

# Onderdonk: Triumph and Tragedy



*... was half talked into the belief that there was something in all this. But I can't and won't believe it. But I'm too much mystified and astonished and disgusted to discuss the matter. One thing I'm surprised at, I confess: the very general feeling of sympathy for the Bishop that seems to exist even in quarters where one would least expect it.*

—GEORGE TEMPLETON STRONG

Any man elected so quickly to take the place of the renowned Hobart must have possessed considerable popularity, ability, and the implicit benediction of his predecessor. And so it was. Benjamin Treadwell Onderdonk was a native son, born in New York City on July 15, 1791. His older brother, Henry Ustick Onderdonk, was a student in medicine before he, too, decided to enter the ministry. Both men studied under Hobart and were ordained. Henry served as missionary in Canandaigua and subsequently became rector of St. Anne's in Brooklyn; he was elected Assistant Bishop of Pennsylvania in 1827. He thus came to work with William White, the now aged mentor of Hobart. Benjamin Onderdonk's entire ministry had been as an assistant at Trinity Church and a teacher at the General Theological Seminary. He was often considered a surrogate for Bishop Hobart.<sup>1</sup>

"The opinion of his own friends is, I find, that the Bishop is a little Dutch," wrote James Fenimore Cooper.<sup>2</sup> If the novelist meant that Onderdonk tended to be tenacious and stubborn, the judgment can be sustained by a hundred proofs. Thoroughly committed to the principles of his tutor and benefactor, Hobart, Benjamin Onderdonk never hesitated to seize an opportunity to promote New York High Churchmanship. He was not one to soften his importunities. A letter he wrote to John Henry Hopkins of Pittsburgh as early as 1828 is an illustration: he wanted Hopkins (who would one day sit in judgment upon him) to come to the vacant St. Stephen's Church in New York because the rec-

tor there should be a man "of sound Church principles who will keep that church in unity of sentiment and operation with the Bishop and the great body of Clergy in this City and diocese."

The letter is forthright and does not hesitate to equate the "good cause" with Hobartian High Churchmanship.<sup>3</sup> It is quoted here not only because it reveals Onderdonk's bluntness but also because it shows us that the assistant at Trinity was very much in the corridors of influence. He was the hardworking, loyal servant of Hobart and, like the bishop, was liable to quarrel with his associates. But alas, he lacked Hobart's celebrated grace and charm. One suspects he also had little of that other most endearing Hobart quality: a ready ability to apologize when shown to be in error. Nevertheless, he was friendly, often child-like, and despite his capacity for politicking there seems to have been an otherworldliness about him. He was speedily made the fourth Bishop of New York in an election that met with general approval, though some of Onderdonk's best friends regretted a certain coarseness of manner and an unfortunate habit of openly "fondling" his students at the seminary<sup>4</sup> or "often caressing" people he knew well.<sup>5</sup>

The years between 1830 and 1840 were ones of continued great advance for the Episcopal Church. Even by the beginning of that decade Greene County was "well sprinkled with flourishing missions."<sup>6</sup> One reason why the Episcopal Church was to be found in such remote hamlets is that between 1830 and 1840 the number of its clergy doubled.<sup>7</sup> Another reason is that, in New York State, Hobart had prosecuted an energetic missionary strategy. And perhaps there is yet another reason why the Episcopal Church began to thrive in these burgeoning years of the nineteenth century: having passed through an era of unpopularity caused by the politics of the Revolutionary War, the Episcopal Church tended to avoid involvement in the many parties and pressure groups that were springing up in the young nation. The Church stood aloof from, and seemed untouched by, the antislavery and anti-Masonic movements. When Temperance became a nationwide issue, some notable Episcopalians were its exponents, but they tended to make it mainly a household virtue, avoiding political formalities. Even so, the Temperance question had an emotional and economic appeal, and there is no doubt that the drinking habits of Americans were profoundly altered in the 1830s. It is arguable that the Temperance movement led to the downfall of both Onderdonks. One other national political movement probably had a certain influence upon Episcopalians, though the Church itself wasn't officially involved: the nativist Know-Nothings, who deplored the influences brought to these shores by the increasing numbers of non-British immigrants.

## NEW YORK IN THE 1830s

When Onderdonk was consecrated Bishop of New York in 1830, there were 128 clergy, 68 congregations, and an undetermined number of missions, and 6,708 communicants in the state. By the end of his active episcopate (1845), there were 198 clergy, 165 church buildings, and 13,486 communicants: a remarkable increase. Much was due, of course, to continued immigration from England, which tended to fill Episcopal churches while old-timers in Manhattan were lamenting the disappearance of the Knickerbocker families. Changes were, as ever, carefully noted. "Everyone is driving after money," said James Fenimore Cooper in 1833 (forgetting for the moment that his own Quaker cum Episcopal family had done rather well in that line). Cooper also thought he could see a new "coldness" about New Yorkers, and he wondered if the city fathers were capable of controlling a municipality where "there is an alarm of fire every half-hour, as usual, and the pigs have the freedom of the city, as usual."<sup>8</sup> Cooper counted among his relatives the Jays, Watts, Laights, Kearneys, and dePeysters; his brother-in-law, the Rev. William Heathcote DeLancey—note the middle name—would soon be the first Bishop of Western New York.

The diarist Philip Hone was another knowledgeable New Yorker who was dubious about developments. He wrote in 1833 that "emigration to America [is] in numbers so great as to cause serious alarm . . . 49,569 emigrants have arrived in Quebec since the opening of navigation of the St. Lawrence the present year. Of these, a large proportion find their way into the United States, destitute and friendless."<sup>9</sup> "All Europe is coming across the ocean," he wrote later.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless Hone was not a Know-Nothing or much in sympathy with the exclusionists; he reserved his disdain for the American parvenus he discerned about him. For, as the port grew, fortunes were rapidly made and, often, as rapidly lost. John Bernard, an English actor visiting New York City about this time, left a memorable glimpse of

the habits of New York merchants [who] breakfasted at 8 or half-past, and by 9 were in their counting houses to lay out the business of the day; at 10 they are on their wharves, with aprons around their waists, rolling hogsheads of rum and molasses; at 12 at market, flying about as dirty and as diligent as porters; at 2 back again to the rolling, heaving, hallooing and scribbling. At 4 they went to dress for dinner; at 7 to the play; at 11 to supper.<sup>11</sup>

## THE CHURCH IN THE 1830s

When Benjamin T. Onderdonk became the Bishop of New York, the growth of the Episcopal Church nationwide was thought to be "very much in the Evangelical direction."<sup>12</sup> By this is meant that what became known as the Oxford principles were generally unknown, or ignored. We have seen that Hobart favored certain embellishments in the churches, and yet spoke often of the "apostolic purity" of the Episcopal Church. Hobart however was quite at home with, and uncomplaining about, the familiar arrangements of church interiors. But his successor Onderdonk urged changes that, though they might be already in the air, were subsequently blamed on him.

And indeed, in a fast-growing nation and Church it was time to question some of the old ways of doing things. Church buildings in the 1830s were very plain, inside and out. No crosses were to be seen, and little interior color. The officiant clung to the old custom of changing vestments in mid-service: at sermon-time he would slip out from under his great floor-length surplice and don a black silk gown with sleeves looped or folded back above the elbows. In cold weather, he would wear gloves, with the forefinger snipped so he could turn the pages of his long sermon. (Those gloves might be colored, even if the walls were not; one congregation long remembered the sight of the rector's new lavender kid gloves; that morning he preached a sermon on "Humility.")<sup>13</sup> The "little ceremonies" of today were unknown: no entrance or exit ritual, no "passing the plate" and presentation; alms were collected (if at all during the service) in bags or boxes and placed at the head of the aisle. Preaching was confined to "pro-virtue and anti-vice,"<sup>14</sup> which was, at least, a change from the continual emphasis on adoption that had prevailed in an earlier, Calvinist-inspired age.

Even so, the thought pattern of most Episcopal clergy expressed itself in distinctly Evangelical language. Both Hobart and Onderdonk preached in a solidly redemptionist style. Their "theological stance" (as we would say today) led them to emphasize the atoning work of Christ. They seem to have seldom referred to the Incarnational point of view that is thought to be more characteristically Anglican. The language these High Churchmen used when they exhorted each other reveals their understanding of God. "Keep near to the throne of grace," wrote Levi Silliman Ives to William R. Whittingham.<sup>15</sup> Whittingham had succeeded Ives as rector of St. Luke's in-the-Fields; the pair had made that parish a bastion of New York High Churchmanship. Ives bade his friend pay special attention to the Bible class there, whose members were "often in my heart before God."<sup>16</sup> Whittingham speaks the same way; of a penitent, he wrote, "He has thrown himself at the foot of the

cross and he has known Jesus to be precious.”<sup>17</sup> Of himself, Whittingham noted, “Sadly wasted time, What but the blood of Christ can bring it back!”<sup>18</sup> Or, revisit the death chamber of Hobart, the most noted of all High Churchmen, the man credited with turning the Church away from the “Evangelical direction.” The words he uses to the anguished visitors to his bedside are these: “I have no merit of my own; as a guilty sinner would I go to my Savior, casting all my reliance upon him—the atonement of his blood. He is my only dependence—my Redeemer, my Sanctifier, my God, my Judge.”<sup>19</sup> Finally—after the man has lain there desperately ill for more than a week!—someone suggests the Communion, and it is almost as a revelation to himself that Hobart replies, “The Sacrament—the Sacrament, that is the last thing, that is all, let me have it.”<sup>20</sup>

Both Evangelicals and High Churchmen could use the same language, because they saw the contest not as one between what soon came to be a High Church and Low Church difference, but rather one that was High Church opposed to Latitudinarianism. Hobart had labored long for apostolic order and evangelical truth as he understood it. He and his successor, Onderdonk, cherished the prerogatives, the exclusiveness, they believed attached to a church of apostolic succession. They adorned the Church of the Prayer Book with an elaborate, pious language unknown to the Caroline divines, and disdained by the Latitudinarians. This partly explains why Samuel Provoost, and others of his age, were swept into oblivion.<sup>21</sup>

Changes were brewing, however. The poetry of John Keble was popular with many Episcopalians about the time Onderdonk became Bishop of New York. Hobart had visited Keble’s friend, Hugh James Rose. Several clergymen in America corresponded with Keble, whose *Christian Year* was well-known and struck the right note for an age just dawning. A quotation from Keble’s “Holy Innocents Day,” for instance, was to be found on many an infant’s grave marker in years to come: “Just born, baptized, and buried.” Was there ever a better alliterative line for an age devoted to the bittersweet?

Another cause of change was the effect of the Episcopal seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, founded about the same time Hobart settled the General Seminary under his own watchfulness in New York City. “The seminary in Virginia has made Evangelicals dangerous,” declared Hobart to a friend in Maryland in 1826.<sup>22</sup> Prior to 1817 an Episcopalian preparing for ordination studied under a knowledgeable, able presbyter or bishop who shared with the young man what books and time he had at his disposal. When new ideas arrived, they came by way of the ocean, from England. American theological training had usually been managed through tutors. Now there were two seminaries, in New York

and Virginia. Each of them was under a separate, often contending, influence, for one sought to retain and improve what it found in the Evangelical heritage of the Episcopal Church while the other with equal determination sought what was precious in the writings of the Oxford divines and their predecessors. The Virginia Seminary tended to a lack of interest in the ancient claims of the Church, stressed the Bible, used the Prayer Book, and urged foreign missions. The General Seminary, on the other hand, had a "higher" view of the Church as descended by means of bishops from the days of the apostles, protected the Church by preferring not to cooperate with other religious bodies, and believed mightily in the spiritual value of outward and visible things. It is easy to see that in this division of emphasis, the Evangelicals would mark themselves hereafter with the language and piety hitherto shared by all.

Hobart's sudden death also played a part in fixing future events. Though not young according to longevity of his own time, Hobart's death bore the sure marks of heroism. He died hard at work, in a distant place, without warning, worn out (as they said) in the Church's service. It is tempting to imagine what might have happened to the Church in New York had Hobart lived to an old age of diminished powers such as plagued his two predecessors. And, had he lived, would he have reaped the whirlwind eventually visited upon Onderdonk? Probably not. Hobart's facile grace would enable him to withstand the more advanced High Churchmen while yet retaining their loyalty. His integrity, and surprising readiness to admit mistakes, would have kept the respect of Evangelicals and Low Churchmen. To be succinct: Hobart probably could have carried off the Carey ordination in 1843; Onderdonk could not.

#### THE ONDERDONK STYLE

This compounds the tragedy, for there could never be a bishop more well-meaning and hardworking—*plodding* is a better word—than Onderdonk. Whereas Hobart was given to great bursts of energy and accomplishment followed by nervous exhaustion or disappearance into the remoteness of his beloved Short Hills, Onderdonk seems to have labored steadily, day after day, month after month, for the fifteen years of his episcopate. In addition to the indefatigable traveling made necessary by the growth of the Church and the growth of the state, Onderdonk was a superior administrator. (In those days that meant that he managed to journey, write, plan, and pray without any assistance.) In only one area does he seem to have failed, and that is in meeting his

classes at the General Seminary—an irony, since his High Church influence was later declared to be perilous to the students there.

The Onderdonk years formally began with the diocesan convention in "old" Trinity Church on Broadway. (Though not yet forty years of age, the church was already showing signs of inferior workmanship and would be pulled down toward the end of Onderdonk's episcopate.) In the diocesan convention of 1830, eighty-two clergy represented 182 congregations in the diocese. There were 122 laymen present at the opening ceremonies, which included Morning Prayer, the bishop's charge to the clergy, an ordination, and the Holy Communion. It was the custom in New York, and probably in other large dioceses, for visiting bishops to attend; it was also customary in New York to have a formal roll call and a procession of professors and students from the General Seminary. This latter was a Hobart-Onderdonk touch and, as the High Church reputation of the seminary increased, was much resented by some of the convention members.

In his initial convention, Bishop Onderdonk gratefully referred to his predecessor and then reported his visitations: upriver, May through June (1831) he visited parishes as far north as Hudson. In July he went to Albany, and in the following weeks was in Troy, Saratoga, Ticonderoga, Plattsburgh, Schenectady, Amsterdam, Geneva, Auburn, Skaneateles, Ithaca, Batavia, Rochester, Oswego, Cazanovia, and Pompey, ending with the Indian congregation at Oneida and the church in Utica. He returned to New York City on September 12 having, in this year, ordained eight deacons, five priests, and confirmed 1,350 men, women, and children. He had spent one-third of the year traveling, and it was a story to be repeated with even more intensity in the years to come.

The rigors and inconveniences of episcopal travels were a necessary duty for the American successors of the apostles. When Whittingham became Bishop of Maryland he asked Onderdonk to advise him about planning his travels. The bishop wrote, from Sandy Hill in Washington County, somewhat wryly:

On setting aboard the steam boat, at Newburgh, on Friday night at an unusually late hour, it was my lot to find it completely booked—every berth settled, mattress, table, etc. occupied by slumberers. My night was therefore spent in the rather comfortless posture of sitting with my hand as the only pillow for my head. Thus refreshed, I had double duty on Saturday and was obliged to devote the rainy evening in making calls that could not with propriety be omitted. Then there was before me twelve or thirteen miles travel and three preachings, for the following day. Will you not excuse me, under these circumstances, from begging to be excused from my promise to sit down and prepare memoranda of my week's service? Sunday night I was some-

what similarly situated, but now, being here, weatherbound, for the night, on my way to Whitehall, I will tell you what, by the divine goodness, I have been enabled to do of episcopal duty since leaving home . . .<sup>23</sup>

Bishop Onderdonk then proceeds to say that on the previous Monday he had been in North Salem, Westchester County. On Tuesday, he was at Christ Church, Patterson. Thursday found him in Garrison, and on Friday he was at St. George's, Newburgh, but in the afternoon he crossed the river to lay the cornerstone for St. Anna's Church, Matteawan. It was that night he found no accommodations on the steamboat; next day he instituted Horatio Potter rector of St. Peter's, Albany. On Sunday he consecrated the new church in Cohoes, and the next day there was a confirmation at St. John's, Troy. Today, a bishop might keep these appointments with comparative ease, but in the 1830s public transportation was unreliable. There was no Hudson River Railroad connecting New York City with Albany until 1854. Travel was rough, time-consuming.

Apart from fulfilling the travels that then took so much of a bishop's time and energy, it was, of course, necessary that the Bishop of New York be aware of public trends. Like Hone and Cooper and others, Benjamin Onderdonk was aware of the effects of immigration upon New York City. In his first convention address he warned those present that the Church had a special responsibility for the many immigrants arriving from England and Ireland. In 1832 he was able to report that "the first fruits of the New York Protestant Episcopal Mission Society" had been the consecration of the Church of the Holy Evangelists in Vandewater Street. Here was a free church for immigrants, where visitors to the city could be welcomed, for the other churches had assigned or rented pews that were off limits to strangers. "This enterprise has been crowned with signal success," the bishop exulted, and then he proceeded to that sort of abrasive remark that so often marred his public utterances: the Mission Society's constitution, he said, "recognizes the general supervision of, and responsibility to, the ecclesiastical authority of the Diocese, and the most marked and respectful consideration has been paid to my feelings and wishes."<sup>24</sup> Everyone present knew there had been difficulties with the clergyman in charge of Holy Evangelist Church, but with such lordly remarks, repeated many times, lay the beginnings of the bishop's downfall. His gratuitous pronouncements must have been offensive to some of the delegates to convention, or to some of the rectors in whose churches he spoke. Much later, a commentator upon the City of New York asserted that Bishop Onderdonk had "great executive talent, and ruled the diocese, it is said, with a rod of iron. In personal appearance he resembled Napoleon the First,



of which fact he was quite proud. . . . He was decidedly the ablest man that has ruled the see of New York for many generations."<sup>25</sup>

In the better months of the year the bishop made his western tours. It was a rigorous life for a man in his forties (an older age then than now). Tedious rides, interruptions, the inconveniences of long waits—then a service, a meeting, perhaps a confrontation with parish leaders, a meal, and then a bed in a strange chamber—all to be repeated the next day, and the day after: this was Onderdonk's life through the summer. History has not awarded him the praise it bestows upon Hobart. No portrait of Onderdonk was ever hung in diocesan halls. But he, more than any other bishop, was responsible for the growth of the Church in the State of New York. This is not to say that Hobart is undeserving of the laurels offered him but, rather, that the pressures of population growth, immigration, and undeniable vibrancy of Church life—an acceleration of all factors—bore more heavily upon Bishop Onderdonk. The Erie Canal was a significant part of Onderdonk's problems because it moved people far away from Manhattan, where a Bishop of New York naturally resides. After 1830 the fertile fields that General Sullivan's men had appropriated from the Indians became the city's breadbasket. The thinner, worked-out soil of the Hudson Valley might be adequate for the lawn of a gentleman's "villa," but a growing port demanded more hay and wheat and corn and beef, and these would hereafter arrive by canal boats plying the new Erie. Coal, slate, and cement would soon come to the city by way of the new Delaware and Hudson Canal, which had its terminus in Roundout, near Kingston, and was the cause of rising hamlets along its waterway; soon churches would be needed there, too. And, even in Bishop Onderdonk's time, people began to long for a respite from civilization such as might be provided by the Catskill wilderness and the breathtaking views from the mountain escarpments. The tanbark men killed the hemlocks, leaving them lying where loggers could cut them for sheathing New York City dwellings—and Catskill Mountain boardinghouses.

Beginning in 1832, Bishop Onderdonk tried to have annual confirmations in the city churches because of "the many strangers sojourning among us."<sup>26</sup> He would continue "the usual triennial" visitations in all other places. That year he went northward as far as the Canadian border, on to Utica, and then to the Oneidas. This would have been a poignant visit, for Onderdonk was familiar with the Indians' long attachment to the Church. He reported

Holy Communion was, of course, administered, when a large number of Indians were among the recipients. The *Gloria in Excelsis* was chanted by the Indians in their native tongue [but] that portion of the Oneidas which professed attachment to our Church removed soon after, to the vicinity of Green Bay.<sup>27</sup>

That July the bishop made a wide circuit through the Catskills and on up to Watertown, and having done this he could say he had visited every parish in the diocese at least once. In 1832 alone, he had traveled 3,000 miles "to almost every extremity of the State," and in that year he had ordained nine priests and twenty-two deacons, consecrated twenty churches, and confirmed 1,101 persons in a diocese that now numbered 10,030 communicants with 183 clergy.

Onderdonk's liturgical opinions, as we have seen, were delivered with more freedom than wisdom. He consistently upheld the prerogatives of the clergy, which is probably one reason why the majority of them remained loyal to him after 1845 when the laity of the diocese knew his was a lost cause.<sup>28</sup> Once, he reminded the convention that the priest is "supreme in the school or schools of his parish"<sup>29</sup> and arranged for the clergy and laity to sit separately in diocesan conventions. It was long the custom for the professors and students of the General Seminary to have assigned seats in the conventions, and in the diocesan *Journal* graduates of the seminary were denoted by an asterisk. This attention shown General Seminary was not likely to appeal to clergy who were not its graduates, or to laymen who opined that Romanism was rife in Chelsea.

It is probable that Bishop Onderdonk never realized in those middle years of his episcopate how offensive his pronouncements could be. Was it wise for him to speak, in convention, of the "proper position" in Holy Communion service?<sup>30</sup> Should he have declared incorrect the rubric that then expected the celebrant to stand at the north end of the Holy Table?<sup>31</sup> Surely, he was showing his customary tactlessness when he criticized the shallow chancel of one church and the dubious placement of the altar in another. He was a trifle overbearing in his recommendation that the people should comply with the House of Bishops' recent preference that the people join the minister in the General Confession rather than repeat it after him. And was it worthwhile to insist that there be no prayer before the sermon?<sup>32</sup> Or that chancels be at least two feet above the nave?<sup>33</sup> In the diocesan convention of 1841 the bishop elaborated on the appropriate preparation for the Holy Communion. The bread loaf was to be cut in moderate slices, and then cut again, half through, at right angles (and thus the more easily broken into pieces, the bishop explained). One quart of wine should be allowed for every hundred communicants—none of your late Victorian sips—and silver vessels should be used.<sup>34</sup>

Now, in so advising, Bishop Onderdonk believed he was doing the work of an apostle's successor, and since he was "a little Dutch" he would argue for that right, unaware that neither the parish priest nor his laymen cared to come all the way to New York City to be thus lectured. Some of the delegates preferred to hear how their churches

were to pay for the elements and the priest in those terrible years of depression that followed the 1837 Panic. We may well imagine the gentlemen's frustration as they talked to one another on the sidewalks or strolled in St. John's Square during recess. The wiser of the delegates would have said that the shame of it was that the able bishop managed to swamp himself in these edicts of Church life when at other times he showed himself so competent and so faithful.

The bishop's closest friends feared the disasters his naiveté could bring on. "I should feel extremely anxious about your convention," wrote George W. Doane to a city presbyter in 1836<sup>35</sup> and added in a later letter, "he suffers solely from faults of manner, the impulses of a kind and loving nature uncontrolled by sound judgement."<sup>36</sup> As the 1830s proceeded, it seems that every one of Onderdonk's good friends held his breath until the diocesan convention was past, wondering what gaffe the poor bishop would conjure up for his own embarrassment and his enemies' delectation.

#### DIVISION OF THE DIOCESE: WESTERN NEW YORK

Nonetheless, the greatest single accomplishment of Onderdonk's episcopate took place in those very forums which later determined his disgrace: the House of Bishops and the diocesan convention. Church growth and New York's phenomenal population increase made it necessary to divide the diocese of New York. It was still known as the "Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York" in 1837, though the word "diocese" was in common use. In 1834, Bishop Onderdonk tested the waters by telling the convention that "the time must soon come, and perhaps it may not be long distant, when this diocese will be too great for unshared supervision."<sup>37</sup> That remark was calculated to elicit questions. Everyone knew Bishop Onderdonk was overworked. Did he now want a bishop to assist him? Or did he advocate splitting the State of New York into more than one diocese?

Either alternative would draw impassioned argument. Assisting bishops were still not deemed suitable in a church whose very name implied *a* bishop presiding over his diocese. There was the memory of Provoost's attempted intervention, and the awkwardness of Hobart's being an assistant in name but in fact very much the leader while the invalid Benjamin Moore remained "Bishop of New York." Assistant bishops were an unsure thing in those days. On the other hand, the Episcopal Church prized its present stance as the Church in the several states, corresponding to the federal government as it applied itself in bicameral houses with the union of the states. This is what the early

General Conventions had in mind. Moreover, no state had as yet ever been divided into more than one diocese, and there was no canon enabling this to be done.

The bishop let the matter brew and meanwhile helped steer canonical adjustments in the General Convention. His best arguments were the plain facts: 239 clergy and 232 parishes in 1836. In that year pressures of work made it necessary for Bishop Onderdonk to resign as a minister of Trinity Church. It was a position that had been necessary as a source of salary and, luckily in this year before the Panic, Trinity Church found ways to continue providing for the bishop through the new "Episcopal Fund" of the diocese. "The connexion with the parish of which for nearly a fourth of a century I was one of the ministers has ceased," he informed the convention in 1837.<sup>38</sup> The bishop said he hoped the Episcopal Fund would soon be great enough, thanks to Trinity's largesse, so that the diocesan could be supported by it and not depend upon a parochial stipend. Perhaps this was the first time many of the delegates realized that all along Trinity Church had been responsible for paying the greater part of the salary of the Bishop of New York. The bishop's optimism was meagerly rewarded and in the future he often found it necessary to mention his "inadequate temporal support." This, too, in times of depression became a matter of diocesan friction and contention, especially when there were those who had seen the "splendid residence and the most splendid furniture" at the bishop's Murray Street address.

The bishop's careful preparations for dividing the diocese included planning a special diocesan convention in Utica on August 22 and 23, 1838. The main purpose was to consider division of the diocese, and so the bishop chose a town which would be in the center of the new diocese. General Convention had amended the Church's Constitution so that the dioceses might be divided if the proposed area contained not less than 8,000 square miles and thirty priests. It was also necessary that the original diocese and General Convention consent to division. Bishop Onderdonk also wanted to be sure that the clergy in the western part of the state attended, but many men from downstate also appeared; Washington Irving was there the second day, a delegate from Zion Church, Greenburg (now Tarrytown). A committee of laymen and clergy had conferred with the bishop to determine the boundaries of the new diocese. It was reported that the line would be the eastern borders of Broome, Chenango, Madison, Oneida, and Lewis counties, and the northeast corner of Jefferson. The dividing line was said to split the population and area of New York State almost equally. (1,016,245 people and 21,463 square miles in the west and, it was said, 1,158,273 people and 21,750 square miles remaining in the Diocese of

New York). Such a division would make the "western portion compact and of easy communication" by means of canals, projected railways, and crossroads. "Very few persons would require more than a day to travel from the remotest part to the centre," it was said.<sup>39</sup> There were about fifty mission stations in the western area, and one of the thorny tasks of those favoring division was convincing those missionaries that their salaries would be guaranteed. There were also about forty self-supporting parishes. The bishop declared to the delegates at Utica, "Depend upon it, the eye of the world and the Church is now very especially upon you,"<sup>40</sup> but many of the delegates remained unpersuaded that division was wise. There was a last-minute attempt to rescind the motion to divide, but the convention ultimately sustained what had long been Onderdonk's hope, and he was the man of the hour.

General Convention, meeting in Philadelphia the next month, approved New York's course. Bishop Onderdonk anticipated this, and had arranged for another diocesan convention in Trinity Church on Tuesday, September 11, 1838. The business of the day was to facilitate the work of the Utica convention, setting a date of actual division (November 1), and receiving the formal permission of the diocesan bishop. It was also necessary to appoint a committee to discuss how the new diocese would share in the Episcopal Fund, a most sensitive matter. The new diocese would be named in its organization convention in October. This, also, was a sensitive matter, for High Church preferences led a diocese to choose the name of its key or see city, while Low Churchmen preferred them named after areas. Bishop Onderdonk was chairman of that organizing convention, and presided over the election of his favorite candidate, William Heathcote DeLancey, as the first Bishop of Western New York (for that was the name chosen).

#### TROUBLES WILL COME

The next year—it was perhaps Onderdonk's finest year—he was able to refer in diocesan convention to the successful separation accomplished in 1838. He was also satisfied to remind the convention that in the eight years reviewed in his address he had ordained 148 deacons, 112 priests, consecrated 96 churches, and confirmed 8,896 persons. Hobart, he said, in nineteen years ordained 150 deacons, 113 priests, consecrated 80 churches, and confirmed 11,678. The bishop had the grace not to state that his statistics compared very favorably with Hobart's. But, surely, everyone present was quick to see the point.

While Bishop Onderdonk was reviewing diocesan statistics, he

might have tried to add up the myriad of independent organizations that had been formed in the diocese. Even in Bishop Moore's time tract and educational societies had begun to do what the parish church and the diocese could not undertake. Bishop Hobart had used organizations and able directors to promulgate his aims and views, a practice maintained by Onderdonk. He also founded other organizations to assist him. The most notable was the New York Protestant Episcopal Mission Society, at one time known as the Education and Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York. It was firmly established in 1832 with the bishop as president and vice-presidents including such clergy as John Reed of Christ Church in Poughkeepsie, Henry Milnor of St. George's, John McVickar of Columbia College, Henry Anthon of St. Mark's, and such able laymen as Peter A. Jay, Lieutenant Governor Edward P. Livingston, and William A. Duer, president of Columbia College. Other members were Berrian of Trinity, Wainwright of Grace, William Richmond, Manton Eastburn, Luther Bradish, William Bard, Cyrus Curtis, Jacob LeRoy, Matthew Clarkson, William A. Muhlenberg, and John C. Spencer—all of them, clergy and lay, a galaxy of opinions and great capacities. One of the aims of the Society was to assist men preparing for Holy Orders. Another was to support missionaries among the poor of New York. In later years, of course, the work of the Episcopal City Mission Society would find wider fields for work. One of the original purposes of the Society was to establish churches in New York City. The first was the Church of the Epiphany, others were the Church of the Holy Evangelists in Vandewater Street and St. Matthew's, Christopher Street. It must be emphasized that Onderdonk was keenly aware of work needed among the poor and unchurched in the increasingly teeming city. A fast-growing city meant developing slums, a problem scarcely known to Hobart but at least partly recognized by his successor. Why, then, was Onderdonk silent when an organized mob, at least partly encouraged by James Watson Webb, an Episcopalian and editor of *The Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, sacked St. Philip's Church? As far as we know, the bishop's sole response to the outrage was a hand-delivered letter to St. Philip's rector, the Rev. Peter Williams, Jr., calling upon Williams, himself a black, "to resign at once, your connexion in every department, with the Anti-Slavery Society, and to make public your resignation."<sup>41</sup> The bishop implied that God, in his own time, would make all things right. Williams complied with the bishop's directive and resigned his leadership in the Anti-Slavery Society.

Unfortunately, the early days of the City Mission Society were plagued with dissension. Manton Eastburn believed, quite rightly, that the bishop intended to insinuate High Churchmen into the Society's

work. He led a rebellion in the group which, as we have heard the bishop report to convention, was unsuccessful. The details of the matter will be forever lost, but Doane, among others, feared a repetition and wrote to William Whittingham:

I have written in the plainest English to Bishop Onderdonk. The City Mission is the most dangerous post in your diocese. An artful, unprincipled man of ability and address could do the Church more harm in it than in any other rectorship in the city. So I have written my excellent friend and brother. I do hope the gate may be kept closed against the wooden horse.<sup>42</sup>

Since Low Churchmen feared they would be outmaneuvered by the bishop, or outnumbered by his friends, other organizations were founded to counteract the prevailing influences. One of the more sinister of these was the "Association for Promoting Christianity," gathered at St. Thomas Church at the time of the trouble in the City Mission Society. John Duer was a member, and Evert Duyckinck a leading spirit. The object of the association was to raise funds for existing Episcopal organizations, and dispense them only after careful scrutiny. In need of funds—and also in need of watching!—were the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, New York Episcopal City Mission Society, General Theological Society, the Sunday School Union, New York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society, and the New York Episcopal Tract Society. Duer and Duyckinck would ferret out any High Church malefactions in those and other Episcopal organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from their obvious drawbacks of searching for trouble in the Church, there was probably a certain advantage in the diocese's having various groups of churchpeople engaged in charitable efforts. Nevertheless, the question remains: did loyalty to the "little" societies and associations militate against a united diocese in the 1830s? It would seem so. In a collection of Church archives one will find an unidentified "Rule of Life" dating from about this time. It tells us a very great deal:

I will never speak disrespectfully or unkindly of or to my Bishop.

I will not expose the faults of my brethren of the Clergy unless duty requires me so to do.

I will always vindicate my Bishop or an absent brother when slandered.

I will never urge upon my guests the indulgence in intoxicating drinks.

I will as much as possible keep my family from attending theatres, and operas, and make it an example of a Christian family.<sup>44</sup>

## THE BISHOP AND HUDSON VALLEY WORSHIP AND SOCIETY

The High Churchmanship of Hobart and Onderdonk increasingly expressed itself in the physical arrangements and appearance of the church building, and again, one's attention is turned to what Episcopal churches looked like.

There had always been considerable latitude in the interior arrangement of the churches. Thus, a visitor to Trinity Church in New York City in 1744 described the building as being

above one hundred feet long and eighty wide. At the east end of it is a large semi-circular area in which stands the altar [structure, probably including pulpit and reading desk], pretty well ornamented with painting and gilding. The galleries are supported with wooden pillars of the Ionic order, with carved work of foliage and cherubic heads gilt betwixt the capitals. There is a pretty organ at the west end of the church, consisting of a great number of pipes handsomely gilt and adorned . . .<sup>45</sup>

All this was swept away in the fire of 1777, but the church built on the site in 1794, though somewhat smaller, was much like the original Trinity.

The bishop of the diocese, however, never knew what awaited his gaze as he approached a church on the visitations the diocesan constitution of 1787 required at least once every three years. St. Paul's, Eastchester, for instance, had a dual orientation, in a building that had

stone walls, rough and unplastered. The roof with its immense rafters is plainly visible. The pews are of pine, the divisions as well as outside work being in panels with doors hung with knuckle hinges and capped, high-backed, capacious—and unpainted. To your surprise you find beside the present side aisles an additional main passage, at right angles with them, extending from the middle door to the Clerk's seat, behind and above which is at the east end of the building and within it the new Communion Table, surrounded by a rail.<sup>46</sup>

This was prior to the changes of the 1840s and '50s which brought St. Paul's into conformity with most other Episcopal churches (and conformity with Bishop Onderdonk's oft-expressed preferences).

St. Stephen's Church in New York was one of the many churches here and abroad where the visitor would find a heavily embellished pulpit sounding board. There was also a statue of Stephen, with the text "And they stoned Stephen." Christ Church in Poughkeepsie rejoiced in a gilded dove perpetually alight on a screen behind the pulpit. This is the screen that figured in reminiscences about when



the clergy lay aside the surplice, or sacramental vestment, when entering the pulpit to perform their teaching function in the academic gown. . . . From 1834 to 1854, while this screen was in existence, the children of Christ Church used to watch eagerly for what they considered a delightful Jack-in-the-Box performance. The Rector would leave the reading desk just before the sermon, disappear through the door at the north end of the screen wearing his surplice, and suddenly reappear, in the high pulpit, in his black gown.<sup>47</sup>

A fuller account of this standard Episcopal performance describes the fashion-plate appearance of the clergy:

The officiating clergyman wore a surplice, gathered with fine pleats in a yoke around the neck, and reaching to the ground, with scarf of broad black silk, and bands made of lawn (and tied around the neck with small strings), which hung in front of the collar. It was the custom for the clergyman to retire during the singing of a hymn, after the Gospel had been read, and to return arrayed in an academic black silk gown, to enter the pulpit and preach the sermon. On the first Sunday of each month, at which time the Holy Communion was administered, the clergyman retired to the vestry-room after the sermon, and resumed his surplice. He then proceeded in the administration of the Lord's Supper.<sup>48</sup>

The long, full surplice was used in some places in New York as late as 1900. The black preaching gown with accompanying bands was discarded much earlier, though for many years there were those who recalled Episcopal clergy "thus attired [in] the streets on official occasions."<sup>49</sup>

St. George's in Schenectady had, after 1798, an arrangement whereby the Communion table shared the east end with the pulpit on one side, and the pew of the patron's family on the other. Pews for honored persons were common in the churches. They were richly upholstered in crimson, and might have a suitable canopy overhead. Such a pew was set apart for George Washington at St. Paul's Chapel, and was shown to him by his friend Samuel Provoost. The old box pews lent themselves to whatever alterations their owners cared to bestow upon them. Sometimes chairs and tables were set in these enclosures. The substitution of "slip" pews for the older box affairs was a step toward the uniformity Bishop Onderdonk desired, but personal tastes were asserted long after the bishop's day. Many churches can recall the peccadilloes of assertive parishioners, but it would be difficult to surpass those embodied in St. Paul's, Tivoli, where, when the new church was built in 1868, the eccentric General John Watts dePeyster had built for himself and his brother-in-law Johnston Livingston an apse with separate door, richly furnished with sofa and four armchairs; the whole was

fenced off from the main body of the church so the general might bring his dogs with him when he attended service.

Most Episcopal churches built after the Revolutionary War were the white-painted boxlike structures that, to this day, dot the American landscape. They used the severe, straightforward lines of classic architecture. Hobart mildly preferred Gothic because it looked English and he was, at least for the first part of his episcopate, very much of an Anglophile. Onderdonk preferred the Gothic style because he deemed it best suggested what the Church of God is, having a long past reaching back to divine origins. "The great faults which prevail throughout the country," he said in 1832, "are small and low chancels and the want of comfortable vestry rooms."<sup>50</sup> Onderdonk idealized soaring, arched ceilings, and it is one of history's ironies that when his architectural notions were sublimely realized in New York at Grace Church and Trinity Church his suspension from office prevented him from consecrating them. He took pains to promote Gothic architecture, and lost no opportunity to praise Gothic accomplishments in the diocese. Thus he rated the "brick Gothic Church" in Westfield as a fine new landmark in Chautauqua County.<sup>51</sup> In 1836, he was overjoyed by the new church in Medina

... a platform running nearly across the church and raised above the level of its aisles three or four steps. The Communion table is against the center of the wall in the rear of the platform; and in front of the platform, on the extremity at the left of the altar, is the reading desk, and on that level at the right, the pulpit; the three standing on the same level, and the desk and pulpit being exactly alike.<sup>52</sup>

He was describing exactly what soon became the normal arrangement of Episcopal churches.

But if the nearsighted bishop had once peered over his spectacles while delivering these lectures on proper chancel arrangements he might have noted restlessness and sideward glances among his auditors—perhaps even a groan when he declared the ideal church was one surmounted by a cross. Did the bishop ever realize how disturbing his remarks could be? Again, in 1839, he commended crosses on steeples and reported to convention that in the new church in Troy "the altar holds its proper distinguished station, having suitably provided places, on its right for the daily prayers, and on its left for preaching,"<sup>53</sup> and urged that Ante-Communion, "which the Church requires to be read on all Sundays and holy days" be read from the altar. "It is a great mistake," he declared, "and one coupled with serious misapprehensions of the Christian system, to represent the pulpit as the chief and most honorable part of the Church." If the younger men out of the

General Seminary applauded these lessons in chancel arrangements (with their implied preferences for sacerdotalism), many of the older clergy were annoyed that the bishop used public occasions to promote his partisan preferences. They may have been all the more irritated when the majority of younger men solemnly agreed with the bishop's pronouncements. The clergy do not like to be publicly lectured, especially from their own platforms, or in convention when their leading laymen are present. Onderdonk's requirements for "proper" chancels were offensive to those delegates who were quite satisfied with the present arrangements of their churches.

### OXFORD MOVEMENT PERILS

It is necessary to emphasize Onderdonk's aggressive opinions about chancels because it was a constant theme during his episcopate. Since he had never seen a medieval church we may be sure that it was theology more than taste or aesthetic preference that led him to dictate what constituted the ideal chancel. Moreover, as a reader and active churchman, he was aware of and sympathized with the coming wave of ecclesiastical life. His active episcopate, 1830 to 1845, almost exactly parallels developments in England that came to be known as the Oxford Movement.

By 1830 it was clear that Parliament would exercise political prerogatives which would drastically affect the state Church. Contemplated changes included acts which would permit Nonconformists in the universities and the disposition of some dioceses in the Church of Ireland. Some English clergymen regarded this as dangerous and irresponsible Erastianism—the state dictating to the Church—and they disputed the state's right by notable sermons and tracts. Eventually (for Parliament proceeded to do what it threatened), the business of "the Oxford men" became a rediscovery and publicizing of the traditional teachings and beliefs of the Church of England. Some of this had long been in the air in America. It has even been claimed that the new emphasis on tradition was less novel here than in England. But the British developments had dramatic aspects lacking in America. Keble, for instance, was officially silenced for a time. Pusey functioned in the great universities and had the advantage of Oxford's prestige, if not always its sympathy. It was his name that was lent to Church doings that were sometimes thrilling, and often suspect; "Puseyism" had an aura of daring, of ivy-covered walls in old England—exactly the things that intrigued many Americans. Then, there was John Henry Newman. He soon assumed leadership, wrote most of the Tracts for the Times, and possessed the authority belonging to the vicar of St. Mary's, Oxford.

"Young men were all enthusiastic about Newman in those days," recalled Arthur Cleveland Cox when he wrote about his days at General Seminary.<sup>54</sup> Then, "like a thunderclap," it was said, in 1845 Newman forsook the Church of England for that of Rome.

Such, in brief, was the Oxford Movement as it appeared to American Episcopalians. They met it with opinions ranging from fervent approval to dark fear. New York was as quick to receive news from abroad as it was to receive immigrants, and in some minds the events in Oxford were as threatening as were the newcomers. At the seminary, however, where Onderdonk was a leading influence as trustee and professor, he was now seen as also a protagonist of the "Oxford Divines," whom he praised, though (he said) "they may sometimes push their zeal too far."<sup>55</sup> When the bishop asked the convention delegates to discern the difference between "catholic and Romish systems," he forgot that some of the clergy and laity were apt to be suspicious of *both* "systems."<sup>56</sup> As the 1830s progressed almost every pronouncement of Bishop Onderdonk's made him vulnerable to future attack. It may well be that the man's energy, friendliness, and patent goodwill postponed his ultimate downfall.

No one could deny him that excellent record of unrelenting work and ability. An admirer wrote of him:

How the bishop acquits himself in his services, his sermons, and his social intercourse! The gentleman in the parlor, the plain parish priest, fatherly, affectionate, and at home in the plainest farmhouse. And so sound, so edifying, so consoling in his pulpit exercise.<sup>57</sup>

And this is the impression most people had of him while he was active as Bishop of New York. He never displayed Hobart's flamboyance and charm (or wiliness!). He had no social ambitions (though his house was said to be opulent). He seems not to have walked easily with prominent people. His notable characteristic was, simply, hard work: city work in winter, rural in summer. His diocese was, until 1838, the entire State of New York. Transportation was, as we have seen, by Hudson River sloops and steamboats and, west of Albany, by the new Erie Canal. He probably knew the dirt roads in the state better than any other New Yorker; it was common for him to jog along slowly all night in a wagon.

#### THE USUAL YEARLY SCHEDULE

The year would begin in New York, where the bishop may have indulged in his ancestors' pleasant custom of the New Year's Day calls. By the time winter began to fade the bishop would have made tentative

plans for visitations in distant parts of the state. Very likely, such schedules were only approximate because the bishop would never know what exigencies would detain him in one place, or what transportation troubles would prevent his on-time arrival at his next appointment. It was only after railroads were built that the timetable became an episcopal reality. But this was after Onderdonk's time, and it may be said that his successor bishops of New York were railroad experts until the day Bishop Burch bought his infamous motor car. With Bishop Onderdonk dependent upon water and rough road transportation, the rector in, say, Batavia, would prepare his people for a visit from the bishop sometime in the third week of August. Then they would await his appearing, and be quite understanding if a message arrived saying the bishop would arrive the following week—or not at all that year because he had been summoned elsewhere. But Onderdonk probably canceled few appointments. People remembered how he had faced inconvenience and discomfort to reach them. No wonder that, when his troubles came, the bishop found far more support upstate than in New York City.<sup>58</sup>

The Brooklyn and Westchester parishes would be visited in late winter, or in late autumn. Transportation there was easier, and Bishop Onderdonk was able to spend the night and proceed next day to another church, another meeting. Upriver arrangements were more complicated, and perhaps made an interesting puzzle for an otherwise serious and prosaic bishop. His letter to Whittingham quoted above shows that the bishop accepted the vicissitudes of travel as they came. Of one thing he might be certain: if the rector or warden knew he was coming, there would be a delegation from the local church waiting to greet him at the landing, and another to wave him off as he departed. It was a courtesy that persisted as long as the bishops of New York used public transportation on their long-distance visitations. The Bishop of New York was a familiar celebrated personage on the Hudson River landings and on a hundred railroad platforms.

Bishop Onderdonk, following the canon, expected to visit each rural parish at least once in three years. After the diocese was divided he aimed at annual visitations. Not all stops had church buildings, of course, and very often the bishop preached and confirmed at inns, fraternal lodges, borrowed churches, or dwellings. There were about eighty "missionary stations" in the diocese when Onderdonk was consecrated. It happened then, as it does now, that an established parish had come to grief and was trying to regain its wonted prosperity. St. Mark's, LeRoy, was an example, as Bishop Onderdonk told the 1832 convention. The Rev. Francis H. Cuming had recently gone there and "found the parish in somewhat of a depressed state in consequence of having been for a long time destitute of regular ministerial services."

The able Cuming's name shows up frequently in American Church annals; he was, for instance, a founder of Calvary Church in New York, missionary to the Oneidas, and an unofficial chaplain to the bishop—it was he who accompanied Hobart's body to New York. Cuming soon had a large Sunday school in LeRoy, a Bible class with fifty-five members who met Tuesday evenings and handed in written assignments on the Fourth Gospel, and the inevitable "Female Benevolent Association" that met to make articles for sale. Throughout his career, Francis Cuming was an enthusiastic organizer of fund-raising women's organizations in the Church, and if not the founder he was at least the patron of what became a dependable and lucrative feature of the Episcopal Church.

When Bishop Onderdonk thought of the upriver Hudson, his imagination needed to take him no farther than what is now midtown Manhattan. That is where the "country" began, and in the bishop's day it stretched from there infinitely northward. In Bishop Provoost's time many fine Federal style houses were built in the fields toward the northern extreme of Manhattan Island; Gracie Mansion is a significant survivor of those houses that provided escape from city heat and disease in summer. But now that steamboats and their docks had improved, men and women of comfortable means were enabled to go farther upstream. The Hudson River entered upon its halcyon days when huge houses were built along its banks. Washington Irving was one of Manhattan's sons who settled on the riverbank after his return from Europe and, like many of his friends, he helped the Episcopal Church prosper in the Hudson River Valley. Other New Yorkers were also conspicuous in settling the Church in neighborhoods they adopted. The pattern was likely to be this: a wealthy New Yorker, who had more leisure than his father had ever enjoyed, was able to retire early on former earnings, and would build a summer "villa" on the river. Once the house was built, the proprietor might turn his attentions toward "improvements"—and by that he had two things in mind: the condition of his lawns and the morals of his neighbors.

There were precedents and books to guide him. The precedents were (apart from the enviable English custom of squire-with-chapel) what had already happened in upper Manhattan. There, St. Michael's (1809), St. James' (1810), and St. Mary's (1820) had been established to minister to the summer families who had built houses on the Hudson and East rivers. Now that estates were developing in or near river hamlets there was a broader scope than Manhattan provided. Up in Newburgh, there was a nurseryman's son, Andrew Jackson Downing, whose ambitions embraced improvements and cultivations whether architectural, agricultural, or social. Soon, Downing had a wide circle of friends

and clients, north, south, and in England. But his native Hudson River Valley remained his favorite place. He concentrated upon developing houses and landscape there, insisting that the best mode was what he termed the "picturesque," which was in fact an adaptation of Gothic. Bishop Onderdonk was pleased, and had he been a wiser man he would have left the popularization of that favored architectural mode to Downing.

We shall hear more about the Gothic revival, but for the present discussion it is only necessary to say that Downing found it worth his time to include mention and designs of chapels and churches in his writings. Since he was an Anglophile and formed a literary partnership with the celebrated London writer about gardens, Mrs. Loudon, and brought Calvert Vaux to New York to be his office partner, it is easy to see that Downing was an asset to the Episcopal Church in New York. No man could better encourage the rich New Yorker to become a squire whose duty was to provide uplift in the neighborhood.

Hobart had fostered this attitude of educational and spiritual noblesse oblige which proceeded to build and manage for the rest of the century. Vestiges of this ecclesiasticism wed to manorial paternalism are still to be found in Hudson River towns, and, as we will soon learn, its most outstanding offering to public life is probably present-day Bard College. The pattern of a rich Manhattan merchant moving to the country to build his house, his church, and its school was seen as a boon to the rural people who worked in the brick plants, the ice houses, or the textile factories. In the annual diocesan *Journal* it accounts for the rise, or rebirth, of many parishes, beginning with Yonkers. Peekskill, Garrison, Wappingers Falls, Annandale, Tivoli, Beacon are only a few of the places where the Episcopal Church enjoyed reinvigoration due to a superimposed squirearchy delightfully applied. A clear result of this proprietorial management was that the rural people were induced to forsake their Reformed, Presbyterian, or Lutheran faiths and become Episcopalians. It is a safe bet that the impressive confirmation statistics of the nineteenth century were, in part, the results of pressure from the big house.

Bishop Onderdonk saw only the beginning of these developments and he cannot be blamed for their offensive aspects. In any case, he had neither the time nor inclination to linger at any man's villa.

#### CAREY AND CONSEQUENCES

The Carey ordination July 2, 1843, was the undoing of Bishop Onderdonk. An ordination is always a poignant event: a Christian asks to be

set apart for extraordinary work; parents and friends circle round, joyous and yet awed by the weight of a thousand and more years of history. It should have been so for Arthur Carey: young, innocent, earnest—and very High Church. At the General Theological Seminary Carey was viewed as holding “advanced” views, which, to many, seemed indistinguishable from those of the Church of Rome. The General Seminary was thought to nurture and encourage this point of view, and not a few New York ministers kept a watchful eye (and a ready ear) to discern erroneous doctrine in Chelsea Square. Was popery not already strong enough in New York now that immigration from Ireland was so accelerated? Hadn’t the General Convention investigated the seminary because of peculiar goings-on there? What about those prominent Episcopalians who had become Roman Catholic? While still a seminarian, Arthur Carey was marked as a man who appeared to be sympathetic with Catholic things. This brought him to the attention of Henry Anthon, rector of St. Mark’s-in-the-Bouwerie. Anthon’s friend, Hugh Smith, rector of St. Peter’s in 20th Street where Arthur Carey taught Sunday School was also exercised. But perhaps the most critical watchdog of all was Manton Eastburn, rector of the Ascension, the Careys’ parish. Eastburn had gone off to be Bishop Coadjutor of Massachusetts, but he later implied that he had kept an eye on Arthur Carey, whom he declared to have “imbibed the deadly poison of the Tracts for the Times.”<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, nothing seemed to deter Bishop Onderdonk from a triumphal pursuit of what he believed to be right for the Diocese of New York and the Church at large. Therefore, when it appeared that Arthur Carey’s ordination to the diaconate would be opposed by prominent Manhattan rectors, the bishop appointed a committee to question him. The fact that Bishop Onderdonk assigned assessors on the whole favorable to Carey is of little historic importance, for those men probably were representative of the diocese. But they did not reflect the thinking of some New York clergy, or of many Episcopalians elsewhere. “New York Churchmanship” was exactly the pivotal concern.

The committee appointed to examine Arthur Carey recommended that he be ordained. Though Anthon and Smith had been among the examiners, and had been outvoted, they were yet convinced that the man should not be made a deacon. Therefore, at the ordination, when Bishop Onderdonk asked the traditional question embodied in the service, whether or not there might be any impediment known so that Arthur Carey ought not be ordained, Dr. Smith, and then Dr. Anthon, advanced from their pews and read protests. There was a terrible tenseness in St. Stephen’s Church. Then Bishop Onderdonk, who clearly had expected the protest, declared that these same complaints had already



been heard and dismissed by a committee: he would proceed. Whereupon Bishop Ives, Bishop of North Carolina, who was in the chancel and appears to have been equally clued, began the Litany. Anthon and Smith strode out of the church, vowing that they would have their day.

Theological divergences and personality differences: these set some people against Benjamin Treadwell Onderdonk. But there was further abrasion: many people thought he was coarse. The word comes up again and again. It is something weightier than whether or not the man was likable to those who deferred to him—countless people disagreed with Hobart but were captivated by the man. If we say Bishop Onderdonk was a victim of theological differences we will not be telling the whole truth. More accurately, he fell because his undoubted abilities and successes had insulated him from correctly gauging the integrity and dedication of enemies who must find a solution to their frustrations.

The story has become an epic in the Episcopal Church, and we will merely summarize the events. First of all, Judge John Duer, scholar, member of the state's 1821 Constitutional Convention, noted jurist, kin of the state's oldest families, was in the convention of 1844. He was one of the ablest judges in the state, and a very influential member of the Episcopal Church. He was not friendly to the bishop, and the bishop knew it. Duer arose to address the convention. The bishop refused to hear him and ordered him to his seat. Duer was not accustomed to such peremptory commands, and he insisted upon his right to the floor. The bishop thundered out, "Sit down, sir! Sit down." To this imperious command the judge submitted. The convention was greatly excited, and all knew that the matter would not end there.<sup>60</sup>

Even before this, however, an ugly matter had arisen before the Church at large. Francis Lister Hawks, formerly of New York, was elected Bishop of Mississippi in 1844. He was at that time residing in the South, having found it wise to move there after the failure of St. Thomas Hall, the school he had founded in Flushing, Long Island. It was no secret that the bishop elect was hiding from his creditors. The question was, in these unpleasant circumstances, would the House of Bishops concur in his election? Given the tender sensibilities of the Episcopal Church at this time, people began to line up one side or the other: should, or should not, Francis L. Hawks be the Bishop of Mississippi?

Henry Anthon was a friend of Hawks, and wrote to warn him that Muhlenburg (who had conducted a competing school), and Bishops Whittingham and McCoskrey would oppose the consecration, as would Onderdonk and "the North Carolina Prelate," Bishop Ives. Just at this time Benjamin Onderdonk's brother, Henry, Bishop of Pennsylvania,

was accused of indecent behavior while under the influence of alcohol. If Henry Onderdonk's case, wrote Anthon to Hawks,

is put upon the shelf without an impeachment our B[ishop] will probably lift up his horns on high and speak with a loud mouth. But if the ecclesiastical horizon there [in Philadelphia, where General Convention was about to meet] gathers blackness before we assemble [in the New York diocesan convention] we shall experience during our session the very quintessence of Amiability from a certain quarter. *I wonder if he has heard what we have heard?*<sup>61</sup>

*What we have heard!* Anthon meant nothing less than sordid talk about Bishop Benjamin Onderdonk's improper conduct with women. Specifically, it was said the bishop had molested an ordinand's wife during an all-night carriage ride at which her husband was present, in the central part of the state (prior to division of the diocese); it was further said that Bishop Onderdonk had similarly made indecent approaches to "the Rudderow girls" in a carriage ride after service in St. James', Hamilton Square; and there was another story, about another clergyman's wife. In fact, Bishop Onderdonk had become something of a stale joke in New York's drawing rooms. If, at a party, the gaslight failed, there was always some wag whose voice would be heard in the darkness, "Ladies need not fear: the bishop is not present." Stories had gone the rounds, as they will, and were an affront to many Episcopalians, because no one could dispute that Bishop Onderdonk did have the habit of unconsciously touching people when he spoke to them.

Unfortunately, an eccentric but credible clergyman, James C. Richmond, began to collect stories about the bishop. Richmond had earned Onderdonk's disapproval, and had a score to settle. Francis Hawks, too, "gathered together all the testimony bearing against the powers that be, and if opposition is made to his consecration [as Bishop of Mississippi, he] will declare war to the Knife point."<sup>62</sup> The fact that Hawks was well-known throughout the national Church lent credence to whatever "testimony" he might share with Onderdonk's foes. When the General Convention met in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1844, everyone but Benjamin T. Onderdonk was aware of the scandal about to break over his head. Calvin Stowe wrote to his wife, Catherine Beecher, about the Episcopal bishop who "while half boozled has caught young ladies who were so unfortunate as to meet him alone, and pawed them over in the most disgusting manner . . . and now it all comes out against him."<sup>63</sup> So persuasive were the stories—and so persuaded in their own Low Churchmanship?—that three bishops determined to go to New York City after General Convention to ascertain to their satisfaction the

extent of Onderdonk's culpability. Needless to say, there were men in New York who were glad to entertain them. It was these three—Bishop Elliott of Georgia, Meade of Virginia, and Otey of Tennessee—who proceeded to make a formal presentation against Onderdonk.

The hearing—for such it was—took place in St. John's Chapel, the scene of many Onderdonk triumphs. The bishop was not present, and made no defense other than a broad denial. The House of Bishops considered testimony of alleged "immorality and impurity." There was no accusation of adultery. On January 2, 1845, the Bishop of New York was adjudged guilty, by a vote of eleven to six.<sup>64</sup> The verdict was not entirely along party lines: disgust of sexual irregularity was stronger than religious orthodoxy. The question, then, was the degree of punishment to be meted out; the new canon providing for a trial of a bishop was singularly unclear about this. Three sentences seemed possible: deposition, suspension, or admonition. Onderdonk's friends on the bench sought to save him from outright deposition by agreeing to a sentence of suspension. It was a fatal mistake, for in doing so they doomed the man. There was no time-limit to suspension. Presiding Bishop Chase merely signed an order suspending Benjamin Treadwell Onderdonk "from the office of a Bishop in the Church of God, and from all functions of the sacred ministry."