free religion that was non creedal, committed to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and to knowledge based on the scientific method (FR 76-87). Octavius Brooks Frothingham, who was the first president of the FRA, insisted that individual progress was possible only within the larger context of the human species in general, and he questioned belief in an unending progress. In place of viewing the self in terms of personal growth and moral perfection, the developing focus was now ethically centered on the moral sense of justice. As we explore the life and thought of Minot Judson Savage, we will see his role in resolving these tensions within Unitarianism.

We now recall the impact of Spiritualism on the nineteenth century American religious thought. There was a strong movement in the early 1800s which rejected Calvinism, with its eternal damnation, in favor of universal salvation. In its infancy, Spiritualism was tied to the doctrines of the Universalist denomination. An undergirding principle for both was a radical but progressive rationalism, in the tradition of the Enlightenment. "The evidence suggests that spiritualism's appeal in the culture at large was strongest among the middle class, which was also true of Universalism" (OS 53). The middle class turned spiritualism into a parlor game, which shifted the religious experience for many from the church to the home. By the 1850s there were numerous spirit circles in Maine, with several in Bangor, the town in which Savage was to receive his theological education. Those gathered in spirit circles felt that they were intermingling with the lives of those past and in so doing were entering their own immortality.

For the spiritualists, there were two classes of persons, even among the intelligent and cultivated. In one class their spiritual consciousness is dormant, while in the other their spiritual consciousness is the moving force in their daily lives. Those whose conscious spiritual self is dormant hold fast to reason. However, from the spiritualists' perspective, they narrow the field of thought open to discovery by reason to the material

phase of existence. The spiritualists viewed the material as the first phase of human existence, to be followed after death by a spiritual existence. They argued *a priori* (rational deduction from self-evident statements) that there were interventions by these two phases of existence. By following the inductive method, essential additional information is discovered which requires rational examination. Spiritualists consider it rational to believe that under God's wise and benevolent economy this interchange between worlds is possible, especially since the spiritual world was considered close at hand to those living. The value of these spiritual phenomena, assuming they are valid, is that they provide the strongest proof to the reality of another world.

Let us briefly outline what Robert Dale Owen (RO 16-28) called "the Spiritual Creed." 1. They deny that communications from the spiritual realm are miraculous. 2. They believe in the universality of law, which applies to material as well as the spiritual realms. 3. All the signs and wonders, which have been attributed to Jesus, occurred under universal law and were natural. 4. Since the modern world considers many things occurring in the present period also as signs and wonders, the spiritualists find these common signs as proof of the general truth of the New Testament account. 5. They rejected the doctrines of infallibility and plenary inspiration (writers were inspired and presented God's message without error). Spiritualists recognized that a spiritual message may be in error or incorrectly interpreted. Therefore, one is required to test such messages rationally, as would be any earthly claim. This conviction regarding the testing of messages was derived from the next item in the creed. 6. There will be the same varieties of character in the next world as in this one. At death one throws off the natural body for a higher one, but there is no immediate transformation of the soul. The moral, social, and intellectual qualities we displayed in this world remain ours in the next world and serve to identify our position in that world. One's earthly sins determine one's spiritual position. 7. One's spiritual position in the next world will change by one's own aspirations. This change is similar to the change one might have made in the early world, except that in the spirit-world one is relieved of the heavy burden of material weight, enabling one through effort to draw closer to the Divine Source. 8. Having rejected the false conception of death held by the Christian world, the spiritualists viewed death as one's best friend. If one's life has been well spent, one enters the next life in proper relation to the Source of all. They held that because of God's goodness, death is not essentially evil. Therefore, we should not fear but rejoice in our going to a better place. Spiritualists considered that the communications, claiming to be from the other world,

almost unanimously rejoice in their change and have no desire to return to the earthly life. 9. In the other world, spiritualists believed they would not be restricted in occupation—that our duties and enjoyment will be as on earth. As human spirits in the other world, they will be involved in work with goals to reach, just as on earth. They believed that when they are transformed to the next world, their friends will be there to greet them. 10. Spiritualists believed that one's human earthly affections and sympathies sometime attract disembodied spirits back to earth. These spirits often serve as a *messenger* coming to warn and protect earthly humans whom they may not have known. Other spirits, who may have had a mind-set that was exclusively for material gain, often return to this world to deal with troubles and sorrows. 11. Spiritualists regard their position, wisely interpreted, as leading progressively to the highest destiny. Human create their own future by inflicting their own punishment and selecting their own rewards in this life. Righteousness is not something bestowed upon one but is something one earns, even into the next world.

In conclusion, the spiritualists' position rests on the contention that the scriptures teach direct communication between this world and the next. They also note that the scriptures nowhere declare that these communications were to terminate. Spiritualists believe such intercourse to be natural and to continue into the present. They further believe that one can become open to this intercourse if one wisely seeks it in a direct and genuine fashion. Those, who so believe, claim an awakened gratitude to God for God's eternal love and care. Spiritualism was never intended to become a sect or a denomination but was understood as a journey to the Divine Source through this world into the next.

"My Birth"

I had my birth where stars were born,
In the dim aeons of the past:
My Cradle cosmic forces rocked,
And to my first was linked my last.

Through boundless space the shuttle flew,
To weave the warp and woof of fate:
In my begetting were conjoined
The infinitely small and great.

The outmost star on being's rim,
The tiniest sand-grain of the earth,
The farthest thrill and nearest stir
Were not indifferent to my birth.

And when at last the earth swung free,
A little planet by the moon,
For me the continent arose,
For me the ocean roared its tune;

For me the forests grew; for me
The electric force ran to and fro;
For me tribes wandered o'er the earth,
Kingdoms arose, and cities grew;

For me religions waxed and waned;
For me the ages garnered store;
For me ships traversed every sea;
For me the wise ones learned their lore;

For me, through fire and blood and tears,
Man struggled onward up the height,
On which, at last, from heaven falls
An ever clearer, broader light.

The child of all the ages, I,
Nursed on the exhaustless breasts of time;
By heroes thrilled, by sages taught,
Sung to by bards of every clime.

Quintessence of the universe,
Distilled at last from God’s own heart,
In me concentrated now abides
Of all that is the subtlest part.

The product of the ages past,
Heir of the future, then, am I:
So much am I divine that God
Cannot afford to let me die.

If I should ever cease to be,
The farthest star its mate would miss,
And, looking after me, would fall
Down headlong darkening to the abyss.

For, if aught real that is could cease,
If the All-Father ever nods,
That day across the heavens would fall
Ragnarok, twilight of the gods.[1]

—Minot Judson Savage

[1] Minot Judson Savage, “My Birth.” Edmund Clarence Stedman, ed., *An American Anthology, 1787-1900.* 1900.

CHAPTER TWO

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF M. J. SAVAGE

Minot Judson Savage was born in Norridgewock, Maine, on June 10, 1841, and died in Boston on May 22, 1918, at the age of seventy-seven. He was the son of Joseph L. and Ann S. Savage. Norridgewock is in Somerset County and was incorporated June 18, 1788, from Norridgewock Plantation. Some have contended that the name of the town was of Norse origin, meaning "a tribe below the falls." However, most attributed the town's name to an Indian community, the Norridgewogs, who lived on the Kennebac River. The British began to settle the area in 1773. They attacked the Norridgewogs in 1774, and killed their French priest, Father Rasle. Benedict Arnold's army passed through Norridgewock in 1775. In 1809, Norridgewock became the count seat of Somerset County, until it was later moved to Skowhegan. Norridgewock straddles a bend in the Kennebac River, with the Sandy River emptying into the Kennebac at the northern boundary of the village.

It was in this small village, bounded by two rivers, that Savage grew as a child. As a little boy, he "used to look up to the planets and stars by night and think, how glorious, how brilliant, it must be up there" (LD 139). His world was shaped by the importance of the village's Methodist Church, as well as the Congregational Church and its firm Calvinistic orientation. Joseph Savage, his father, had been reared "in the extremest [sic] form of the old Calvinism" (MC 13). The father had revolted against Calvinism and shared with his son his moral outrage against the doctrines of total depravity and fore-ordination, "and all that cast-iron religion, as of fate, in which the souls of men were held and led from the cradle to the grave, and on into the darkness of the future" (MC 13). Before moving to Norridgewock, Joseph Savage had joined the Free-will Baptist Church. Since there was no Baptist Church in Norridgewock, he joined the Methodist Church. Since the Methodist Church only had services one Sunday a month, the Savages primarily attended the Congregational Church.

Although Savage would later postulate that the aim and end of life are happiness, he noted: "I was brought up with the feeling that, if I wanted to

do anything, the chances were it was wrong, that it was a good deal more likely to be in the way of virtue if it was something that was disagreeable to me" (OG 101). He grew up with the belief that a change of heart by him was required "or I could have no hope of salvation in the future world" (MC 14). Young Savage had vivid dreams, with heaven a little above the sky and Hell below the earth. Conversion became an important issue to him, as his minister and family friends "took every occasion to warn me of the danger in which I was living from day to day" (MC 15). When a young seminar graduate became the minister of the Congregational Church, he chose as his first task organizing a revival in the church. In the winter of 1855, there was a widespread revival throughout America, including Norridgewock. This was "revivalism of the hell-fire variety" (UU 318). Savage opined: "this was the time for me to experience this change, if possible… I supposed that, first, I must experience some remarkable conviction of sin, that I must feel that I had been very wicked; and that in some marvellous [sic] moment would come a sense of forgiveness, and light and joy" (MC 16). Savage had learned that there were original sin and sin due to our personal actions. Try as he might, he could not feel guilty for either type of sin. After many of his friends experienced the "change of heart," Savage decided one night that he would not leave his room until he had given himself to God. He prayed to God and told God that he would continue to pray until God provided some relief. "A change of feeling did come over me; and I believed myself pardoned, and a great joy was in my heart… This joy lasted for a few days… But I found myself depressed and in great doubt" (MC 17).

Savage was only thirteen years old, but he began to think that he was not one of God's chosen. Driven by the fear of Hell, he attended a monthly meeting at the Congregational Church, preparatory to communion, at which one expressed one's own religious feelings and experiences. Savage was timid and for him this meeting was actual torture, but when he missed it his conscience trouble him greatly. He had read the creed and did not understand it. However, in order to become a member of the Congregational Church, he was required to accept the creed in a public manner; "and I did so" (MC 18). As a teenager, Savage decided to become a minister. "I grew up reading the denominational reviews, the denominational newspapers. I was taught that it was dangerous and wicked to doubt. I must not think freely; that was the one thing I was not permitted to do" (OG 197). He recalled being surprised when "the preacher proclaimed that large numbers of those who were church members were not really children of God, and would be lost" (OG 209).

Prayer meetings were a significant part of his childhood experiences. "How many times as a boy, when once a month our weekly prayer-meeting was turned into what was called a 'missionary concert,' have I heard people urged and urged and pleaded with tears to give money to send missionaries, because countless millions of heathens were dropping ceaselessly into Hell" (LD 147)! He spoke of the effects these prayer-meetings had on him, as he wondered what these earnest and true persons were doing in prayer. "The implications of their attitude toward God seemed to me nothing less than impious. They begged, they prayed, they petitioned, even with tears. The implication of it all the time was that, if only they could become earnest enough, sufficiently wrought upon, or if they could bring to bear upon God sufficient power, they would wake him up, rouse his attention, start his inactivity, get him to do something… this kind of prayer seems to me little else than insulting to our Father who is in heaven… There was another difficulty that presented itself to me. Not only God's goodness cried out against this kind of prayer, but God's wisdom as well. It seemed to me so egotistical that we, with our little, short-sighted wisdom, should attempt perpetual dictation as to how the affairs of this universe should be carried on. Then, not only the absurdity of the prayers, but the utter impossibility of their being answered—a large part of them—came over me" (MC 119-120).

There were other avenues of interest to Savage in his childhood. It was in this village where he first heard of what is commonly called Spiritualism. They had a small table in their house which would move and answer questions in various ways for Savage. "I saw enough at that time to know that some force was in action other than that which we ordinarily call muscular power, whether conscious or unconscious… I have never been able to explain what then occurred by any ordinary means. I remember that on one occasion, I stood up and touched a table very lightly with the tips of my fingers, and that it followed me quite across the room. So much for my first knowledge of anything of this sort" (LD 295-296). As a young boy, Savage was enthralled by poetry. "I have loved poetry from the time I was able to read at all. I read all the old English poets,–finding them in our little town library,–read them over and over before I had the slightest idea as to their relative rank and importance" (LD 126). As a child, Savage always had a gun available to him for hunting. After hunting, it came over him that it was not as amusing to animals to be killed as it was to shoot and kill them. Following that realization, he no longer found pleasure in killing animals. "We have not yet become civilized enough, so that we feel it incumbent upon us to recognize the fact that animals can suffer pain, that animals can enjoy the air or the sunshine,

and that they have a right to each when they do not trespass upon the larger rights of humanity" (OG 148).

During his childhood and throughout his life, Savage was plagued by continuing ill health. It was assumed that his poor health prevented him from serving in the Civil War. Savage was an excellent student and had planned to attend Bowdoin College, but due to the financial situation of his family and his ill health, he was unable to attend. Reflecting on his childhood, Savage considered it to be a happy one in spite of the fact that "I suffered cold… my dinner was frequently a little more scanty… This whole thing is relative" (L 67).

Being unable to attend Bowdoin, Savage entered Bangor Theological Seminary in order to prepare for a ministry in the Congregational Church. Bangor was the hub for Eastern Maine, with Norridgewock being only fifty-five miles to the south west. It was generally acknowledged in Maine that "as a Nation we have greatly sinned, but chiefly in the oppression of a weak and defenceless [sic] race" (EM 20). Most persons realized that in the changing situation errors were assuming new forms and phrases and could best be refuted by strengthening higher educational institutions. Even though economic conditions during the Civil War were strained, most denominations were able to increase their benevolent giving. A common problem affecting these denominations was "the practice so common among us of late, of ministers leaving the fields of labor assigned to them, is detrimental to the course of religion, and should be discouraged" (EM 23). There was also concern about ministers retaining their assigned ministry while at the same time going into business ventures for the sake of making additional money. All agreed that with the increase participation in Sabbath Schools, ministers need to be better trained for this educational task.

Savage reported on his experience in training for the ministry: "I went to a theological school, and had drilled into me year after year that such beliefs, about God and man and Jesus and the Bible and the future world, were unquestionably true, and that I must not look at anything that would throw a doubt upon them" (OG 197-198). Although Darwin's great theory of evolution had been challenging American theological and scientific minds since its publication in 1859, Savage confessed that "all that I knew of Darwinism up to that time was that it was a newfangled notion which was supposed to antagonize God and religions and all sacred truth. The professors in the seminary referred to it only to sneer at and depreciate it" (IC 8). While a student at Bangor, Savage served for a year during the Civil War with the Christian Commission as an assistant chaplain with the Union Army prior to the battle of Chattanooga. It was his job to distribute

books, tracts, and conduct services. Savage was appalled at the morality of southerners revealed by the conditions of the war.

After graduating from Bangor Theological Seminary in 1864, Savage was ordained at Bangor, commissioned by the Home Missionary Society as a missionary, married Ella Augusta Dodge, daughter of a Congregational minister, and set sail for the Western missionary field in California. "I was sent into the world graduated, not as a truth-seeker, but to fight for his country without asking any questions" (OG 198). He first served for two years at San Mateo, where he held services in a schoolhouse. He then moved to become the minister of the Congregational Church in Grass Valley until 1867.

We may gain hints about the context of his early ministry, by noting the development of Grass Valley just before and during Savage's ministry. Before the Gold Rush, Grass Valley was considered "a verdant valley, coursed by a beautiful stream then unruffled by the labor of the prospector, presented a truly inviting resting place to the spirit-weary traveler over the plains" (HV 185). Grass Valley was settled in 1849, by the early "Forty-niners". In June, 1850, the first discovery of quartz bearing gold was made on what was called "Gold Hill." Before the year was out, gold mining, quartz mills, and saw mills were in full operation. In the fall of 1850, a town began to develop, with the first hotel being named "Betty House." In 1851, the first school was opened and a post office established. A newspaper soon followed, to be followed by a bank and express office in the first brick building in 1854. By 1855, there were over four hundred buildings in the town, but a massive fire destroyed over three hundred of these building that year. Although the town was quickly rebuilt, another fire occurred in 1860, but did not consume as many building as in 1855.

The Congregational Church in Grass Valley was established and built in 1853. When Savage became minister of this Church in 1866, there were in the town over fifty saloons, seven churches, two daily papers, eleven physicians, ten lawyers, and eight schools. The Congregational Church was a thriving organization, with the Sabbath School having "an average attendance of one hundred and eighty" (HV 194) and was superintended by Savage. This congregation was a challenging one with his time being consumed by practical matters, "and up to that time I had not turned my attention especially to any scientific investigation" (IC 8). Savage was questioned about his views regarding Spiritualism, which led him to preach on the subject. "I demolished the whole matter, to my own satisfaction… the only 'out' about the affair being that the hearers and myself were ignorant of the whole subject" (LD 296). During his three years on the mission field, Savage "some time engaged with evangelist,

Mr. Earle, in revival work. No question of the reality of these beliefs ever entered my mind in any serious fashion. I almost regretted leaving New England; for I regarded the Unitarian heresy as so serious a matter that I wanted to be on the field, that I might fight it" (MC 19).

In 1867, Savage decided to return to the East in order to attend to his parents needs. He held a pastorate at the Congregational Church in Framingham, Massachusetts from 1867 to 1869. He had his first exposure to Unitarianism in Framingham, which "only set me more and more against it" (MC 20). Later in Framingham, Savage read a tract by Dr. Henry Whitney Bellows in which he argued against future punishment. He opined: "How I longed to accept this great hope for all mankind! But I was afraid. I did not dare trust myself to this feeling, lest I should be led astray, and endanger not only my own soul, but the souls of others." It was also at this time that Savage began to read the scientific literature concerning Darwin's theory of evolution. Being restless in this small town, Savage sought to go west again.

In 1869, he became the pastor of the Congregational Church in Hannibal, Missouri, which he served until 1873. In this ministry, Savage continued to struggle "over the whole ground of modern skepticism, in a hand to hand contest with its shadows and its facts" (CMIX). He had tried to help others, but felt himself limited because he had discovered a way that satisfied him and which would enable him to better serve his parishioners. He began to question "whether it could be justice and goodness and love in a God who gave light to only a few of his children, and left the great masses of the world to wander in darkness and to perish" (MC 21). Savage also began to question the infallibility of the Scriptures, challenged by James Freeman Clarke's *Orthodoxy: Its Truths and Errors.* He also increased his exposure by reading the many scientific books he had collected in his library. Savage became a firm believer in evolution and, while still in the orthodox church, read a paper defending Darwinism before a conference of ministers and delegates in Northern Missouri. He "was sharply, bitterly criticised (sic) and arraigned by the other ministers" (IC 9). He was going through a time of great personal struggle. "I soon became known as a man somewhat dangerous and unsound in faith" (MC 21). Charges were brought against him for having too many science books in his library and for not preaching about things which he ought to believe. Savage recognized that he was no longer orthodox and wondered if there was any pulpit from which he could honestly preach. He could help those who were intellectually satisfied and only required an impulse to action. However, he "found great numbers who took no steps, for the simple reason that they were in doubt as to which way to go; and he has

learned that the ordinary answers to skeptical questions were insufficient to convince skeptics, because they failed to meet them on their own ground" (CMX). It was within this context, that Savage wrote his first book, *Christianity and The Science of Manhood*, assisted by the critical reading of the manuscript by his brother, the Rev. W. H. Savage. He was surprised that the book was held in substantial accord by both the Orthodox and the Liberal wings of the Christian Church in America.

In 1873, Savage became a Unitarian minister. He accepted the invitation to preach at the Third Unitarian Church in Chicago and served as their pastor for a year. During his time in Chicago he became close friends with Robert Collyer, a former blacksmith who became a lay Methodist minister, before immigrating to America in 1849. The Methodist became upset when Collyer accepted an invitation to preach at the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. The Methodist had called Collyer to a trial, but he submitted his resignation. Collyer accepted an invitation to be minister of the Unitarian Church in Chicago.

Although Savage admitted being nervous before entering a pulpit, he quickly made a name for himself in Chicago for being a preacher with unusual ability. His style of sermon preparation and delivery was unusual. He would carefully think through, word for word, his sermon but would not write the sermon. Savage would deliver the sermon without notes, usually walking around the platform and addressing the congregation in a more personal and challenging manner. Following the sermon, he would dictate word for word the sermon for its later publication. Attendance at Savage's sermons rapidly increased.

In 1874, Savage received a call from the Church of the Messiah in New York City, which he declined. He had again become concerned about his parents, and being in New York would not bring him close enough to them. Robert Collyer accepted the Messiah pastorate in 1879. Later in 1874, Savage attended the meeting in Boston of the American Unitarian Association. While in Boston, he was invited to preach at Unity Church, filling in for George H. Hepworth who had recently vacated the pulpit. When he returned to Chicago, he found a telegram with a call from Unity Church. Although he was well pleased with the congregation in Chicago, he immediately accepted the call, as it would place him closer to his parents.

Unity Church was like many city churches whose congregations had moved to the suburbs. The Unity congregation had moved all most in mass to the Back Bay area, leaving the Church on the South End of Boston. Its attendance was drastically down and it was in debt. Savage learned of this situation when he arrived in Boston. Within two months

the church was full every Sunday and was soon out of debt. Savage became famous as preacher in Boston, as well as throughout Unitarianism as he often traveled to lecture and preach. He was often compared with other famous Unitarian preachers, like Theodore Parker. Savage wore "a Prince Albert coat and white necktie" (FR 31) while preaching and was a striking figure walking around the platform—delivering without notes his thoughts, with many illustrations, in a very direct and personable manner to the congregation. Later in his ministry, Savage wore a full beard and mustache.

A member of Unity Church was George H. Ellis, who became Savage's publisher. Ellis also published *The Christian Register*. After each service, Savage would dictate his sermon for publication in the weekly *Unity Pulpit*, which was widely distributed in Boston and in many parts of the country. Ellis was to remain Savage's primary publisher and close friend until his death.

Savage brought to the pulpit of Unity the spirit of free religion and free inquiry, so that Unity "became in the language of that day 'extremely radical'" (CR 517). Although he preached against the infallibility of Biblical writings and in support of evolution, he was not limited to these advanced ideas. "He was a preacher of great note on a wide variety of themes, and he much endeared himself as a man to all who came into close association with him" (CR 517). After a ministry of twenty two years at Unity, a crisis over financial support developed which could only be solved by moving the Church to the Back Bay district where its financial support had moved. The issue was resolved when Savage received a call to become Robert Collyer's colleague at the Church of the Messiah in 1896. Unity Church was dissolved after Savage's leaving, instead of trying to move it to Back Bay.

On June 24, 1896, Harvard University awarded Savage an honorary Doctor of Divinity. The Commencement was held in Sanders Theatre. Engrossed on Savage's diploma was "*virum in veritatis indagatione omnia explorantem et*, which in English reads "Truth-seeker, proving all things, holding fast that which is good; orator, vehement persuasive, eloquent" (HGM 56-57). Other notables receiving honorary degrees at this Commencement were Booker Taliaferro Washington and Alexander Graham Bell. At the Alumni Dinner, held following the Commencement, Savage was one of those who presented brief remarks. He began by noting there were more graduates of the Veterinary School than the Divinity School. However, he assured the audience that religion was not dying out. Savage opined:

> "There are those who say that religion is but a superstition; other timid people, who believe it to be God's truth, shrink from having questions asked. But I feel sure that the man or church that fears to face any question does not thereby show his faith,—he simply illustrates his doubts and fears. The only infidelity of which I am afraid is that which does not believe in God. I expect to see in the future a grander church and a nobler ministry. I welcome science and criticism, for they are but clearing the field for a more magnificent temple in which the fortunate people of the future may worship. The only age in which I should prefer to live instead of the present is the future, for then the world will have adjusted itself… Art beautifies life; literature paints and expresses it; music gives utterance to it finest emotions that are not to be given in words; science is only the headlight on the locomotive of progress. All of these decorate, ornament, and help to comfort life, but religion is the creator of manhood and womanhood. Man is not man, from a scientific point of view, until he has climbed up out of the animal heart and brain into the soul that links him with God." (HGM 65-66)

As Collyer's Associate Minister at the Church of the Messiah, Savage was to take over the main burden of preaching and parish work. Savage preached three Sundays a month, with Collyer preaching the fourth. From the beginning, Savage's preaching attracted new members to the church. "But within two years Savage suffered a serious break-down, and often had to ask his Senior Colleague, at the last minute, to take his place. Collyer recorded that he never went to church without a spare sermon in his pocket during those days" (JH 24). In 1899, Collyer did most of the preaching as Savage struggled with regaining his health. Still Collyer rejoiced with Savage over these very positive years for the church, as its membership grew by the hundreds.

In 1903, Collyer sought to become emeritus minister, with Savage becoming the Senior Minister. Due to the death of Collyer's daughter, Hattie, this shift to an emeritus role was delayed until 1906. Collyer wrote to a friend: "Mr. Savage is my brother beloved… this is the tenth year we have lived and worked together, and no thin mist of trouble has ever fallen between us…" (JH 24). As Savage was beginning the worship service as the Senior Minister, he collapsed with his mental and physical health completely broken. Savage's family took him that day from New York to Boston for medical assistance and rest. "A long rest restored him to health in considerable measure, but he never attempted to take up active work again" (CR 517). Eventually Savage spent most of his retirement in Norridgewock, within two blocks of his boyhood home. While attending the annual Unitarian meeting in Boston and in anticipation of his coming marriage to Miss Katherine Jones of Brockton, Savage had a stroke. He

was found by his son, Maxwell Savage several hours following the stroke. Savage was still breathing but soon died on May 22, 1918. The funeral service was conducted by Charles E. Park at the First Unitarian Church in Mt. Auburn, with the invocation offered by Dr. Samuel A. Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association.

Notices of Savage's death appeared in major newspapers in the United States and in England, as well as in *The Christian Register*, *Unity*, and *The Index*. Savage was praised in *The Christian Register* for his constructive approach which enabled him to assist thousands in rebuilding their faith. *Unity* recognized Savage as "clearly the most successfully aggressive Unitarian minister in America… With a fertility that was amazing and a popular gift of utterance that was delightful his Sunday sermon was promptly printed on the week following, and thought there were but two notes in his message he was forever reiterating that message in a way that was never tiresome… he compelled frank thought and encouraged candid investigation on theological and religious questions to a larger constituency. …he was the first successful exponent of the principle (of evolution) in such a way as to command attention and profoundly affect the thinking of the Protestant religious world… The life of *Unity* practically parallels the ministry of Minot Savage. Their work was interchangeable" (U 224-225). It was also noted that Savage served on the board of directors of the American Unitarian Association, on the council of the National Conference, was a delegate to the International Conference and served on the board of the National Liberal League. Savage was a popular preacher who spoke to people yearning for a new religious direction in radically changing times "who affirmed the religious interpretation of evolution, modern biblical criticism, and comparative religion."