

The Heritage of a Great Bishop: Hobart



Evangelical truth and Apostolic order

—JOHN HENRY HOBART

The traveler who passes through any number of New York State hamlets is likely to spy a venerable Episcopal church. Upon inquiry, he is told the building dates from 1825, but Prayer Book services commenced in the village in 1817. Eighteen seventeen! Ah, yes: Hobart.

These words summarize that man who will ever be a leading character in American Church history. In remote places, among people not congenial to the religious and political predispositions of the Episcopal Church, one finds Hobart or someone sent by him. Be it a solidly Presbyterian town near his home in New Jersey, or a staunch Congregationalist village near the Connecticut border, a logging camp in the Catskills, an Indian settlement in the Adirondack foothills, or a city church: Hobart was there, and his presence was recalled generations later.

This seems strange, for he was the opposite of glamorous. He was of small build, had an unpleasant swarthy complexion, was much afflicted with stomach distress, and had poor eyesight that made necessary spectacles that gave him an owl-like appearance. He was frequently rendered inactive by mental fatigue. Throughout the extant letters of his contemporaries there runs the consistent theme of their anxiety about his health. Strangers found him memorable: "Heard Bishop Hobart preach a very excellent sermon. He is an orator, but unfortunately too much confined to book or notes, which is constantly interrupting the action, of which he has considerable," noted a European auditor in 1815.¹ Despite awkwardness and a very keen predilection to controversy, Hobart was seen by many as "a sort of shining knight, the ideal husband, brother, son and friend."² One can imagine the myopic bishop earnestly preaching orthodox Christianity as he understood it, well

aware of his own personality. Passion and control, character and belief, determination and facility: that is the picture John Henry Hobart leaves of himself.

He was born in Philadelphia on September 14, 1775, the last of nine children of Enoch and Hannah Hobart. His great-great-grandfather came to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633. There were several Puritan clergymen in the family. Grandfather John moved to Philadelphia and became an Episcopalian. John Henry's father was a merchant and ship captain whose success in life was cut short by an early death. The future bishop was still an infant, but Captain Enoch's estate was adequate to enable his widow to send the boy to good schools. He went to the new Episcopal Academy, and later spent two years at the University of Pennsylvania. Then he attended Princeton for two years, graduating in 1793 at the age of eighteen. His family expected young Henry (as he seems to have been called) to become a businessman. He dutifully entered a kinsman's office for a brief time, but then returned to Princeton, where he was a tutor for four years. During this time he became certain of a calling to the Episcopal ministry. We may be certain that he consulted with Bishop White (who had baptized him) during those tutorship years. Princeton was not congenial to Episcopalians who had a high opinion of their Church. It is pleasant to think that Bishop White was a surrogate father, not only in the crucial time of determining vocation, but in Hobart's earlier years. The bishop suggested books for young Hobart to read, but one suspects his real theological training was in the halls of Old Nassau, where his natural combativeness led him to debates with his Presbyterian colleagues. He later said his views were "obnoxious" to his fellow tutors. Here is another attractive facet of Hobart's personality: he was quick to enter controversy, and yet he retained the friendship of his adversaries. Princeton gave Hobart solid biblical background, and a broad knowledge of Church history. One suspects the college of Signer Witherspoon also lent a fierce sense of American national destiny, which Hobart remembered as he later traversed the broad expanses of his diocese.

He was a very able man. Made deacon by Bishop White in 1798, in the next two years he became, successively, minister of several churches in Philadelphia, rector of Christ Church, New Brunswick, and rector of St. George's, Hempstead. By late 1800 he was an assistant minister at Trinity Church, New York. In May of that year he had married Mary Chandler, whose late father, Tory Thomas Bradbury Chandler, had been rector of St. John's in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Whatever books from Chandler's library came along with the bride would further encourage Hobart's High Church views. As an interesting sidelight to our history, this author possesses a Chandler book inscribed "Revd

Dan¹ Nash from his friend and brother John H. Hobart."

Such clerical mobility—five changes in two years, while yet a deacon—would be unacceptable today, but in the Episcopal Church then it betokened a man making his mark. He was ordained priest in Bishop Provoost's last ordination. It has been suggested that Provoost resigned the rectorship only when he was "secure in the knowledge that Trinity had another competent minister on the staff."³ At Trinity Hobart found himself yoked with the aging Abraham Beach as the other assistant under Benjamin Moore, the new rector. Indeed, since Beach had been rector of New Brunswick, he may have been the one who brought Hobart to the notice of Provoost and the vestry. Four months later, the Rev. Cave Jones joined the Trinity Church clergy, with duties primarily at St. Paul's Chapel.

While Jones very soon became much esteemed at St. Paul's, it is Hobart who became the prominent minister at Trinity. Reasons for this are easy to discern. First of all, he had (and knew he had!) a winning personality. Secondly, he gave the appearance of great energy such as would enthrall those who were impatient to see the Episcopal Church bestir itself from stolid eighteenth-century decorum. Lastly, Hobart's preaching provided an unwonted "order and system" to religious devotion such as Provoost's sermons had failed to give. Very soon this man, who had moved from Pennsylvania to New Jersey to Long Island and then to Manhattan, knew he had come into the harbor where he would be. The Trinity congregation filled the new church for the young assistant; if another preacher mounted the pulpit steps, there was an almost audible groan from people who expected to hear Mr. Hobart.

He would always begin his sermons with a biblical text. Like most of his contemporaries, he wrote his sermons. He tried to memorize them, but he often depended upon the manuscript on the pulpit desk. "He appeared in the pulpit as a father anxious for the eternal happiness of his children," wrote an admiring Canadian visitor to an English friend.⁴ No admirer of the new assistant was more fervent than Elizabeth Bayley Seton, daughter of "the most eminent surgeon in New York."⁵ Her grandfather was old Dr. Charlton, rector of St. Andrew's, Staten Island. "Betty" Seton had long been conscious of reaching out to God, whom she sincerely and devotedly sensed as present in her life. What she now longed for, apart from a security not vouchsafed by her husband's uncertain business pursuits, was a consolidation in worship of the various Christian traditions she found satisfying. She wore a crucifix and responded to Wesleyan hymns. Along with many of her well-bred friends, she was accustomed to stately Morning Prayer in Trinity Church, with a fervent anticipation of "Sacrament Sunday." Her sense of duty, submission, and perhaps even of deserved punishment

was at least partly a response to the Calvinism that was never very far away from early America. And she, like her new minister, was influenced by overtones of Christian revival in New York. For "revival" was very much in the air.

But why must Christianity depend upon occasional revivals? Does not God desire a sustained, systematic relationship with his creation? Must religious affirmation be cyclical; should it not be a linear encounter leading back directly to the faith once delivered? There were some, and John Henry Hobart was one, who said Yes, it is to be found in the visible Church of apostolic foundation, the Church of primitive practice and intellectual integrity, the Church of Mrs. Seton's own forebears, saved from papist accretions and Protestant innovations by the peculiar English Reformation, and now transplanted in the United States of America. Here it is, and you are already part of it. This was the message from the new curate who wasn't yet thirty years old, and it exhilarated those who crowded the aisles at Trinity.

Mrs. Seton was particularly in need of such substantial fare. Her husband, as yet unimpressed by Mr. Hobart, was obviously suffering from tuberculosis. His business affairs continued to falter, and the children were unwell. Mr. and Mrs. Hobart were loyal friends, and as the Setons' fortunes worsened, the Hobarts did their best to make things easier for Betty. Perhaps it was at this time that Hobart gave his friend a *Commentary on the Psalms* which she treasured all her life. They also asked Elizabeth Seton to be a godmother of their daughter, Rebecca. When, in a desperate attempt to seek a better climate, the Setons decided to sail to Italy, the Hobarts agreed to store some of their furniture; perhaps Hobart would hang their painting of *The Redeemer* on his own wall until they returned.

During these early years in New York, Hobart's energies were spent in ways that would extend the influence of the Episcopal Church beyond the pulpit of Trinity Church. He became a trustee of Columbia College at an early date, was a founder of the Protestant Episcopal Society for Promoting Religion and Learning in the State of New York, and was busy compiling a devotional manual for laypeople. He was not an average parish assistant and, naturally, this caused some animosity among his fellow clergy in the city. He was ready for whatever challenge, whatever opportunity, came his way. It does no injustice to the man to suppose that he hoped the see of New York might eventually fall to him.

Mrs. Seton could be something of an irritation, if not an embarrassment, along the way. Hobart suspected trouble when he heard that she and her dying husband were sailing to Italy. Knowing the depth of her religious outreach, and fearing that Seton would die in a Roman Catho-

lic country, Hobart warned Elizabeth that she might be overly impressed by the ardor and multitudes at worship in Italy (where he had as yet never been). It happened exactly as he suspected: William Seton died in Italy. The widow was treated very kindly by enthusiastic Roman Catholics, and by the time she returned to New York, her spirit was aimed toward the Roman Catholic Church. Hobart warned her to beware of that "corrupt and sinful communion." He recommended John Newton's account of his conversion to Evangelical Christianity. He thought his friend could still respond to the robustness of "Glorious things of thee are spoken" and the piety of "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds." Hobart was not an unwise man, but wise men can be mistaken—and impatient. After Mrs. Seton became a Roman Catholic there was that decided coolness between them which is to be expected of people who have disappointed each other. It cannot be denied that Hobart, busy with many things, appeared to abandon Elizabeth Seton in the final months of her quest, while her Roman Catholic friends supplied the support the sensitive widow required.⁶

It is interesting that Elizabeth Seton became (on the two-hundredth anniversary of Hobart's birth, September 14, 1975) the first native-born American to be declared a saint by the Church of her adoption. But to us there will be additional salient factors. Hobart's prominence at Trinity Church is one. His early concern for a particular, gifted parishioner is another; we may suppose countless other men and women questioning the Episcopal Church's authenticity similarly occupied his time. Yet another factor is Hobart's loyalty to his church as truly catholic, and his belief that the Church of Rome was not nearly so. Perhaps more important to us is Hobart's early involvement in what soon became a cause célèbre: the conversion of a prominent Episcopal lady to the Roman Church. In this connection, other facts bear historic weight. The first is that a relative of William Seton's, Martin Hoffman, successfully sought to prevent further Roman Catholic invasions upon the family; Hoffman was a progenitor of the great dean of the General Theological Seminary, Eugene Augustus Hoffman. And it may be of further interest to our story that the Setons' next-door neighbor in New York was Joseph Corré, who became father-in-law of Henry Anthon, a clergyman who would in time seek to undo much of the Hobart "system." New York was still a small town in those days. Also, it was at this time (1805) that Hobart's "Essays on Episcopacy" began to appear in the Albany *Centinel*. These essays provoked a spirited pamphlet warfare among several Episcopal and Presbyterian clergy and laymen—and did much to bring the name of Hobart before the public.

Soon John Henry Hobart became very much the man of New York. Later, it would be said that Hobart and Dr. Hoosack and DeWitt Clinton

were "the tripod on which New York stood." The diocesan journals make it clear that Hobart's star began to ascend as soon as he became an assistant at Trinity Church. He was almost immediately elected secretary of the convention, and was the preacher at some subsequent conventions. His conviction that the Church needed various organizations to fulfill definite tasks meant that able people were enlisted. Perhaps most important, he sounded a certain trumpet in a time of nationwide heightened religious activity. "Evangelical truth and Apostolic order" was the reasonable phrase people heard from Hobart, and they found the man and his message impressive. Thus, when the stricken Bishop Moore asked for an assisting bishop, Hobart's election was a clear indication of the new climate prevailing in New York. Hobart was the champion of those who restlessly sought the end of the lethargy characterized (as they thought) by Provoost and Moore. Furthermore, the party idea in Episcopal Church life was by now, 1811, respected in America. Cliques and inner circles enlist human loyalty, but never more than in the first half of the nineteenth century. We will never know exactly what lines might have been drawn by Episcopalians in that era. In his dealings with his neighbor Mrs. Seton, Hobart had already shown that the claims of the Church would be firmly stated. Bishop Provoost's idea, almost certainly unaltered by Bishop Moore, was that a certain sort of New Yorker preferred to worship according to Episcopal form. But now there were those who said that Episcopal worship had a divine and historic basis that made it preferable to all others.

It was later said that in Benjamin Moore's time, the New York clergy were

more orderly than zealous—more orthodox than evangelical—more distinguished for attachment to the ritual of the Church than for a fervent and edifying mode of performing it—more intent upon guarding their folds against the inroads of enthusiasm than upon the conversion of sinners.⁷

And this estimate, written in 1842, might be said to characterize much of the Episcopal Church's image in New York through the years. How perfectly the Church suited the needs of seaboard Americans who desired orderliness and decorum!

When Bishop Moore requested an assistant bishop in 1811, he bared a dilemma. His poor health made the assistance imperative, but at the same time the Episcopal Church was wary of the concept of "assisting" bishops. There was an additional troubling aspect to the situation: was not Bishop Moore himself an auxiliary bishop? The first Bishop of New York was alive, and now suddenly displayed an unaccus-

tomed lively interest in Church affairs. He had doubtless heard that though Bishop Moore's health was said to be "mending," John Henry Hobart would "no doubt be chosen Assistant Bishop."⁸

Of course, Provoost had observed John Henry Hobart's rise at Trinity Church (though the Provoost family preferred attending St. Paul's Chapel, whose minister, Cave Jones, had been entirely acceptable). It may be expected that there was a degree of rivalry between the congregations meeting only several blocks apart. Hobart made many public statements, and his activities were well marked. Bishop Provoost, now nearing seventy years of age, may have been amused by some of Hobart's Old World peculiarities—his use of "ye" in writing, for instance; Provoost eschewed that sort of archaism. Nor would the retired bishop be persuaded by Hobart's notions that the Church would more quickly "revive" if all the Prayer Book feasts and fasts were observed; these, said Hobart, were a perfect safeguard against "ye dangerous extremes of lukewarmness and of enthusiasm." Perhaps even worse for Provoost was Hobart's assessment that Methodism was not as dangerous to Christianity in New York as were the Presbyterians. One of Provoost's most esteemed public friends was the prominent Presbyterian the Reverend Dr. John Rodgers.⁹

RISING TO POWER

Nevertheless, Hobart was the obvious choice for assistant bishop. He was still secretary of the diocesan convention, the confidant of many Episcopal clergy and laymen, and the man whose ability clearly led toward the episcopate. And, it is safe to say, he was Bishop Moore's choice. Not everyone concurred, however. The Rev. Cave Jones, popular and efficient minister at St. Paul's Chapel, was one of those who viewed Hobart's rise with misgivings. It was a matter of conviction and also a matter of personality. Hobart and Jones had quarreled over what appeared to be Hobart's ambition and high-handedness, and they had been unable to make up their differences. Therefore, when it was certain that Hobart would be the chief nominee for assistant bishop, Cave Jones wrote and circulated a tract of eighty-five pages entitled *A Solemn Appeal to the Church*. It appeared ten days before the election. The *Solemn Appeal* is a list of personal grievances which may have concealed deeper diversity; some people have seen the real difficulty as being one final struggle between Tory authoritarianism on the one hand and Whig liberality on the other. Surely, Hobart was often impatient and lofty. Believing himself qualified for great things, he arrogated to himself responsibilities which might better have been dele-

gated to him by an aging rector-bishop. His colleagues naturally chafed when Hobart outpaced them. Now, according to Cave Jones, Hobart caused trouble for Evangelical Richard Channing Moore, rector of St. Stephen's Church (and soon to be Bishop of Virginia). More to the point, Jones accused Hobart of sidetracking the episcopal hopes of Abraham Beach—not a very cogent argument inasmuch as Beach was then in his seventy-first year. Worse, Hobart had used "every electioneering device possible to obtain votes" (which was probably true!).

Hobart was easily elected. In a confidence nourished by victory, he or his supporters succeeded in having the bedridden Bishop Moore bar Cave Jones from the Holy Communion. This was a blunder, for it appeared to be persecution and won friends for Jones. Tension increased. John Jay, the great jurist, and his family were among those who rose to defend Jones. They would thereafter bear a grudge against Hobart and his successor, Benjamin T. Onderdonk. Very soon, St. Paul's Chapel parishioners desired to be independent of Trinity, that Hobartian hotbed. The vestry sidestepped the request and began negotiations with a view to dismissing Cave Jones from his position in the parish.

Jones felt himself treated unjustly by people much more powerful than himself, and in desperation he turned to the resigned bishop, Samuel Provoost. He sought reinstatement. The kindly bishop, removed from ecclesiastical matters, and never much interested in party pressures, advised Jones to "disregard" the deposition proceedings of "Benjamin Moore and his presbyters" as not "sanctioned by the principles of our religion or humanity." What words of the Enlightenment, those! Furthermore, the patriot bishop probably saw in the Cave Jones affair the same injustice he himself had resisted in 1776, and the same authoritarianism he had discerned in Seabury now revived in Hobart. The imbroglio was an effective tonic, for (as was soon reported) "Bishop Provoost is remarkably reinvigorated both in body and mind, and is in better health than he has for many years enjoyed, insomuch as to be able to attend public worship regularly, and funerals when called upon."¹⁰ Clearly, at this late date Samuel Provoost was indicating that he was taking an interest in the affairs of the diocese he had so summarily resigned ten years earlier.

There were several reasons for this. Provoost's family (especially son-in-law Cadwallader Colden) and some friends urged him to thwart Hobart's ambitions. More directly, Provoost may have thought Hobart's supporters irresponsible. Certainly, their having the paralyzed Bishop Moore inhibit Cave Jones from the Communion was reprehensible. For his part, Hobart probably never doubted that he would be elected third Bishop of New York, but this unexpected reentrance of Provoost on the scene *was* awkward.

Just before the election, Hobart wrote "from my little country retreat in the neighborhood of [the present Short Hills, N.J.] I have left my family in New York. I have come out here for a few days to attend to my garden, etc. In fact the country has always charms for me." And then he proceeded to state that retirement in the country was often more appealing than "the arduous duties and awful responsibilities of ye office [of a bishop]" to which his undoubted abilities would soon bring him.¹¹ If we are skeptical about Hobart's sincerity in these sentiments, we may at least grant that he had reason to believe there would not be the necessary three bishops present to consecrate him. James Madison of Virginia and Claggett of Maryland had declared their unwillingness to travel as far as New York. Bishop Provoost resided in the city but seldom officiated and, in any case, disapproved of Hobart. Bishop Moore was unable to participate in any services. The consecration of Hobart was scheduled to take place on May 25 in New Haven, where the General Convention was meeting. Alexander Viets Griswold was to be consecrated Bishop of the Eastern Diocese, the name given a temporary merger of several New England states, at the same time Hobart was to be consecrated for New York. So serious was the problem of finding participating bishops that William White feared "that the American Church would be again subjected to the necessity of having recourse to the mother-church for the episcopacy."¹² Finally Bishop Provoost agreed to be present if the consecration was moved to Trinity Church in New York. Morgan Dix later related, perhaps fancifully:

At the last moment Dr. Provoost had a serious attack of sickness. When therefore the vast congregation assembled in Trinity Church to witness the ceremony it was moved by but one thought, "Could Provoost attend?" After moments of almost intolerable suspense, the news that the venerable bishop had arrived and was actually in the vestry room was whispered from one to another. Audible thanksgiving ran through the assemblage. "He's come! Thank God!" was echoed throughout the sacred edifice. Bishop Provoost remained in the vestry room till the conclusion of Morning Prayer, entering the chancel for the Holy Communion service. He read the Epistle in a low but distinct voice. Dr. Hobart and Dr. Griswold were consecrated together.¹³

Bishop White reported in a letter to the Bishop of Maryland that "it affected me much to see Bishop Provoost brought out in his debilitated State, altho I trust it has not been injurious to him."¹⁴

This was probably Provoost's last participation in a crowded service, and it was the beginning of a sad final chapter in his public life. He had perhaps been urged to take part in the consecration of Hobart by the very people who most disliked the bishop elect. Why? Because it

would be a dramatic reentry into diocesan life and enable Provoost to make the startling but plausible claim that he was the de facto Bishop of New York. This is precisely what happened, and there is reason to think John Jay, as well as Provoost's son-in-law Cadwallader Colden, were among those who encouraged him to circumvent Hobart's ambitions. For, though Hobart was in name the assistant bishop, he was in fact practically the Bishop of New York. This was a fulfillment of wise William White's prediction early in 1811: "I consider it as very improbable that [Bishop Moore] will ever be able to take an active Part in ye Concerns of ye Church."¹⁵

It was commonly understood, then, that the new assistant bishop would direct the affairs of the diocese. And some people were unhappy about the prospect. None was more fearful of what the elevation of Hobart presaged than Provoost, who sent a message to the 1812 convention signing himself "Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, and diocesan of the same." He stated that though poor health will not "enable me to discharge all the duties of a Diocesan, and for that reason I cannot attend now the Convention," he claimed to be the bishop of the Church in New York and "bound to consider every Episcopal act as unauthorized." If the diocesan convention were to accede to this claim, then every act of Bishop Moore since 1801 could be questioned, and as Bishop White with his usual good sense opined, Bishop Moore had acted as *the* Bishop of New York for ten years without any demur from Provoost; how could those ten years now be invalidated?¹⁶ The diocesan convention took the same view, with a mildness calculated to soothe the respected retired bishop. Events unfolded as predicted: the helpless Bishop Moore turned all diocesan matters over to John Henry Hobart. An unfortunate footnote is that the usually magnanimous Hobart refused thereafter to take part with Samuel Provoost in any ceremony, fearing this would confirm Provoost's dubious claims.

THE HOBART EPISCOPACY

Given his ebullient personality, Hobart appeared to dismiss the affair of Provoost's threatened reentry into the diocese. But did he? Despite his personal fame, the unquestioned loyalties gained even from erstwhile opponents, and the statistical gains of his episcopate, tragedy always seems to stalk Hobart. From the beginning, he was at pains to defend his consecration; Bishop White had omitted a crucial Trinitarian formula during the service.¹⁷ Then, there was the seductive attraction of the place in Short Hills: "Our brother," wrote a friend, "has too much

to do and is too often absent from New York. He has purchased a farm forsooth in New Jersey and is there when he should be at his station."¹⁸

This was written just prior to the election, but would be heard again and again throughout Hobart's episcopate. The farm was within the limits of Springfield, New Jersey, but lay closer to the village of Summit. The house was of an ample size, and Hobart liked to think he could be signaled from the steeple of Trinity Church if his presence in the city was urgently needed. The place was purchased in 1810, and the location was chosen probably because it was close to old friends of the Chandler family. It remained in the Hobarts' possession for many years, and though the house has disappeared, the old road traversing the land retains the bishop's name to this day. We can discern a certain dissatisfaction on the part of New Yorkers that their bishop chose a Jersey residence, but in fact it may be that a retreat removed from his own jurisdiction was exactly what was needed. For, in his episcopacy of nearly nineteen years, Hobart was at least twice on the verge of emotional collapse.

Short Hills may be accountable for part of the bishop's fabled career, lending the nonecclesiastical setting often required by an overly active clergyman. Hobart's impatience and nervous energy, even a certain arrogance, were well-known prior to the election. But these were overshadowed by qualities equally known: intellectual brilliance, readiness to admit a mistake, firm belief in God's guidance, and an amazing capacity to endear himself to his colleagues. The times were with Hobart, too. First of all, immigration from England continued strong. The growing city needed skilled and unskilled laborers. Factories were springing up along the Hudson River and its tributary streams. Immigrants from England would be welcomed in New York by a congenial Anglophilism—and none admired England more at this time than the Bishop of New York. Revolution in France, the Napoleonic Wars, and the puzzling unsteadiness of current French sovereigns set much of American loyalty where it always really wanted to be: toward England. As early as 1810, Hobart listed recent English victories over the French in a letter and ends, "Hurra for Old England."¹⁹ A climate preferring English life was, of course, helpful to the Episcopal Church.

The romantic revival also was helpful. In part a reaction against Enlightenment ideals, its outward signs were often seen in adornment associated with "Gothic" styles. But "its imaginative transfiguration of the past was not merely an aesthetic fad, but an inspiration to political and social action."²⁰ Above all, for our present discussion, there was borne along in the romantic revival a "feeling for the still potent allurements of a traditional and authoritarian faith."²¹ Hobart was among

those who would look back and grasp for his day things of the past. No wonder Mrs. Seton and her friends found much to admire in the new assistant's sermons and teaching.

ROMANTIC PIETY

In another, subtle way the romantic revival aided the Episcopal Church. While Gothic motifs had never completely disappeared, they had much declined in the wake of classic simplicities now so much associated with early America. Classic "orderliness" and "visible reason" were to be seen in architecture, heard in music, and experienced in worship. On the other hand, Gothic forms encouraged the human imagination, suggested freedom (at least for the well-born), and praised the products of nature. Both the classic and Gothic modes claim to be essentially "natural," as perhaps they are. And a part of the genius of the Prayer Book is that it can be used with equal force in either setting. If the Western world was now bored with an eighteenth-century espousal of classicism and was ready to indulge in the luxury of romanticism, the Prayer Book was ready to go along, especially now that churchgoers were reading Walter Scott and beginning to require furniture and dwellings appropriate to his characters. If there is hidden meaning in Provoost's remonstrances to the convention, it may be that he was attempting to stop the flow of a tide.

The Episcopal Church readily adapted to the new mood as the nineteenth century progressed. This began with a point of view, for churches are generally wary of tangible changes. Hobart's "high" ideas about the Church, however, were acceptable to many New York Episcopalians because they were based on what seemed to be a new interpretation of history, at the beginning of a century quite ready to adopt a sense of history that could complement its own fast pace. Eventually, this altered point of view began to find expression in the ceremonies of the Church, and that is when great troubles came. But this was after Hobart's death; changes during his time seemed to suit the national feeling. One of these was the romantic revival, with its Gothicisms and reaching back to the supposed benignities of the Middle Ages. Another was the definite religious revival which began just prior to Hobart's ministry, and extended beyond his death.

The "Second Awakening" is the name popularly attached to a new attention given the churches in America in the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1800 no more than 10 percent of the American people were church members.²² As we have seen, influences said to emanate from atheistic France effectively challenged Christianity in America.

At the same time, a postwar conservatism manifested itself. If gifts of the past were to be treasured, none was more important than the religion of Jesus Christ. One form of religious revival may be seen in the career of Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), grandson of Jonathan Edwards, and educator, farmer, and Congregationalist pastor. Dwight directed his pen and voice to counteract inroads of Deism and infidelity. In 1795 he became president of Yale College, which gave him a prestigious platform to continue his intellectual, reasonable arguments entirely appropriate in the eighteenth century.

But more was required, especially as a new century dawned upon a frontier country. If parts of New England and New York could utilize old-style metaphysics, other places found more satisfaction in an emotional approach that blended romanticism and religion.²³ If a heightened sense of history had much to do with the Hobartian triumph, it also led the bishop to stand apart from the conspicuous events of the Second Awakening while at the same time his Church reaped a plentiful harvest from it. Hobart's insistence on the apostolic origins of the Episcopal Church prevented him from appreciating rebirth experiences and the Low Churchmanship of the revival. As a matter of fact, while the Second Awakening was notable in western New York—that "burnt-over district" of religious frenzy and inventiveness—it was decidedly less remarked in New York City. The Awakening lasted many years as a recognizable movement, punctuated by particular events and satisfying increases in church membership; "A state of religious excitement prevails in many neighborhoods through our Diocese," said John McVickar in 1831.²⁴ Indeed, it would be difficult not to trace the devotional piety and church activism of the Second Awakening to the present day. The striking advancement of the Episcopal Church under John Henry Hobart must be seen as a peculiar expression of the Second Awakening in New York.

The times always seemed right for Hobart. And he had the ability to find the right solutions to problems. Very early he elucidated three difficulties that faced the Episcopal Church: education in the Church, missionary expansion in the diocese, and a popularizing of a Church that seemed yet to be the preserve of the privileged. In the first year of his priesthood, Hobart was a leader in organizing the Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Religion and Learning in the State of New York. Two years later, in 1804, he edited *A Companion for the Altar*. This was a communicant's seven-day preparation for the sacrament (though, of course, no Episcopal church in New York had a weekly Eucharist). The *Companion* was borrowed from "divines of the Church of England, who imbibed their principles and their piety at the

pure fountain of the primitive Church," as Hobart truly believed.²⁵ The theological approach is soundly redemptionist:

We are saved from the guilt and dominion of sin by the divine merits and grace of a crucified Redeemer; and the merits and grace of this Redeemer are applied to the soul of the believer in the devout and humble participation of the ordinances of the Church administered by a priesthood who derive their authority by regular transmission from Christ, the Divine Head of the Church.²⁵

Redemptionist, yes. But could there ever be a more concise premise for "high" ideas about the Church? No wonder John Henry Hobart called himself a "high Churchman."²⁶

Hobart had also founded the Protestant Episcopal Theological Society in 1806 and, deprecating Bibles circulated without Prayer Books, he established the New York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society in 1809. This, of course, was in direct competition with the American Bible Society, against which Hobart warned his people. Later, he edited *The Christian's Manual*, which approved ejaculatory prayer, outlined mental prayer, and enjoined churchpeople so to familiarize themselves with the Book of Common Prayer that they could use its words automatically: "Episcopalians have been so much in the habit of praying in the language of the Prayer Book that they cannot make bad prayers," Hobart wrote. "It is more difficult for an Episcopalian to make a bad prayer than a good one."²⁷ Such statements did not always endear Hobart to people of other churches, nor did his idea about "familiarizing" the Prayer Book make him a favorite to those of us who were later required to learn the collect of the day by heart on Sunday mornings.

MAKING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH KNOWN

The second recognized need in the Episcopal Church was missionary expansion. Hobart had the gift of sensible strategy, and the complementary ability to inspire clergymen he sent to remote places in the diocese. In the year after his consecration, he sailed upriver and, apart from calling at some of the landing towns in Dutchess and Ulster counties, he visited Milton, Charlton, Stillwater, Albany, Fairfield, Richfield, Unadilla, Stamford, Troy, Lansingburg, Butternuts, Waterford, Athens, Hudson, and Catskill. Succeeding years saw Hobart in much wider swings throughout selected portions of New York State—and sometimes northern New Jersey, where for a while he had jurisdiction in the absence of a Bishop of New Jersey. Each journey was enthusiastically

reported to the diocesan convention as being a normal concern of that body. In 1813 he suggested a diocesan canon requiring parishes to contribute toward missions in the state. That was in his convention address, in which his call for mission labor supported by an annual offering was considered with his appeal for liturgical faithfulness as a barrier against fanaticism, and for a "learned and pious ministry."

Hobart's most lasting contribution was his popularization of the Episcopal Church and removing it (as far as ever could be done!) from its reputation as being the church of wealth in New York and an enduring vestige of English colonization. By means of his vivid personality, inexhaustible drive, pleasing speech, and readiness to debate, Hobart made Americans aware that the Episcopal Church was now a native church, and could offer rich gifts from its historical treasury. Hobart's "Evangelical truth and Apostolic order" became a celebrated slogan for the Episcopal Church. As we have seen, he spoke an Evangelical's theology, but departed from it when he insisted that the Church, by God's design, is the dispenser of his grace. Those Evangelicals who failed to note this insistence could warmly embrace Hobart. When he clashed with them, it was usually because he would not join in services with other churches or societies. He stood aloof from Masonic exercises and, toward the end of his life, was much criticized because he refused to take part in the obsequies for popular Governor Clinton.

Hobart's *Compantion* would have marked him as a High Churchman, for he had an exalted view of the Church, as we have seen. We must repeat, however, that "High" ceremonies were hardly known in his time. The Episcopal services throughout Hobart's life remained about as they had been when Samuel Provoost was a student at King's College. Hobart distrusted the word "sacrifice" as applied to the Holy Communion, repudiated what he understood to be transubstantiation, and spoke earnestly against auricular confession. Unlike his successor, Hobart was singularly uninterested in clerical garb or church architecture, or the dozens of peculiarities that expended Episcopal energies after 1830. He stressed the invisible structure of the Church, its liturgy, and particularly its ministry, so that critics were likely to retort, "All Church and no Christ."²⁸ No wonder Samuel Provoost and his friends feared another Bishop Seabury had been set loose in New York. But this was another age. The door of the past century was firmly closed and the Georgian Church was, at least in America, gone forever. In Hobart, various strands were intertwined. There was the old-fashioned and moderate theology he had learned in Bishop White's library. Then there were the books of his father-in-law, Thomas Bradbury Chandler. From the one man he would have learned the practicality demanded by the real situation in a pluralistic America. From Chandler he would

have found the answers needed by his own nervous and active personality: a toughness and yet a tenderness and (perhaps best of all) a reverence for the claims of the old high churchmen, now seasoned by intimations of the romantic revival. It is a conservative political and ecclesiastical viewpoint, exactly what Provoost detested. But it was a conservatism maintained by a man of free-wheeling charm and genial manners: hard to place in the scheme of things. Those who looked to one extreme called him an "enthusiast," mused his staunch admirer John McVickar, while "those who looked to the other styled him a 'formalist,' and 'bigot.' It was not every one whose intellectual grasp could take in both points at a single view."²⁹

When Hobart's abilities were activated in expanding the Episcopal Church in New York, the results were immediate. We have seen that he promoted various Church organizations long before his consecration, and published books for communicants. Other Church societies followed: the Young Men's Auxiliary Bible and Prayer Book Society (1816), the Missionary Society (1817), and the New York Sunday School Society (1817). Hobart knew he needed these organizations to strengthen his work, and was always optimistic about the future. "Our Church," he wrote to Rufus King in 1815, "in this country has, I trust, passed through her worst days and better times await her. The interest of lay gentlemen and influence is not one of the least and most gratifying circumstances in encouraging this hope." It has been said that at Hobart's death in 1830 "nearly every important town in the State had an Episcopal church and rector."³⁰ It has also been stated, rightly, that Hobart's great achievements were in the rural areas of his diocese; to his successor was left the mounting problem of New York City's growth gone berserk.

Until 1815 there were three Episcopal bishops of New York. Samuel Provoost sulked in his tent because General Convention declared him to be a "resigned" bishop. Bishop Provoost is "very justly indignant at certain conduct in relation to himself at the late general convention and refuses to take any part whatsoever in the affairs of the Church [in New York] until the House of Bishops shall have decided on his claim to the Diocesanhip," wrote an observer in 1814.³¹ Nonetheless, Provoost was, at least in title, Bishop of New York.

The second bishop resident in New York in 1815 was Benjamin Moore. But since 1811 he had been confined to his sickroom; "Dr. Moore is a nonentity in the Church," wrote a critic of Hobart, who added, "Dr. Hobart is a man from whom I never will ask a favor, and from whom I never expect any."³² Hobart, of course, was the third Episcopal bishop in New York. There was no question that he was de facto bishop of the diocese, but he carefully avoided joining Provoost

in any ceremonies, still fearing the older man might claim diocesan authority.³³

A "retired" bishop, an incapacitated bishop, and an energetic bishop—all in the same city, and all with arguable rights to be acknowledged as diocesan: this was the situation in New York until September 6, 1815, when Samuel Provoost died. The funeral procession formed at his house in Greenwich Street next day, and included "all Episcopal clergy of the city . . . the pall, covered with the Bishop's robes was borne by the elder of the Clergy" to Trinity Church, where the principal officiant at the evening service was Cave Jones. The Provoost family was charged one pound for candles to light the church, which was thronged. In the procession were the lieutenant governor of the state, judges of the federal courts, the mayor of the city, the recorder, members of the bar, the bishop's physicians, the trustees of Columbia College, the vestrymen of Trinity Church—all led by children of the parish school. The interment was in the vault of William Alexander (Philip Livingston's father-in-law), but later, probably when the present church was built, the bishop's coffin was transferred to the Colden plot in Trinity Cemetery.

Provoost died in the year peace was declared after the War of 1812. The United States was now decidedly independent of the mother country. It was an appropriate time for the old bishop to die. His earliest years had been spent in New York, a large town already known for its outstanding silversmiths and cabinetmakers, a place where itinerant artists knew rich sitters awaited them, a city where the English Church had pretensions never fully substantiated. Provoost, knowing the difference, disdained the sham and allowed himself the luxury of choosing what he thought was the best of the world in which he lived. Perhaps therein lay the failures posterity would attribute to him.

Provoost's death meant that now, at last, Benjamin Moore was second Bishop of New York. Though "able to reason and converse"³⁴ Moore continued unable to act as bishop. Hobart was very much in charge of the Episcopal Church in New York, and also New Jersey, where, though the province was of Quaker and Presbyterian origins, the Church of England flourished in at least twenty-four congregations prior to the Revolution.³⁵ Hobart and William White shared responsibility for the Church in New Jersey until 1815, when Bishop Croes was consecrated for that state.

The next year, 1816, Bishop Moore of New York "expired on Tuesday evening, the 27th of February, 1816, at his residence at Greenwich, near New York, in the sixty-eighth year of his age."³⁶ Another prominent link with pre-Revolutionary America was broken. The Church paused to remember this gentle man who "never made display of tal-

ent, of learning or of station." Bishop Hobart preached the funeral sermon, and said Benjamin Moore loved the Church, was steady in principle, and "lived until he saw her . . . raised from the dust, and putting on the garments of glory and beauty."³⁷

THE GENERAL SEMINARY

With Provoost gone in 1815 and Moore the next year, one might expect a significant event in 1817. The General Theological Seminary calls that the year of its origin, but a theological training school was in Hobart's mind much earlier. Of all the needs that his various organizations were intended to meet, none was greater than that of a seminary. Presbyterians and Congregationalists and Dutch Reformed candidates could prepare for the ministry in famous places equipped with appropriate faculties. Episcopalians were obliged to find a clerical tutor. Hobart probably imagined an Episcopal theological department at Columbia College, but the tide began to run against Episcopal domination of the college when Bishop Moore resigned as president in 1811. The head of the college should be an Episcopalian because of Trinity's land grant—so ran the agreement—but now not even staunch Episcopalians were prepared to contend for full Episcopal management. Not even Hobart. The appointment of Episcopalian William Harris as president and Presbyterian John M. Mason as provost made it clear that too many influential trustees were prepared to argue for neutrality in the college. Hobart's influence at Columbia was therefore considerably diminished. But he nursed the hope that if the college abandoned its buildings to move elsewhere, the land could be reclaimed by Trinity and used as a seminary.³⁸

New York was only one diocese looking for a seminary. Other Episcopal dioceses needed places where candidates for the ministry could study. Bishop White and Bishop Hobart thought of diocesan seminaries, but other Church leaders envisioned a main seminary controlled by the General Convention. The idea of control aroused Hobart. Predictably, he opposed such a seminary, arguing with cogency that "the direction and superintendence" of theological studies was the responsibility of the ordaining bishop, not the responsibility of the General Convention. Hobart was not likely to share these important duties with others—and certainly not an impersonal legislative body such as General Convention. Nevertheless, the move toward a "general" seminary grew stronger, and Hobart perceived possibilities in the enterprise when the General Convention, on May 27, 1817, proposed that "this seminary be located in the city of New York." Perhaps Hobart

also found encouragement in knowing that his views might be dominant in the seminary if the Diocese of New York could furnish an impressive wherewithal. He already knew that his predecessor's son, Clement Clarke Moore, was ready to give an entire block of his Chelsea estate if the seminary would build there. Early in 1818 he met in Philadelphia with other members of the "theological school committee and agreed on certain measures for collecting funds."³⁹ This particular committee did not do its work very well, for the General Theological Seminary was a most impecunious institution for many years to come. Nonetheless, there was enough optimism to induce two able priests, Samuel Farmer Jarvis and Samuel H. Turner, to become the first full-time professors when the seminary began in the spring of 1819, with six students meeting in a corner room of the gallery of St. Paul's Chapel.

Fortunately for those who feared that Hobart would dominate the General Seminary, he appears to have been too busy elsewhere to enforce his will upon the seminary; furthermore, in Jarvis and Turner he would encounter wills as strong as his own. Like many men who must control any venture to which they put their hand, once Hobart discovered he could not rule the General Convention's seminary, his lack of interest in it was manifest. Bishop Brownell of Connecticut was more encouraging, and at his invitation the seminary forsook the school-rooms offered by Trinity Church and moved to space above a bookstore in New Haven. This further displeased Hobart, who regarded New Haven with the contempt customarily reserved by a Princetonian for Yale; was not Old Eli in 1820 still a bastion of New England Congregationalism?

Now that the General Seminary was removed from New York City, Hobart resumed his efforts for a diocesan seminary. Part of his plans included a regrettable attempt to undermine whatever progress the New Haven seminary might enjoy. Hobart called upon Clement Clarke Moore for the Chelsea land the old bishop's son had promised, and he had in hand certain funds with which to proceed with his theological school. As far as Hobart was concerned, there could now be two seminaries: the doubtful one in New Haven, and the other safely under his control in New York. (Another seminary was beginning, in Virginia, at this time.) The resourceful bishop was also thinking of an "Interior School" upstate, in Geneva, where men from that part of the diocese could be trained for the ministry. Meanwhile, the New York Diocesan School in New York City opened on May 18, 1821, with four students; later in the year, there were nine students at the Geneva School.

Then Jacob Sherred died. Of German Lutheran background, he had been a successful merchant and a vestryman of Trinity Church. Not long before his death, Sherred had been induced by John Pintard to

leave a handsome bequest for the establishment of a seminary "within the State of New York, under the direction or by the authority of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church." *Within the State and the authority of the General Convention!* Within days, both the New Haven and New York seminaries were claiming the bequest; both had attorneys assuring them of their rights. Bishop White called a special session of the General Convention. The result was that the General Theological Seminary was relocated in New York City, on the Moore land that was eventually named Chelsea Square on the road that has become Ninth Avenue. Hobart's control was somewhat limited by the absurdly large number of trustees provided by the General Convention. The resettled and redefined seminary pleased most people, though one churchman wondered if "the evil of the undue influence of New York" (meaning, of course, Bishop Hobart) might not pose a threat to sound theological education.⁴⁰

Throughout these proceedings, which have been admirably told by the seminary's historian, Powel M. Dawley, Hobart's whole personality may be seen: his need to control, his occasional pettiness, his ability to conciliate, and his final magnanimity. "Scholarship was not his stronghold,"⁴¹ declared John McVickar, who thought his god's greatest personal gifts lay in the ability to grasp a situation and give it practical application. Hobart is described variously as "affectionate," "child like," "warm and gentle and kind."⁴² Charles Finney, the Abolitionist preacher who designed and had built the Broadway Tabernacle after the Tappen brothers invited him to New York, left in his autobiography an appealing vignette of Hobart. A young girl of the street responded to a revival meeting. Later, she told Finney she had stolen a shawl belonging to Bishop Hobart's daughter. Finney declared the shawl must be returned. So the poor girl took herself to the bishop's doorstep. Whoever responded to the knock ushered her into Hobart's presence, and the crime was confessed. "When I told him, he wept, laid his hand on my head, and said he forgave me."⁴³

RECORDS OF SUCCESS

One New York City parish that entered upon a flourishing existence in the Hobart years was St. Stephen's Church, then on the corner of Broome and Chrystie streets. The church had been founded by English Lutherans in 1805 and by 1816 was reported to be the largest congregation in the diocese. It was said to be composed of "merchants, grocers, butchers, wheelwrights, shoemakers, watchmakers, sail makers and bricklayers."⁴⁴ When Hobart was consecrated, his friend Richard Chan-

ning Moore was rector of St. Stephen's. The church then had the customary high pulpit in the aisle "with velvet cushions and silk tassels." The choir of men and women found the note by means of a tuning fork, though a pipe organ was soon purchased. In winter the church was warmed by four great iron stoves that burned hickory; the sexton (for a fee) would help the people fill their portable footwarmers with coals from these stoves. There had been a Sunday school at St. Stephen's from its beginnings (it was, possibly, the first Episcopal Sunday school in New York), but Hobart's enthusiasm for religious education and the effects of the Second Awakening practically assured a Sunday school in every active parish by 1825. The fact that its rector, Richard Channing Moore, was a noted preacher and soon to be Bishop of Virginia promoted the fortunes of St. Stephen's Church, and it enjoyed much prosperity until its congregation joined in the uptown hike which proved to be disastrous to all but the most resilient of parishes.

Another church that traces its prosperity to the Hobart era is St. George's, Newburgh. This was a parish of Royal Charter (1770), whose first building dated from prior to 1750. St. George's had fallen on hard times in the Revolutionary War and had failed to make the recovery other churches enjoyed. Bishop Hobart persuaded John Brown, rector of Fishkill, to go to Newburgh in 1815; within four years, a new church was built and St. George's was on the way to being one of the Hudson Valley's prime parishes. Such a rapid recovery suggests the growth of Newburgh, then a port of increasing prosperity. It also illustrates the improved fortunes of the Episcopal Church in the metropolitan area. John Brown was rector of St. George's for sixty-two years, his ministry there being a long link between the era of Benjamin Moore and that of Henry C. Potter. In that time, Brown founded several missions that grew into independent parishes and a hospital. In his time, too, old St. Thomas's, New Windsor, was revived. This was another SPG mission, reaching back as early as 1731. When the old chapel burned in 1845, it was immediately replaced by one of America's significant "correct" stone Gothic country churches, copied from St. James the Less, Philadelphia (which was itself a replica of St. Michael's, Long Stanton, Cambridgeshire).

These accounts of quickened growth might be repeated again and again in this history. Churches of all major denominations prospered in the Era of Good Feeling. The Episcopal Church in New York was particularly able, for reasons already outlined, to utilize all the favorable breezes of those times—especially with a man like Hobart at the helm. The statistics are impressive: assuming the beginning of Hobart's episcopacy to be 1812, his first full year as Moore's assistant, there were in the Diocese of New York twenty-five clergy, forty churches, and 2,345

communicants. When Hobart died, there were 168 clergy, sixty-eight congregations, and 6,708 communicants.

Given the strain upon a man of the bishop's temperament, the responsibilities he saw attending upon such growth brought their own warnings. A prolonged European tour seemed to ward off an impending breakdown. But once back in New York, the bishop gathered again all the strands in his own hands and resumed the control that was his wont. In all probability he was dissatisfied at the manner in which affairs had been managed in his absence. Above all, there is a sense of the *loneliness* the man must have felt: even his fellow bishops seemed wary of him. They were often irritated by his eagerness to command the situation. He had myriad admirers, persons of all walks of life. Proud parents conferred his name upon their children. But were there many friends?

His death came, most appropriately, while he was on a visitation in a far-off corner of the diocese. The bishop arrived in Auburn the evening of September 1, 1830. He said he had a slight cold with some chills, but appeared to be well the next day when he preached in St. Peter's Church and confirmed nine candidates. But when he returned to the rectory he complained of "coldness and oppression of the stomach." No one seems to have become alarmed. The bishop had shown similar symptoms for twenty years, and in any case had been indisposed in that same house four years earlier. Several days later, it was apparent that Hobart was very ill. His son, a physician, was summoned from New York. Hobart died September 12, 1830, at the age of fifty-five. The route from Auburn to New York City became one long funeral procession by means of horse-drawn wagon, canal barge, and the river steamboat *Constellation*. A crowd met the coffin at the dock in Manhattan and conveyed it to Trinity Church, where the burial service was read by Hobart's Evangelical friend, Bishop Moore of Virginia. Benjamin T. Onderdonk, long the bishop's trusted lieutenant, was the preacher at the service.