



ARTICLE

“The Hidden Life”: Ellen Gates Starr, Vida Dutton Scudder, and Catholic Socialist Progressivism

Abigail Modaff*

Honors College, University of Houston

*Corresponding author. E-mail: amodaff@uh.edu

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Ellen Gates Starr and Vida Dutton Scudder are not the best-known names of the Progressive Era. Yet they were at the forefront of progressive reform in the 1880s through the 1910s, and they helped to create the ideas and institutions that defined the settlement house movement. Their prominent historical role demands that we pay serious attention to their alternative visions of progressivism. Starr and Scudder were more politically radical, and more religiously traditional, than many of their peers. Each woman integrated a radical embrace of social transformation with High Church Christian cosmology, creating a Catholic socialist progressivism that contrasts to both other settlement workers and the male leaders of Christian socialism. This article explicates Starr's and Scudder's belief systems and argues for their importance to the history of progressive reform and to the intellectual history of American social change. Although each thinker had her own emphasis—Starr foregrounded art, while Scudder focused on uniting Marxism with Catholicism—Starr, Scudder, and their friendship represent a lost destiny of the progressive movement: a worker-led movement grounded in religious faith.

Vida Dutton Scudder was reconciled to her own obscurity. At least, she tried to be. Late in life, after her work in settlement houses and college classrooms was done, she often reflected on her legacy. “I’ve really done my part,” she wrote in 1934. “And the best of it is, nobody knows. Lord, I thank thee for the hidden life.”¹ But this grateful humility was only temporary. As Scudder prepared to publish her memoir *On Journey* (1937), her fourteenth book, she worried eagerly about its reception.² Even her private writings evinced her desire for an audience. “Is there any point to this journal?” she wrote, bitterly, at the age of seventy-five. “Not even Florence”—her longtime companion—“is ever likely to read it.”³

¹Vida D. Scudder, 23 July 1934, Book III, Folder 7, Box 1, Vida Dutton Scudder Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter VDS Papers).

²Scudder, 14 March and 9 Aug. 1932, and 23 July 1933, Book I, Folder 6, Box 1, VDS Papers; 13 Feb. and 28 Oct. 1935, and 8 July 1936, Book IV, Folder 7, Box 1, VDS Papers. See also 6 Sept. 1940 and 28 Oct. 1945, in “Book of Age,” Folder 8, Box 1, VDS Papers; Theresa Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder* (Boston, 1982), 87. The count of Scudder’s books excludes pamphlets and edited collections.

³Scudder, 18 Nov. 1936, “Book of Age.” On Florence Converse see Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 108–10, as well as Scudder to Ellen Gates Starr, n.d. (“Each day ...”) and n.d. (“It is shameful that ...”), Box 10, Folder 11: Scudder, Vida D. 1915–29, Ellen Gates Starr Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College,

By the time *On Journey* was published, Scudder's old friend Ellen Gates Starr had accomplished, by choice, the retreat from public life that Scudder felt was being forced upon her. Scudder and Starr had been at the leading edge of progressive reform in its formative decades. After cofounding the influential Hull House settlement in 1889, Starr spent nearly thirty years spearheading Chicago's Arts and Crafts movement and risking arrest on picket lines. But in 1920, she abruptly converted to Catholicism and left Hull House. After this, she produced only religious writings; after a spinal injury in 1928, she rarely saw her former friends.⁴

Both women knew—Starr gladly, Scudder reluctantly—that they were being written out of the narrative of turn-of-the-century reform. Starr's voluntary recusal from public life is particularly easy to read backwards into her time at Hull House. Her retreat into Catholic monasticism seems to demonstrate her unsuitability to what we now understand as the progressive movement: she was always too religious, too dogmatic, to fit. Even Scudder, a High Church Episcopalian who considered herself Catholic, found the post-conversion Starr elusive.⁵ Yet Scudder, too, despite her attempts to remain in the public eye, plays at best a minor role in the historiography of settlements and progressivism. Her vast corpus of interdisciplinary writing—from literary criticism to socialist theory to theological meditation—has sparked little scholarly interest, as have her role in the founding of the College Settlements Association and her forty years as a professor at Wellesley.⁶ Starr's unavoidability in connection to Hull House has generated some studies, but her figure remains dwarfed by the massive literature on her erstwhile partner Jane

Northampton, MA (hereafter EGS Papers); Vida Dutton Scudder, *On Journey* (New York, 1937), esp. 275; Susan Hill Lindley, "Gender and the Social Gospel Novel," in Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, eds., *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana, 2003), 186–201.

⁴Mary Jo Deegan and Ana-Maria Wahl, "Introduction," in Ellen Gates Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, ed. Mary Jo Deegan and Ana-Maria Wahl (New Brunswick, 2003), 1–35, at 28, 16.

⁵On High Episcopalianism see especially Peter W. Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money: Episcopalians and American Culture from the Civil War to the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 2016); Thomas F. Rzeznik, *Church and Estate: Religion and Wealth in Industrial-Era Philadelphia* (University Park, 2013); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920*, 2nd edn (Chicago, 1994), 198–215. Scudder's self-description and Starr's eventual conversion make precise nomenclature difficult. As much as possible, I use "Catholic" to indicate institutional Catholicism and the lower-case "catholic" to describe both women's broader religious views. However, given that both Scudder and Starr considered themselves Catholic at various points in their lives, I use the phrase "Catholic socialist progressivism" to capture their overarching social thought.

⁶This could change with the recent publication of Gary Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism: History, Politics, Religion, and Theory* (New Haven, 2021); and Eugene McCarragher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), both of which feature Scudder. See also overviews in Elisabeth L. Hinson-Hasty, *Beyond the Social Maze: Exploring Vida Dutton Scudder's Theological Ethics* (New York, 2006); Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*; Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca, 2000), 30–32; Susan H. Lindley, "Neglected Voices' and 'Praxis' in the Social Gospel," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18/1 (1990), 75–102; Gary Scott Smith, "Creating a Cooperative Commonwealth: Vida Scudder's Quest to Reconcile Christianity and Socialism, 1890–1920," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 62/3 (1993), 397–428; Patricia Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven, 1995); Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885–1930* (Chicago, 1990); Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 142–7.

Addams, whose ideas commonly stand in for settlements as a whole.⁷ Vida Scudder and Ellen Starr, in short, are bit players in the drama of progressive reform as it is currently written.

They were not, however, bit players at the time. They were originators of the American settlement movement and some of the best-known female advocates of Christian social reform. Yet despite their position at the center of the networks that defined the era, they are rarely viewed as representative of the movements they helped to create. This is, in part, because their vision ultimately lost the battle for what progressivism would become. As the twentieth century dawned, their religious traditionalism quietly distanced them from their peers, and their socialism began to cause more visible fractures—even playing a role in Scudder’s resignation from the Denison House board.⁸

From this position both inside and outside progressivism, Scudder and Starr created an alternative form of progressive thought and practice. Their class-conscious socialism represents a lost possibility of the settlement movement: a worker-centered socialist coalition backed by religious faith. This coalition did not begin with Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers’ Movement in the 1930s, but had firm roots a generation earlier, in Scudder and Starr’s Catholic socialist progressivism. Indeed, Starr and a fellow veteran organizer helped to publish Day’s *Catholic Worker* in the 1930s.⁹ In Starr’s practical allyship and Scudder’s prolific attempt to become the voice of Christian socialism in the United States, High Church radicalism emerged from the settlements’ fertile ground.

The study of socialism’s role in the Progressive Era has recently begun to gain ground, fed by long-overdue attention to female intellectuals.¹⁰ As research into

⁷Most recently, Jane Duran, “Ellen Gates Starr and Julia Lathrop: Hull House and Philosophy,” *The Pluralist* 9/1 (2014), 1–13; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 140–42; Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*.

⁸Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 8; Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*, 93–5; Deegan and Wahl, “Introduction,” 5, 7–8, 17, 32–3; Duran, “Ellen Gates Starr,” 2, 4; Louise W. Knight, *Jane Addams: Spirit in Action* (New York, 2010), 84–5.

⁹See letters between Starr and Frances Crane Lillie from 1937 and 1938, Box 9, “Lillie Frances Crane, 1936–38” folder, EGS Papers. For examples of the tendency to begin left Catholicism with Day, see John Loughery and Blythe Randolph, *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century* (New York, 2020), 2–4; Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*, 185; R. A. R. Edwards, “Jane Addams, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Dorothy Day: A Comparative Study of Settlement Theology,” in Edwards and Gifford, *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 150–66; Robert Trawick, “Dorothy Day and the Social Gospel Movement: Different Theologies, Common Concerns,” in *ibid.*, 139–49.

¹⁰Landmark studies such as James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought* (Oxford, 1986); and Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago* (Urbana, 1998), connected socialism and progressivism, but interest has increased recently. See especially Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*; Gerald Friedman, Rosanne Currarino, and Richard Schneirov, “Recovering the Centrality of Social Democracy in the Early Twentieth Century,” at <https://s-usih.org/conference/conferences>; Stephen E. Barton, “Berkeley Mayor J. Stitt Wilson: Christian Socialist, Georgist, Feminist,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 75/1 (2016), 193–216; and *New Perspectives on Socialism I and New Perspectives on Socialism II*, two special issues of the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2/3–4 (2003). On women see especially Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*; Andrea L. Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837–1917* (Ithaca, 2016); Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism* (New York, 2015); Andrew M. Johnston, “The Disappearance of Emily G. Balch, Social Scientist,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13/2 (2014), 166–99; Duran,

women's political thought expands the subject of inquiry, a messy picture emerges of a progressive movement that was quite close to socialism in its goals and its networks, yet fiercely distanced itself from the Socialist Party. Starr and Scudder illuminate this complex picture. Despite the popularity among progressives of many ideas that could be called "socialist," including municipal ownership of utilities and the value of labor unions, Starr and Scudder caused a stir when they joined the Socialist Party in the early 1910s.¹¹ Yet they saw themselves as the rightful heralds of progressivism's future, seeking to grow the outmoded ideology of their settlement peers toward what they believed was its natural conclusion. Despite Kathryn Kish Sklar's landmark works on the socialist Florence Kelley, the continued historiographical dominance of Jane Addams—who famously refused to convert to socialism despite sympathizing with its ends—obscures the magnetism and clout of women like Kelley, Scudder, and Starr.¹²

Yet their radicalism, too, was one of progressivism's currents. Pursuing it required Starr and Scudder to defy public expectations in multiple ways. In addition to uniting political radicalism with religious traditionalism, Starr and Scudder abandoned the mediating, often feminized, politics of settlement work and allied themselves with the adversarial politics of the male-helmed Socialist Party.¹³ In so doing,

"Ellen Gates Starr"; Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*. This includes finally treating Addams as a progressive intellectual: see Christopher Lasch, "Introduction," in Lasch, ed., *The Social Thought of Jane Addams* (Indianapolis, 1965), xiii–xxvii, at xv; Joel Winkelman, "A Working Democracy: Jane Addams on the Meaning of Work," *Review of Politics* 75/3 (2013), 357–82, at 359; Marilyn Fischer, Carol Nackenoff, and Wendy E. Chmielewski, *Jane Addams and the Practice of Democracy* (Urbana, 2009); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); Amy Kettelstrom, *The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition* (New York, 2015); Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890–1920* (Chicago, 2003); Maurice Hamington, *The Social Philosophy of Jane Addams* (Urbana, 2009); Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "The Social Self in Jane Addams's Prefaces and Introductions," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 49/2 (2013): 127–56; Marilyn Fischer, *Jane Addams's Evolutionary Theorizing: Constructing "Democracy and Social Ethics"* (Chicago and London, 2019).

¹¹On controversy, "My Good Italian Friends," *Boston Globe*, 10 March 1912, Box 2, "Other Publications, 1902–13" folder, VDS Papers; "From the Boston Common, March 9, 1912, Miss Scudder's Criticized Speech," 9 March 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, VDS Papers; Theresa Corcoran, "Vida Scudder and the Lawrence Textile Strike," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, July 1979, 183–95; Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 57; Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 27; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 81–3. See also clippings in response to Starr and Lillie joining the Socialist Party, Box 1, Folders 11 and 12, EGS Papers. On socialist ideas see Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, 1998); Richard Schneirov, "New Perspectives on Socialism II: Socialism and Capitalism Reconsidered," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2/4 (2003), 351–60.

¹²Addams's own account is Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, centennial edn (New York, 1961), 122–5. See also Knight, *Jane Addams*, 88–9; Abraham Bisno, *Abraham Bisno, Union Pioneer* (Madison, 1967), 118. Hamington argues that she was nevertheless a socialist despite disliking labels, and Kettelstrom calls her a "social democrat": Hamington, *Social Philosophy*, Ch. 7; Kettelstrom, *Religion of Democracy*, 309–49. On Kelley see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830–1900* (New Haven, 1995); Sklar, "Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers," *Signs* 10/4 (1985), 658–77; Bisno, *Abraham Bisno*, 115–18.

¹³Both women's views on gender deserve further study. Scudder wrote early in her career that a settlement "has for its very essence the power of home-making": Vida D. Scudder, "The Relation of College Women to Social Need," *Association of Collegiate Alumnae*, 24 Oct. 1890, 10, Box 2, "Other Publications, 1884–98" folder, VDS Papers. On gender, settlements, and politics see especially Shannon

they recognized that they courted controversy. “The word socialism,” Scudder insisted, “glows to the writer, not with the delicate rose-pink so pleasantly popular, but with a deep uncompromising red.”¹⁴

This radical progressivism was rooted in High Church religion. Although the settlement first emerged from the Church of England, Starr and Scudder became outsiders in a milieu increasingly defined by its opposition to dogma. As religious traditionalists, Scudder and Starr embraced ritual, creed, the Trinity, individual contemplation and prayer, the holiness of the saints, the importance of liturgy, and the continuity of the historical church. Their High Church progressivism was not simply a narrow alliance of convenience, as some scholars have depicted Catholic social Christianity, nor a momentary broadening of Catholic rigidity to fit a liberal age, as others have implied.¹⁵ Scudder and Starr were neither antimodern Catholic communitarians, gradualist Christian socialists, nor pragmatist and mediating progressives. They were, instead, catholic socialist progressives who believed in class conflict, beauty, and the sacramental church. They sought “union between a mortified life born of sacramental experience, and ... sending the rich empty away”; they celebrated the “unity” and “authority” of Catholic tradition.¹⁶ Unlike most middle-class Catholics and High Church Episcopalians, however, they did not flinch from class struggle. Dissatisfied with half measures, willing

Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor, 2000); Sklar, “Hull House”; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990); Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871–1933* (Princeton, 2002); Hamington, *The Social Philosophy of Jane Addams*, 71–85, 150; Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920,” *American Historical Review* 89/3 (1984), 620–47. On gender and socialism see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana, 1981); Sally M. Miller, *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism* (Westport, 1981); Sally M. Miller, “For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2/3 (2003), 283–302. On progressivism’s conflict avoidance see especially Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York, 2003).

¹⁴Vida D. Scudder, *Socialism and Character* (Boston, 1912), 6.

¹⁵Scholars who take the first approach focus almost exclusively on men, particularly clergy. Thomas E. Woods Jr, *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York, 2004), 130, argues that Catholic opposition to socialism was essentially unanimous. Scholars who take the latter view are often more inclusive but focus on lay responses to ideas conceptualized in the institutional church: Deborah A. Skok, *More than Neighbors: Catholic Settlements and Day Nurseries in Chicago, 1893–1930* (DeKalb, 2007); Wade Luquet and David McAllister, “Widening the Historic Circle: The Contribution of Women Religious to the Development of Social Work,” *Journal of Social Work Education* 56/2 (2020), 354–68; Ilia Delio, “The First Catholic Social Gospels: Women Religious in the Nineteenth Century,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13/3 (1995), 1–22; Patricia A. Lamoureux, “Irish Catholic Women and the Labor Movement,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16/3 (1998), 24–44; and the discussions in Carson, *Settlement Folk*. An exception is Joyce E. Williams and Vicky M. Maclean, “In Search of the Kingdom: The Social Gospel, Settlement Sociology, and the Science of Reform in America’s Progressive Era,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 48/4 (2012), 339–62.

¹⁶Scudder, “Social Conscience,” 44; Ellen Gates Starr, “A By-path into the Great Roadway,” in Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 186–7. Cf. Vida D. Scudder, “The Social Teachings of the Church Year,” *Anglican Theological Review* 1/4 (1919), 383–406; Scudder, “Christian and Churchwoman: Why?,” *Living Church*, n.d.

to abdicate leadership to the working classes and the historical forces that governed them, Scudder and Starr “took out [their] red card[s].”¹⁷

This article illuminates Starr and Scudder’s alternative progressivism by examining them in two phases: first as uneasy yet influential settlement mouthpieces, and then as unapologetic High Church socialists. Both Starr and Scudder began as typical settlement advocates, arguing for unity, cross-class friendship, and learning from interpersonal experience. Yet despite their instrumental role in bringing settlements to the United States, Starr and Scudder soon decided that localized intervention was not enough. By the 1910s, both viewed settlements as an outmoded form of social action. They sought instead to strengthen alternative political communities: labor unions and, eventually, the Catholic Church for Starr; Episcopalian alliances for social justice for Scudder; and the Socialist Party for both. “After the cutting disappointment inflicted by the feebleness of philanthropy and the failure of reform, after our saddened revolt from the personal solution pressed on us by religion,” Scudder wrote, “came socialism like a new evangel.”¹⁸ The history of the settlement movement must grapple with the leadership of Starr and Scudder, who believed that this—the gospel of socialism—would become its future.

Settlements and “social holiness”¹⁹

All life must be redeemed.

Ellen Gates Starr (1896)²⁰

Ellen Starr and Vida Scudder took familiar paths into “the modern adventure” of reform.²¹ Born into an Illinois farming family in 1859, Ellen Starr learned her letters in a one-room schoolhouse and the basic tenets of Christianity from her Unitarian parents.²² She met Jane Addams when they both began school at Rockford Seminary, a women’s post-secondary institution, in 1877. After finances forced Starr to leave Rockford, she and Addams remained close. As the 1880s dawned, both women mourned the seeming uselessness of their educations in a world that did not welcome women’s public involvement, and they searched together for spiritual meaning.²³

¹⁷Scudder, *On Journey*, 161–2. On Catholic communitarianism see Woods, *Church Confronts Modernity*; John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York, 2003); Skok, *More than Neighbors*; McCarragher, *Christian Critics*; Jonathan McGregor, “A Queer Orthodoxy: Monastic Socialism and Celibate Sexuality in Vida Dutton Scudder and Ralph Adams Cram,” *Journal of American Studies* 52/1 (2018), 65–90. Underscoring the rarity of socialism in social Christianity is McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, esp. 282. On American Episcopalians see competing views in Rzeznik, *Church and Estate*; and Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*. On working-class Catholic activism see Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York, 2015); Lamoureux, “Irish Catholic Women.”

¹⁸Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 69–70.

¹⁹Ellen Gates Starr, “Settlements and the Church’s Duty,” *Publications of the Church Social Union* 28 (15 Aug. 1896), 3–16, at 12.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 7.

²¹Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 3.

²²Starr, “A Bypath,” 167–8; Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 83–4.

²³Deegan and Wahl, “Introduction,” 3–4; Knight, *Jane Addams*, 27–8; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 43–5. On “spiritual meaning” see also Addams, *Twenty Years*, 41–57; Addams to Starr, 7 Feb. 1886 and 22 June 1884,

In their youth, Addams and Starr were well matched; but as they aged, the contrasts in their personalities grew clearer. Where Addams was gentle and reflective, Starr was single-minded and stubborn. Starr's spiritual searching led her to a steadily escalating Episcopalianism, and even as early as the mid-1880s, friends began to predict that she would become Roman Catholic.²⁴ As eccentric in her fashion sense as she was forthright in her politics and religion, Starr has at times been seen as an irritant in the generous home that Addams built.²⁵ But her strength could be as magnetic as Addams's warmth. "Oh, you child of an April day!" one friend wrote to her, lovingly.²⁶ Years later, a priest would credit her with helping to sustain his faith.²⁷

All that was ahead of Ellen Starr in the 1880s, as she and her confidante sought meaningful work in a rapidly changing world. They did not so much find that work as create it. In September of 1889, Starr and Addams rented a floor in a large house on Chicago's run-down West Side. They moved into the settlement they called Hull House that September, with the goal of "tearing down these walls—half imaginary between classes"—that kept society divided.²⁸ Starr and Addams were part of a wave of idealists and seekers, mostly women, who adapted the English settlement idea for their American context. Their model was Toynbee Hall in London, a home for Oxford men in a poor neighborhood, where privileged youth could "know and be known, love and be loved, by our less happy brother."²⁹ For its American enthusiasts, Toynbee represented a "universal" task: one advocate defined it as "reestablish[ing] on a natural basis those social relations which modern city life has thrown into confusion."³⁰

in Jane Addams, *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Barbara Bair, and Marie De Angury, vol. 2: *Venturing into Usefulness, 1881–88* (Urbana, 2009), 330, 433.

²⁴See Starr to Addams, 3 Dec. 1885 and 10 and 13 March 1886, in *Selected Papers of Jane Addams*, 416–17, 447–8. In 1910 Lillie worried that Starr was "going to choose between me and a more Catholic stand than you have ever taken." Frances Crane Lillie to Ellen Gates Starr, 18 July 1910, Box 9, "Lillie Frances Crane, 1906–19" folder, EGS Papers. See also Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 92; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 35–41.

²⁵On fashion see Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 10. One neighbor with fond memories of Starr called her "cranky, slightly crotchety, and quite intolerant." Harriet Welling, OH-048, interview by Mary Ann Johnson, 12 Sept. 1984, Series II, Box 5, Folder 83, Hull House Oral History Collection, the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. The Starr–Addams contrast features in Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 92–100; and Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 81–2. Deegan and Wahl argue that focus on Addams distorts perceptions of Starr: see Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 32–3.

²⁶Frances Crane Lillie, "Thursday Morning (Likely 1910)," Box 9, "Lillie Frances Crane, 1906–19" folder, EGS Papers.

²⁷See letters between Father John Handly and Ellen Gates Starr, Box 9, Folder 14, EGS Papers, especially those from the early 1920s, 14 July 1932, 9 Aug. 1932, and 16 Aug. 1933.

²⁸Starr quoted in Anne Firor Scott, "Introduction," in Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, ed. Anne Firor Scott (Cambridge, MA, 1964), vii–lxxvi, at xxiii–xxiv.

²⁹Henrietta Barnett, "Passionless Reformers," in Samuel Barnett and Henrietta Barnett, *Practicable Socialism: Essays on Social Reform*, 2nd edn (London, 1894), 88–98, at 93. See also Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 1–10; Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890–1914* (New Brunswick, 1984), 3–8.

³⁰Vida D. Scudder, "An Appeal for a New Work" (12 Feb. 1889), Box 2, "Other Publications, 1884–98" folder, VDS Papers; Robert Archey Woods, "Social Recovery," in Woods, ed., *The City Wilderness: A Settlement Study by Residents and Associates of the South End House* (Boston, 1898), 273–4.

Many settlement leaders were also motivated by the religious worldview known as social christianity or the “social gospel,” which emphasized social service and universal brotherhood. Social Christianity is most commonly associated with the broad, anti-dogmatic liberal Protestantism that emerged from doctrinal shifts on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is tempting to infer simply that creedal tolerance begat social tolerance. Yet social Christianity also gathered strength from more dogmatic religious thinkers, Starr and Scudder among them, who made original contributions to the meaning of social justice.³¹ In the early years of settlements, these different Christian cosmologies met on the common ground of faith in cross-class unity. It would take decades for Starr and Scudder’s High Church theology to blossom into their radical alternative progressivism, and at first they willingly affiliated with settlements’ professedly secular missions.³² Despite making common cause with the influential reformist ministers who had shaped their own thinking—among them James Otis Sargent Huntington and Phillips Brooks, two towering figures in the Episcopal Church, and Walter Rauschenbusch, the leading voice of social Christianity and Scudder’s close friend—Starr, Scudder, and their allies had little success in pushing their denominations toward social justice.³³ This absence of institutional support left Starr and Scudder to agree with their more

³¹On dogma see studies of Scudder’s theology, especially Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*; McGregor, “Queer Orthodoxy.” Starr’s theology merits further investigation. On Christianity and progressivism see Stebner, *Women of Hull House*; Carson, *Settlement Folk*; Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, esp. 27–9; Kittelstrom, *Religion of Democracy*; Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Malden, 2009), 36–48; Richard Wightman Fox, “The Culture of Liberal Protestant Progressivism, 1875–1925,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23/3 (1993), 639–60. Such accounts often acknowledge High Church thinkers but position them as exceptions. See also Dan McKanan, “The Implicit Religion of Radicalism: Socialist Party Theology, 1900–1934,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78/3 (2010), 750–89. Jacob H. Dorn, “In Spiritual Communion: Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Christians,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2/3 (2003), 303–25; Edwards, “Jane Addams.” Exceptions are the excellent Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*; and Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*. Even accounts of Catholic activism highlight divergence between Catholic and Protestant “progressives”: see Luquet and McAllister, “Widening the Historic Circle”; Woods, *Church Confronts Modernity*; McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*; Skok, *More than Neighbors*; McCarragher, *Christian Critics*; Delio, “First Catholic Social Gospellers.” Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York, 2010), argues that Protestantism shaped even those who were not religious.

³²On settlements and secularism see Starr, “Settlements”; Vida Dutton Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1910, 845, Box 2, “Atlantic Monthly, 1883–1931 and Yale Review, 1914–21” folder, VDS Papers; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 57–8; Skok, *More than Neighbors*, 4–7; Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago, 1989), 97–100; Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 39–47.

³³On Starr and Huntington see 1897 Notebook, Box 19, Folder 1, EGS Papers; Ellen Gates Starr to Charles Wager, 14 Aug. 1909, Box 11, Folder 2, EGS Papers. Scudder was asked to write Huntington’s biography: Vida D. Scudder, *Father Huntington, Founder of the Order of the Holy Cross* (New York, 1940); see also Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 88–93. Scudder tried and failed to get Rauschenbusch to join the Socialist Party: Christopher Hodge Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York, 2017), 101; Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*, 93. See also Vida D. Scudder, *The Church and the Hour: Reflections of a Socialist Churchwoman* (New York, 1917); Starr, “A Bypass,” 169; Scudder, *On Journey*, 39; Vida D. Scudder, “The Social Conscience in American Churches,” *The Commonwealth* 32/374 (1927), 41–4; Scudder, “Forerunners of the C.L.I.D.: Our Heritage from the Past,” *The Witness*, 25 Sept. 1925; Scudder, “The Social Duty of Catholics,” *American Church Monthly*, May 1930, all in Box 2, “Other Publications, 1922–48, n.d.” folder, VDS Papers; Rzeznik, *Church and Estate*, 181–208; Elizabeth

liberal peers that settlements—while lacking, to their minds, in “the spirit of faith”—were a leading site of spiritual practice, one where “the deepest side of life can be touched” and human relations set aright.³⁴

A final ingredient in the progressivism that Starr and Scudder shared with their peers was an affinity for English social theorist John Ruskin (1819–1900). An art historian and advocate for industrial justice who mingled antipoverty advocacy with reverence for medieval artisanship, Ruskin’s influence suffused nearly every branch of middle-class reform on both sides of the Atlantic. Some of his admirers, like Starr, founded Arts and Crafts societies that worked toward the democratization of beauty and the dignity of work.³⁵ Others, like Scudder, metabolized Ruskin’s calls for reform into broader efforts toward social transformation. “His presence was life-communicating,” Scudder recalled: he conveyed “the light of the eternal stars that guides the race in its slow pilgrimage toward justice.”³⁶ Only after hearing Ruskin speak did Scudder return to the works of Franklin Denison Maurice, a leading reform theologian, and take his Christian socialism seriously.³⁷

From Ruskin to Rauschenbusch to Toynbee Hall, Starr and Scudder were thus fluent in the ideas that structured the early years of the settlement movement. They were also key in creating that movement’s institutions. Hull House, which Starr and Addams founded in September of 1889, has often been credited as the first settlement in the United States, but Vida Scudder knew differently. Scudder had been doing her own soul-searching after college, later writing that she “was not wholly a happy young creature.”³⁸ Born in 1861, the daughter of a Congregational missionary, Scudder used her intellectual brilliance to burst through the newly opened doors of women’s education. She was part of the first class of girls at Boston Latin and of the fifth at Smith College, then went on to be one of the first American women to study at Oxford.³⁹ But even after hearing Ruskin deliver his stirring lectures on industrial justice, Scudder could not determine how the clamor of the modern city intersected with her passion for Percy Shelley and *La morte d’Arthur*. She would discover that synthesis slowly, as so many women of her generation did, through settlement work.

Hinson-Hasty, “Solidarity and the Social Gospel: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 37/2 (2016), 137–50.

³⁴Starr, “Settlements,” 15–16. Cf. McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 347.

³⁵The best accounts of Arts and Crafts in the United States are Lears, *No Place of Grace*; and McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 296–327, though neither foregrounds Starr. See also Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, for the connection to Episcopalianism. On Starr see Deegan and Wahl, “Introduction”; Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 87; Jackson, *Lines of Activity*, 254–5; Mary Ann Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House, 1899–1901: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 10/1 (1989), 35–39; Jennifer L. Bosch, “Ellen Gates Starr: Hull House Labor Activist,” in Ronald C. Kent, Sara Markham, David R. Roediger, and Herbert Shapiro, eds., *Culture, Gender, Race, and U.S. Labor History* (Westport, 1993), 77–88, at 78–9.

³⁶Scudder, “Recollections of Ruskin,” 569, 571. See also Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 1–4, 30; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 59–96.

³⁷Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*, 64; Scudder, *On Journey*, 162–3.

³⁸Scudder, *On Journey*, 49.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 57–74; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 38–40.

During a period that one scholar describes as “Brooding, groping, bored,” Scudder began as an instructor in Wellesley’s English department. She would retain that position in some form—despite rattling the college with her radicalism—for the next forty-one years.⁴⁰ While at Wellesley, still seeking an outlet for her sympathies, Scudder recruited a group of college friends to help start a settlement on the Toynbee model. This informal group grew into the College Settlements Association, which would soon seed women-led settlements in several American cities. Their first project was the Rivington Street Settlement in New York, which opened two weeks before Hull House.⁴¹ But as the plans for Scudder’s own intended settlement in Boston stalled, she watched Hull House grow with a mix of admiration and jealousy.⁴² She finally helped to found Boston’s Denison House in 1892, where she would be a leading force for over twenty years, until her growing radicalism distanced her from the house’s board.⁴³ After a controversial speech to strikers at Lawrence in 1912 and her decision to join the Socialist Party, Scudder wrote delicately, “the situation [at Denison House] no longer called to me in the old way.”⁴⁴

Scudder and Starr were therefore crucial to the early days of the settlement movement: one of them creating its first national organization, the other cofounding the settlement that would become internationally representative of the whole. In those early days, they sounded much like the other settlement workers who have come to define what Mina Carson has called “the settlement ideology.”⁴⁵ In the 1890s, both Starr and Scudder emphasized the ability of the settlement to overcome the barriers of class and national origin and rekindle the democratic fellowship that industrial society had lost. “What is coming to be known as the settlement movement,” Starr explained in 1896, “had its origin ... in a very real impulse to eliminate, by disregarding them, the unreal and artificial barriers of class and station.”⁴⁶ The settlement was where divisions could be overcome. “Human interest and passion for human progress break down barriers centuries old,” promised one resident.⁴⁷ In a settlement, one stood, in Scudder’s words, “at the point of greatest

⁴⁰Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 4, 7; Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 10–11; Kay Atwater, “A Socialist Impelled by Christian Faith,” *The Witness*, March 1979, Box 1, Folder 3, VDS Papers; Vida D. Scudder, “Letter to the Editor,” 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, VDS Papers; Lindley, “Neglected Voices,” 77–8; Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, 130–32, 242–52.

⁴¹Scudder, *On Journey*, 110–11, 135–40; Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 10–11.

⁴²Scudder, *On Journey*, 135–6, 141–2.

⁴³Vida Dutton Scudder, “Early Days at Denison House” (clipping, n.d.), Box 1, Folder 1, VDS Papers; Scudder, *On Journey*, 141, 268, 276; Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 5–6, 8; Corcoran, “Vida Scudder”; Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 402–3; “Vida Scudder, Liberal Sage, Died Saturday,” *The Townsman*, October 14, 1954, Box 1, Folder 3, VDS Papers.

⁴⁴Scudder, *On Journey*, 276.

⁴⁵Carson, *Settlement Folk*, x–xi.

⁴⁶Starr, “Settlements,” 3. Cf. Addams, *Twenty Years*, Ch. 6, “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” first delivered at a conference Scudder attended. See also Laura R. Fisher, *Reading for Reform: The Social Work of Literature in the Progressive Era* (Minneapolis, 2019); David Huyssen, *Progressive Inequality: Rich and Poor in New York, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); Laura M. Westhoff, *A Fatal Drifting Apart: Democratic Social Knowledge and Chicago Reform* (Columbus, OH, 2007).

⁴⁷Lillian Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (New York, 1915), 310.

need in the modern world,—between those alienated classes which cry out for a mediator.”⁴⁸ The settlement would reunite the human race.

Growing restless, seeking justice

Despair is the surest road to Anarchy.

Ellen Starr, Katharine Coman, and Gertrude Barnum (1916)⁴⁹

In the 1890s and the first years of the twentieth century, Starr and Scudder helped to define the ethos and practice of the American social settlement. Yet the goal of “social holiness” that had initially drawn them toward settlements soon began to push them away. Even in their early and most devoted days in the movement, Starr and Scudder had a tendency to undercut their presentations of settlements as ideal modes of life by praising broader social restructuring, a tendency that grew more explicit as the twentieth century dawned. Eventually, they would build a worker-led politics that prioritized catholicism—in politics as well as religion—above the settlements’ currency of relationships, experience, and expertise.

Even before founding Denison House, Scudder acknowledged that the settlement’s “half a dozen simple lives, lived sincerely in the spirit of love,” could accomplish “pitifully, tragically little” against the overwhelming demand of urban poverty.⁵⁰ Starr was concerned as early as 1896 that “sentimentality—the affectation of an equality which does not exist—is in danger of gaining ground in settlements.”⁵¹ Seeking “the healthy passion for justice instead of the morbid one for ‘doing good,’” Starr insisted that trade unions, despite their imperfections, were the true location of Christian brotherhood.⁵² The labor movement’s goal of “reconstruct[ing] life for us all” was far nobler than “our little spasmodic efforts at reconstructing life in some particular corner.”⁵³ Better-known Hull House socialist Florence Kelley raised similar concerns, depicting the settlement as the base for her efforts rather than their culmination.⁵⁴

Scudder kept her strongest doubts about settlements to herself throughout the 1890s, but by the start of the 1910s, she, too, was dismissive of the settlement as a historical force.⁵⁵ “The great mass of misery, corruption, and injustice remains practically unaffected by our efforts,” Scudder wrote flatly.⁵⁶ (Contrast this, for example, to settlement leader Lillian Wald, who as late as 1915 wrote rhapsodically

⁴⁸Vida D. Scudder, “A Glimpse Into Life,” *Wellesley Magazine*, 18 Feb. 1893, 232, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1884–98” folder, VDS Papers. Cf. Woods, “Social Recovery,” 274.

⁴⁹Katharine Coman, Gertrude Barnum, and Ellen Gates Starr, “Garment Workers’ Strike,” 3, Box 1, Folder 12, EGS Papers.

⁵⁰Scudder, “Glimpse,” 228. See also Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*, 59, 61–2.

⁵¹Starr, “Settlements,” 5–6. Cf. Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 141; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 60, 67–8.

⁵²Starr, “Settlements,” 8.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁴See Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 91–2; Sklar, *Florence Kelley*.

⁵⁵Scudder, *On Journey*, 148–72.

⁵⁶Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” 842. See also Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 16–21, 429–31; Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 404–5; Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 231.

about the Federal Children's Bureau as a monument to a new future.⁵⁷) While Scudder still encouraged college women to join settlements as a first step, she had no patience for revering the settlement beyond its due. "It is splendid, it is inspiring; it is by all odds the best thing that the modern world has to show," Scudder wrote impatiently in 1911. "But what is it achieving? What have they DONE ...?"⁵⁸

By the 1910s, Starr and Scudder sought a more holistic politics than the settlement was able to provide. The following sections focus on the intellectual content of Scudder's and Starr's High Church socialism, but they also put those ideas into practice. Both were members of the Society for the Companions of the Holy Cross (SCHC), an organization of Episcopalian women dedicated to the practice of intercessory prayer: prayers intended to improve the welfare of others, including through vast social change.⁵⁹ Beyond the SCHC lay a slate of other communities, formal and informal, in which Starr and Scudder blended their High Anglican religion with social reform: the Church of the Carpenter, the Church League for Industrial Democracy, small publications like the *Trimmed Lamp* and *The Dawn*, the Church Socialist League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the wide networks of correspondence through which books were recommended and ideas debated. Scudder was published alongside Edward Bellamy, Frances Willard, and Washington Gladden; Starr helped shape the design of Chicago's schools and public spaces; both women planned SCHC conferences on social issues and mentored young members of their denominations.⁶⁰

Starr and Scudder also went where surprisingly few settlement workers followed: they joined the Socialist Party. Although they were part of a sizeable minority of Christians in the Party, this was still a controversial choice in broader progressive networks, as leading reformers criticized socialism for promoting class conflict and divisiveness.⁶¹ "I never accepted the theory of practice of the class struggle,"

⁵⁷Wald, *House on Henry Street*, 167.

⁵⁸Scudder, "Socialism and Sacrifice," 842.

⁵⁹Vida D. Scudder, "Social Intercession," *Association Monthly* 8/8 (1919), 317–18; Fredrica Harris Thompsett, "A Passion for Intercessory Prayer: The Historic Vocation of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross," *Anglican Theological Review* 98/2 (2016), 303–16; Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Vocation of Companionship: An Organizational History of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross* (West Conshohocken, PA, 2006).

⁶⁰See especially Starr's correspondence with Charles Wager, Father Handy, and Frances Crane Lillie, Boxes 9, 11, 14, and 15, EGS Papers; Scudder, "Forerunners of the C.L.I.D."; Scudder, "Social Conscience"; Vida D. Scudder, "Socialism and Spiritual Progress: A Speculation," *Publications of the Church Social Union*, Series A, no. 10 (1 Jan. 1896); Scudder, *On Journey*, 164–72; "Conference Program, S.C.H.C. Conference on 'The Church and Social Justice,' A.D. 1909," 21 Sept. 1909, Box 11, Folder 2, EGS Papers; Ellen Gates Starr, "The Prophet Amos, Miss Starr, and the Thinking Thousand," *Trimmed Lamp*, Feb. 1916, Box 1, Folder 12, EGS Papers; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 117–50; Rzeznik, *Church and Estate*, 181–208; Bosch, "Ellen Gates Starr"; Scudder, "Social Conscience"; as well as thorough discussions in McCarragher, *Christian Critics*; and Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*.

⁶¹See Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*; Dorn, "In Spiritual Communion"; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, especially 81–3; Richard Schneirov, "Walter E. Weyl, John Graham Brooks, and William English Walling and American Social Democracy," in *Recovering the Centrality of Social Democracy in the Early Twentieth Century* (2020), at <https://s-usih.org/conference/conferences>; Richard Schneirov, "New Perspectives on Socialism I: The Socialist Party Revisited," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2/3 (2003), 245–52; Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 43–5, 56–7; Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 2,

wrote Denison House cofounder Emily Greene Balch, “which I rejected both on scientific and on ethical grounds.”⁶² It was precisely this divisiveness that Scudder and Starr embraced. “Life cannot be ... redeemed in spots,” Starr proclaimed. The settlements’ goal of mediating or disregarding class boundaries needed to give way to destroying inequality itself.⁶³

Scudder and Starr thus put forth a forceful internal critique of the common conviction that “the Settlement,” in Addams’s oft-cited words, “can stand for no political or social propaganda.” They also challenged Addams’s concerns that strikes—which she nevertheless generally supported—enhanced the “sharp division of the community into classes, with its inevitable hostility and misunderstanding.”⁶⁴ Instead, as Scudder argued, “whatever incidental enhancing of class-bitterness the struggle brings with it, it is the working class who hold to an ideal which would cut that bitterness at the root.”⁶⁵ Attacking Addams explicitly, Scudder demanded, “how can we fail to see in the class-struggle one of those inspiring forces which are the glory of history?”⁶⁶

When Scudder and Starr joined the Socialist Party in the early 1910s, they believed that socialism was the inevitable outcome of the movement that they had helped to create. Their work in the ensuing years was to build the germ of the settlement idea into a broader articulation of what progressivism could mean: a divine revolution, led by workers, that brought justice and flourishing to all. Their radicalism even survived the repressions and recriminations of the First World War. Both tentatively admired the Bolshevik government of the Soviet Union, and Scudder was sending money to “that distracted country” as late as 1925.⁶⁷ While they ultimately lost the battle for what progressivism would become,

26–7; Bosch, “Ellen Gates Starr,” 81; Jacob H. Dorn, “The Social Gospel and Socialism: A Comparison of the Thought of Francis Greenwood Peabody, Washington Gladden, and Walter Rauschenbusch,” *Church History* 62/1 (1993), 82–100, at 99; Kittelstrom, *Religion of Democracy*, 309–49. The Catholic Church, even when pro-labor, was strongly antisocialist for these reasons: see especially Woods, *Church Confronts Modernity*; and on the Episcopal Church see Rzezniak, *Church and Estate*, 181–208.

⁶²Emily Greene Balch, “Acceptance and Transcendence of Socialism,” in *Beyond Nationalism: The Social Thought of Emily Greene Balch*, ed. Mercedes M. Randall (New York, 1972), 49–50.

⁶³Starr, “Settlements,” 7.

⁶⁴Addams, *Twenty Years*, 83; Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (Urbana, 2007), 77. On Addams and labor see Addams, *Twenty Years*, 124; Winkelman, “A Working Democracy”; Susan Roth Breitzer, “Uneasy Alliances: Hull House, the Garment Workers Strikes, and the Jews of Chicago,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 106/1 (2010), 40–70; Connolly, *An Elusive Unity*, 170–77; Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman*, 2nd edn (Chicago, 2007), 255–70.

⁶⁵Vida D. Scudder, “Beyond ‘Stewardship,’” *Living Church*, 15 Nov. 1919, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1914–19” folder, VDS Papers.

⁶⁶Vida D. Scudder, “Class-Consciousness,” *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1911, 320–30, at 325, Box 2, “Atlantic Monthly, 1883–1931 and Yale Review, 1914–21” folder, VDS Papers. On Addams, see *ibid.*, 320. Compare to Hinson-Hasty, who downplays Scudder’s embrace of class consciousness: Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*, esp. 109–10.

⁶⁷Vida D. Scudder to Ellen Gates Starr, 19 March 1925, Box 10, Folder 11, EGS Papers; Ellen Gates Starr to Charles Wager, 2 Jan. 1920, Box 11, Folder 8, EGS Papers. Both women’s attitudes toward the USSR deserve further study. Scudder leaves a particularly rich trove of documents: see notes on Trotsky, Box 1, Folders 7 and 8; Vida D. Scudder, “A Christmas Message,” *The Churchman*, 22 Dec. 1917, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1914–19” folder; Scudder, “The Problems of Socialism from a College Window,” *New Leader*, 29 Jan. 1927, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1922–48, n.d.” folder; Scudder, *On Journey*, 170–72, 303–6; Vida D. Scudder,

each woman left her mark: Scudder as a beloved and long-standing professor at an elite college, a widely known Anglican elder, and one of the most prolific Christian socialist authors; Starr as a stalwart of Chicago's labor politics and a key interpreter of Ruskin and Morris; and both on the settlement community that they had created.

The remainder of this article focuses closely on each woman's thought. Scudder and Starr had different methods of prioritizing holism above relationships and transformation above mediation: while Scudder focused on Marxism, Starr emphasized art. Yet despite their differences, each woman built a political vision in which socialism was inseparable from their catholic religious cosmology. At once founders and skeptics, exemplary and exceptional, Ellen Starr and Vida Scudder illuminate the rich world of possibilities that progressivism contained.

Vida Scudder, fellowship, and Christianity

People can no longer live the little life.

Vida Scudder (1919)⁶⁸

"Individuals are of immense importance; but things are done through, not by them," Scudder announced in *Socialism and Character* (1912).⁶⁹ By the time she arrived at her mature views around the turn of the century, Scudder's philosophy depicted a delicate world of human relations, threatened on all sides by solipsism, sentimentality, and the struggle to survive. Scudder refused to rely upon the interpersonal connection that was the core of the settlement idea, creating instead an original synthesis of Catholicism and Marxist materialism. While Scudder was hardly alone among Roman and Anglo-Catholics in seeking a cooperative commonwealth safe from unregulated capitalism, she was one of vanishingly few to take Marxism seriously and to embrace class antagonism.⁷⁰ She saw herself as the first to articulate a truth both secular and divine, urgent and incontrovertible: the union of materialist socialism with liturgical Episcopalianism. Bigger and broader than the "religion of humanity" that defined progressive liberalism, Scudder's God was incarnated in the impersonal clash of material forces, which the dwarfed individual ought to obey with joy.

"The ultimate source of my socialist convictions was and is Christianity," Scudder insisted in her autobiography. "Unless I were a socialist, I could not honestly be a Christian."⁷¹ While her religious and her social convictions evolved in the years before 1912—from Fabianism to Marxism, and from "Broad Church" Episcopalianism to devoted faith in the saints and liturgy—they each emerged from the same source: Scudder's suspicion of the individual. This suspicion was deeply autobiographical. Raised Congregationalist, Scudder was intrigued by

"A Little Tour in the Mind of Lenin," *Christian Century*, 24 March 1937, Box 2, "Other Publications, 1922–48, n.d." folder, all in VDS Papers.

⁶⁸Scudder, "Social Intercession," 317.

⁶⁹Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 129.

⁷⁰See Woods, *Church Confronts Modernity*; Carter, *Union Made*, 3–5, 83, 141–2, 166–8; Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 4–6; McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*; Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*, esp. 94. On Scudder in theological context see Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 117–50; Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*.

⁷¹Scudder, *On Journey*, 163.

more holistic religions from an early age.⁷² Although she never joined Roman Catholicism due to its stances on private property and priestly authority, she still used Catholicism as a shorthand for her religious views.⁷³ “The Catholic life should be the soul of the democratic state,” she insisted in 1919, the same year that the General Convention of the Episcopal Church declared itself Protestant once and for all.⁷⁴ As usual, Scudder stuck to her own lights.

Her search for catholicity did not prevent Scudder from devoting herself to merely human communities. From the moment she joined the Society of Christian Socialists in 1899 through the half-century that followed, Scudder was a leading radical Christian voice.⁷⁵ She participated in religious forums that addressed socialism, social service, racial justice, pacifism, and intercessory prayer; she published in Anglican publications and mentored new members of religious orders, despite being even further to the political left than her friend Reverend W. D. P. Bliss, whom one historian has cast as the leftmost edge of progressive Episcopalianism.⁷⁶ By the end of her life, the ardently radical Scudder was so well-known within American Anglicanism that ministers called her “Aunt Vida.”⁷⁷ Her commitments also extended well beyond the Church: in 1937, she claimed to be a member of fifty-nine reform organizations.⁷⁸

Scudder’s personal investment in fellowship, however, lies alongside her refusal to place it at the center of her philosophy. While scholars often note Scudder’s youthful reticence and her strong friendships as an adult, few have observed how profoundly this biography shaped her radical progressivism.⁷⁹ For Scudder, human souls unaided—even acting in concert—could achieve little against the world’s broader forces. This conviction did not emerge from Scudder’s religion or her socialism, but instead underpinned them both. This is evident from a revealing short story published in 1891, when Scudder was leading the College Settlements Association. The story, titled “A Modern Legend,” traces the seemingly charmed childhood of its protagonist, Elva. Feeling herself at one with the birds, trees, and sun, Elva rejoices. But Elva’s reticence toward the human world is the

⁷²Ibid., 36–8.

⁷³See e.g. Scudder to Ellen Gates Starr, 25 Sept. 1924, EGS Papers; 14 June 1935, Book V, Box 1, Folder 8, VDS Papers; Vida D. Scudder, “Christian and Churchwoman: Why?,” *Living Church*, n.d., 355, VDS Papers.

⁷⁴Scudder, “Church Year,” 386. On the convention see Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 91; and Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*.

⁷⁵Demonstrating Scudder’s leadership are Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth”; Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*; Hinson-Hasty, “Solidarity and the Social Gospel”; and to a certain extent Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 198–215; McCarragher, *Christian Critics*, 30–32; Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism*. McKanan, “Implicit Religion,” 775, argues instead that Scudder has gotten too much attention.

⁷⁶Williams discusses Scudder in depth but deems her “moderate”: Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 64, 141–5. See also Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 398–404; Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 6–11, 43–4, 65–6; Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*, 6–9; “Vida Scudder, Liberal Sage”; “Ambassador to the Court of St. Francis: The Story of Vida D. Scudder,” *World Tomorrow*, Aug. 1930, 329–32; McKanan, “Implicit Religion,” 771–4.

⁷⁷Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*, 11; Atwater, “A Socialist Impelled.”

⁷⁸Scudder, *On Journey*, 67, 160.

⁷⁹Corcoran especially sees fellowship as central to Scudder’s thinking: Corcoran, *Vida Dutton Scudder*, 18, 106–10. See also Hinson-Hasty, “Solidarity and the Social Gospel,” 144–8; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 38–9, 83–4; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 144; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 210–11.

dark side of her exuberant love for the imaginary and the natural. After her mother's death, a harrowing solipsism encases Elva's world. Every villager that she meets dissolves into her own form; the total lack of otherness parodies her youthful oneness with nature.⁸⁰ Even Elva's attempt to commune directly with Jesus cannot save her from horrifying self-regard.⁸¹ Her redemption comes in two phases: first, she begins to silently help the villagers around her; and second, a saint arrives in town. Elva tells the saint how, through her practical efforts, she has developed "a great tenderness and a great compassion" for the world—a wholly different feeling from "the proud and sinful love of [her] youth."⁸² As the saint lays his cross on Elva's lips, she hears the whisper of the pines, and the otherness of the world floods back—just as Elva dies.⁸³

This dark, fanciful story was baldly autobiographical. Throughout her long life, Scudder felt as though she had narrowly escaped selfish solipsism only through public service and the intercession of Catholic divinity. In her autobiography, written forty-six years after the Elva story, Scudder depicts her pantheistic childhood as a dangerous Eden. Her rich inner life was full of Wordsworthian intimations; one evening, at dusk, she saw fairies.⁸⁴ But this magical oneness with the world concealed intense loneliness. "The human race had up to this time not entered at all into my vision," she admits of herself as an adolescent.⁸⁵ She was terrified of what she saw as her own callousness. Recalling her inability to grieve at the death of her grandmother, Scudder wrote, "I faced the shocking fact that I did not love anyone."⁸⁶ Only her first brushes with Catholicism opened a window to a broader world: "A sense of expanding life, of a world in which I could breathe free."⁸⁷

For Scudder, as for Elva, compassion was developed arduously and incompletely, out of practice rather than instinct. As Scudder wrote in her journal at age seventy-four, "I can behave with decent kindness and courtesy; maybe at a pinch, and could even give my body to be [burned]; but ... [I] never get beyond ... Admiration and Kindness—Cold, callous, empty, indifferent."⁸⁸ Fellowship rescued Scudder from a self she believed to be greedy and fickle, but without ever fully melting the ice that she felt at the bottom of her soul. For that, she looked to God. "I have come to know that power to love is not a natural impulse but a gift of grace," Scudder concluded. "We can really love people only when we find them in God."⁸⁹ Human relationships were as unpredictable, as uncontrollable, as grace.

⁸⁰Vida D. Scudder, "A Modern Legend," *Harper's Magazine*, Jan. 1891, 300–3, at 301–2, Box 2, "Other Publications, 1884–98" folder, VDS Papers.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 302.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 303.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 303.

⁸⁴Scudder, *On Journey*, 21–30, 34–44, 47–49.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 43.

⁸⁸Scudder, "Holy Thursday," 1935, Book IV, VDS Papers.

⁸⁹Scudder, *On Journey*, 145–6.

Vida Scudder's catholic socialism

The class-struggle ... may be the trumpet-blast of an angel of God.

Vida Scudder (1910)⁹⁰

Scudder built her social theory so that it did not rely on the fickle springs of human emotion. Her commitment to settlement ideology as a quest for fellow-feeling was thus necessarily brief. Whereas Scudder had once insisted, in 1890, that “the method of friendship is the only one which can save both poor and rich,” she soon argued instead, “On the surface, our sympathies may tinker away pleasantly and our charities may afford relief; in the depths, [lives] will never be affected till the economic factor be altered.”⁹¹ Unlike other High Church critics of capitalism, however, Scudder pinned her hopes for the Kingdom of God on social revolution.⁹² Historically materialist socialism—with a theological backbone—swept in to fill the void between the lonely individual and humanity.

After leaving Denison House in 1912, Scudder threw herself into the task of synthesizing Christianity with “class-conscious, revolutionary” socialism.⁹³ This involved distinguishing her politics from the settlement ideology that she now associated with the past.⁹⁴ “Jane Addams in her noble autobiography sums up the aim of a settlement in three pregnant words: to socialize democracy,” Scudder wrote. “And truly democracy needs socializing.” Yet there was more than one way to tackle “barriers of race, class, and religion.” The “method of settlements,” Scudder argued, was to “permeate [the barrier] by forces of friendliness so that by and by life shall melt it and flow through”—although this was only possible if the barrier “is of a certain nature.” Socialism’s approach was simpler: break the barriers down.⁹⁵ Whereas Addams and others envisioned friendships as the seeds of a better society, Scudder saw such relationships as localized and lucky: tinkering with individual lives, and only effective under certain conditions. “We have been led,” Scudder wrote, “from vague compunction to the concrete deed.” The time had come to blast those barriers apart.⁹⁶

⁹⁰Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” 847.

⁹¹Scudder, “Relation,” 9; Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 132.

⁹²Later in life Scudder concluded that a revolution without Christianity would fail, but she never rejected social revolution, although several commentators use Scudder’s later views to discount her earlier statements. See especially Vida D. Scudder, 1935–45 Journal, Box 1, Folder 8, VDS Papers; Scudder, “The Social Conscience in American Churches,” 44; Vida D. Scudder, “Religion and Socialism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 3 (1910), 230–47, at 242; Scudder, “Church Year”; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 150; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 212–15; and McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, who places Scudder’s Anglo-Catholicism at odds with her socialism.

⁹³Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 5–6.

⁹⁴See Scudder, *On Journey*, 148–9; Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 16–22, 141–3.

⁹⁵Vida D. Scudder, “‘Socializing’ Democracy,” *Boston Transcript*, 28 Jan. 1911, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1902–13” folder, VDS Papers. Cf. Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 405–6.

⁹⁶Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 110. One need not accept Scudder’s interpretation of Addams, nor characterize Addams as “individualistic,” as Smith does, to conclude that Addams’s philosophy centered interpersonal relationships. See Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 406; Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, ed. Ann Firor Scott (Cambridge, MA, 1964), especially Ch. 1; Seigfried, “Social Self”; Kittelstrom, *Religion of Democracy*, 1–15, 309–49; Abigail Modaff, “To Meet Life Face to Face”:

Scudder's moral universe hosted more unified actors than the person-to-person networks of settlement ideology and practice. While nearly every reformer insisted that there was something to be learned from the lower classes, Scudder's version of this learning dispensed with individual interactions. Instead, the working class was crucial in its unified form as the revealing agent of the forces of history. Reformers could use their expertise to assist this movement, or they could stand athwart it—to their peril. In the forward march of the lower classes, reformers would “read an Intention greater than our own, expressed ... in the warm if terrible terms of this ever-changing universe.”⁹⁷

This “Intention greater than our own” was not, of course, purely secular. This was Scudder's Marxist version of the Episcopalian sacramentalization of the material world. By the time she wrote *Socialism and Character*, Scudder was convinced that the atheism of most organized socialism was contingent rather than essential: it arose from the Church's opposition to reform, which only deepened as socialism sharpened its retaliatory critique of religion.⁹⁸ If socialism's spiritual aspects could be properly explained, the two sides would understand their unity.

Even Scudder's most sensitive interpreters rarely take Scudder at her word that she had formulated a truly class-conscious Christian socialism.⁹⁹ Yet that was Scudder's goal in *Socialism and Character*, which she long viewed as her favorite and most important work.¹⁰⁰ There, Scudder admonished her audience that just because a force is outside human control does not mean that it is purely material. This allowed her to reinterpret historical materialism as, ironically, a deeply spiritual worldview. “Economic conditions ... are imperious and impassive as were those Assyrian tyrants whose insolent images confront us from the past,” she wrote. “But what if these great lords of life are themselves living?”¹⁰¹ The sweeping movement of economic history, Scudder argued, was yet another instance of Christ's revelation as God made flesh. “The material universe ... is a sacrament ordained to convey spiritual life to us,” Scudder wrote. “This is what neither mystic nor revolutionary has learned.”¹⁰² In socialism's very materialism, its refusal to be confined to the human scale, lay a grandeur that could be nothing but divine.

For Scudder, proletarian advance was coming, whether her audience wanted it or not. After the tiny, sentimental efforts of past decades, the “force” of socialism had swept in to provide an actionable blueprint for the future.¹⁰³ Although Scudder was convinced, especially later in life, that lasting positive change could flower only if

Communication and American Social Reform from Haymarket to the Harlem Renaissance” (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2021), 187–279.

⁹⁷Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 178. Cf. Scudder, “Religion and Socialism.”

⁹⁸Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 77–91; Scudder, “Class-Consciousness,” 326–7; Scudder, *Church and the Hour*, 103–18. Starr agreed: Starr, “A Bypath,” 186; Starr, “Settlements,” 11–12.

⁹⁹See especially McCarraher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 346–59; Hinson-Hasty, *Social Maze*.

¹⁰⁰Scudder, *On Journey*, 168.

¹⁰¹Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 146.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 147. See also Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth,” 420; McCarraher, *Christian Critics*, 31. On the material in this period's Episcopalianism see especially Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*; McCarraher, *Enchantments of Mammon*; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 183–215.

¹⁰³Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 69–70.

“rooted in Catholic truth,” she refused to position herself as an expert.¹⁰⁴ She proposed instead to follow the working class where it led. Pointing out that “movements of real value” were almost always initiated by workers, Scudder chastised her fellow reformers for their hubris.¹⁰⁵ “We shall ... be more Christian as well as more scientific if,” she wrote, “we study how to direct aright the great forces arising from life.”¹⁰⁶ In concrete terms, this meant two things: the development of ever-more-precise socialist theory through the science of history and economics, and facilitating workers’ leadership by placing them on the boards of reform organizations and supporting unions in the class struggle.¹⁰⁷

Scudder sought to smooth the path of inevitable revolution by unifying socialism and Christianity. Instead of the reconciliation between groups of people that dominated progressive thought, she sought reconciliation between grand ideas: Christianity and historical materialism. “Such reconciliation,” she insisted, “is the only hope for democracy.”¹⁰⁸ Her Christian socialism was where they met. It was, in fact, the word made flesh. “In the rise of the proletariat, in the elements of the class-struggle, in the trend toward socialism, is the body prepared for us of the twentieth century,” Scudder proclaimed. “Into this body we are to infuse what soul we will. ‘Lo! I come,’ let us then say, [‘]to do thy will, O Lord!’”¹⁰⁹

Ellen Gates Starr, the “Angel of the Strikers”

The Holy Ghost is not conditioned by stations in life.

Ellen Gates Starr (1896)¹¹⁰

In the winter of 1915, Ellen Starr was struggling to tame her ardor as she crafted an article on the recent garment workers’ strike in Chicago. While the published version, “Cheap Clothes and Nasty,” unflinchingly criticized police and employers, the unpublished draft had choice words for philanthropists as well.¹¹¹ “Hospitals for the wreckage after we have made it!” Starr spat. “How long will this shuffling kind of substitute pass current?”¹¹² The only solution, she wrote, was a total overhaul of the industrial system.¹¹³ The following year, Starr launched a failed

¹⁰⁴Scudder, “Church Year,” 384.

¹⁰⁵Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” 846.

¹⁰⁶Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 141.

¹⁰⁷See Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” 846; Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 141–4; “Smith College,” *Hampshire Gazette*, 20 March 1912, Box 2, “Other Publications, 1902–13” folder, VDS Papers.

¹⁰⁸Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, vii.

¹⁰⁹Scudder, “Socialism and Sacrifice,” 849. On socialism and incarnation see also Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 353–5; Smith, “Cooperative Commonwealth”; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 6, 60, 145–9; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 3–4, 38. Compare to Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 214.

¹¹⁰Starr, “Settlements,” 4.

¹¹¹Ellen Gates Starr, “Cheap Clothes and Nasty,” in Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 135–8. On the strike see Breitzer, “Uneasy Alliances,” as well as EGS Papers, Box 1, Folders 11 and 12; Welling interview; Sidney Hillman to Ellen Gates Starr, 22 Dec. 1915, Box 9, “Hillman, Sidney, 1915” folder, EGS Papers.

¹¹²Ellen Gates Starr, “Reflections on the Recent Chicago Strike of Clothing Workers,” in *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 139.

¹¹³Starr, “Cheap Clothes,” 135–6.

campaign for alderman as a Socialist.¹¹⁴ Defending her choices, Starr explained, “I cast [my vote], uncompromisingly, for an ideal; for a total and lasting change in our whole unchristian system of life.”¹¹⁵

“Uncompromising” is a suitable word for Starr’s life and character. Throughout the 1910s, Starr was a reliable presence on Chicago’s picket lines. Her work with the Women’s Trade Union League had begun early in her time at Hull House, but her activism escalated after she joined a local strike in 1910.¹¹⁶ By 1915, she was challenging policemen in courtrooms and stirring controversy in public forums. “Are we in Russia?” she demanded at a meeting between Chicago’s mayor and prominent ministers. “Wage slavery exists among us.”¹¹⁷ As she honed her socialist voice, Starr had even less patience than Scudder for those who tried to stay neutral. As she and Jane Addams drifted apart, Starr criticized her friend for her broad-mindedness, quipping that if Addams were to meet the Devil, she would admire the curve in his tail.¹¹⁸ Starr herself was under no illusions about the Devil. Uncompromising to the last, the “Angel of the Strikers” spent the final decade of her life in a Benedictine religious order.¹¹⁹ After 1935, when she became an oblate of the Third Order of St Benedict, she acquiesced to strict limits on her contact with the outside world.¹²⁰

As the editors of Starr’s collected works point out, Starr’s writings change after her conversion to Catholicism in 1920.¹²¹ From then on, she wrote only about religious concerns, replacing analyses of police overreach and calls for industrial justice with meditations on the breviary. This transformation, however, is easy to overstate. While her monastic practice clearly diverged from her former life, nothing in Starr’s autobiography supports her editors’ insistence that she repudiated the institutions and principles under which she had once lived.¹²² On the contrary, her dedication to socialism was foremost in her mind throughout her conversion.¹²³ Starr’s explicitly Catholic writings no longer address industrial justice, but the continuity in her philosophy is more informative than the disjuncture. Her philosophy of art and beauty united her end-of-life Catholic cosmology with her long-standing dedication to social reform. Overstating the contrast between Starr the convert and Starr the Hull House founder obscures the religious socialism that drove Starr during her time in Chicago.

Starr herself was explicit about the link between her socialism and her Christianity. In a short article titled “Why I Am a Socialist,” likely written around

¹¹⁴Deegan and Wahl, “Introduction,” 27; Jacob S. Potofsky, “Ellen Gates Starr (Letter to The Public Forum),” *Day Book*, 17 March 1916; “Ellen Gates Starr, 19th Ward Aldermanic Candidate, Outlines Platform,” *Day Book*, 23 March 1916, both from *Chronicing America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁵Ellen Gates Starr, “Why I Am a Socialist” (clipping, n.d.), Box 8, Folder 5, EGS Papers.

¹¹⁶Starr, “Reflections,” 26–7; Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 86–90; Bosch, “Ellen Gates Starr.”

¹¹⁷“Jane Addams to Make ‘Last Plea’ to Mayor,” *Tribune*, 17 Nov. 1915, Box 1, Folder 12, EGS Papers.

¹¹⁸Knight, *Jane Addams*, 84.

¹¹⁹Starr gained this nickname from the Chicago press in 1915–16: Deegan and Wahl, “Introduction,” 2, 26–7.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 16.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 28.

¹²²*Ibid.*, esp. 28. See also Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 39; Bosch, “Ellen Gates Starr,” 86.

¹²³See especially Starr, “A Bypath,” 2003, 181–92.

1916, Starr explained her views concisely: “I became a Socialist because I was a Christian.” The synthesis between Christianity and socialism that Scudder had painstakingly created was, for Starr, self-evident. There was simply no other option: modern life presented a “grotesque contrast” to Christianity’s commands.¹²⁴ Inspired by the fiery words of the Old Testament prophets, with her inspiration confirmed by Christian Socialists like Friedrich von Hügel and by the example of St Francis, Starr depicted socialism—as she had once depicted settlements—as the worldly tool for a divine purpose.¹²⁵ “Socialism only, so far as I could find out, offered any effective method to put down the mighty from their seats and to exalt the humble and meek,” she wrote. In socialism, Starr found a movement that matched the urgency of the moment, one willing to harness the power of machines to beautify the world and prepared to stop tolerating the curvy-tailed devil.¹²⁶ “They were radicals—the prophets,” she noted.¹²⁷

It helped that Starr was not as concerned as Scudder with the details of socialist theory, nor was she committed to Marxist historical materialism. While Scudder, the professor, sought to construct a synthetic philosophy for a new age, Starr wrote directly from experience. In newspaper articles, petitions, and court testimony, Starr described the violence of police, the greed of employers, and the kindness and justness of union members. Yet despite their different authorly personas, Starr, like Scudder, associated socialism with a holistic, catholic perspective on humanity. This quickly pushed Starr, as it had Scudder, beyond the settlement ideal.¹²⁸

For Starr, socialism was the only plausible way forward amidst overwhelming wrong. It cut the Gordian knot of complicated policy and interpersonal dynamics under which the settlements labored. “It is impossible now to imitate Abraham, sitting in the door of his tent and entertaining all who come,” Starr wrote. If we tried, “our doorsteps would settle down under a double mortgage.” Society and the state, not individual hospitality, needed to feed the hungry.¹²⁹ Devotion to the collective was more effective and important than tolerant individual character. Only socialism provided a “modern, practical, scientific, and peaceable” path to equality and brotherhood; to rely on anything less drastic was to fiddle while Rome burned.¹³⁰ “Miss Starr is always in the foreground of the battle,” one labor leader testified. “Her indignation at wrong carries her away.”¹³¹ Starr’s radical progressivism celebrated a force whose grand scale matched that of the injustice it fought.

¹²⁴Starr, “Why I Am a Socialist.”

¹²⁵On influences see especially “S.C.H.C. Conference Program”; Ellen Gates Starr to Charles Wager, 9 Aug. 1909, Box 11, Folder 2; Frances Crane Lillie to Ellen Gates Starr, 9 Oct. 1920, Box 9, “Lillie Frances Crane, 1906–19” folder; Frances Crane Lillie to Ellen Gates Starr, 12 Oct. 1931, Box 9, “Lillie Frances Crane, 1930–35” folder, all in EGS Papers.

¹²⁶On machines see Ellen Gates Starr, “The Renaissance of Handicraft,” in Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 83–7; Sarah Alford, “Ellen Gates Starr and Frank Lloyd Wright at Hull House: The Machine as the ‘Will of Life,’” *Journal of Design History* 30/3 (2017), 282–99. Compare to McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 321–4.

¹²⁷Starr, “Why I Am a Socialist.”

¹²⁸Compare to Duran, “Ellen Gates Starr,” who reads Starr as a Deweyan pragmatist.

¹²⁹Starr, “Why I Am a Socialist.”

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹Agnes Nestor, president of the WTUL, quoted in “Abt Attacked in Open Letter by Ellen Starr (Newspaper Clipping),” 1915, Box 1, Folder 12, EGS Papers.

Ellen Starr on art and socialism

And if gladness ceases upon the earth, and we turn the fair earth into a prison-house for men with hard and loveless labor, art will die.

Ellen Gates Starr (1895)¹³²

Ellen Starr, however, added a dimension to her synthesis of socialism and Catholicism that Vida Scudder did not. In Hull House and in Chicago at large, Starr spearheaded efforts to democratize beauty. She cofounded an organization that placed art in public schools, established the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society (an early influence on architect Frank Lloyd Wright), and secured the coveted tutelage of the foremost artisanal bookbinder in the world, whose techniques she brought to a craft bookbinding in the attic of Hull House.¹³³ Starr ensured that art played a central role in the settlement's life. Hull House's first expansion, in 1891, was to build an art gallery, and art classes would feature in neighborhood children's memories of the settlement a full century later.¹³⁴

Starr's views on art formed a more philosophically robust justification for her socialist politics than the simple equation of socialism and Christianity discussed above. This commitment to art, too, however, ultimately rested upon Starr's religion. She drew upon the late nineteenth-century Episcopalian embrace of artisanship and beauty, but also transcended it, accepting conflict as well as harmony and insisting on modern American socialism, machines and all. For Starr, art's role in society and its relationship to the divine encapsulated the urgency of social transformation. Divine beauty was the core of Starr's intransigent Christian socialism. It was also, however, what ultimately drove her to leave public life behind.

Ellen Starr believed that art was at once an individual religious necessity and an outgrowth of social harmony. This theory of art, adapted from John Ruskin and his student William Morris, provided the holism and urgency that drove Starr to view socialism as progressivism's necessary end. This pragmatic, forward-looking vision is perhaps a surprising result of Starr's dedication to an Arts and Crafts tradition with strong antimodernist tendencies. Indeed, Starr at times seemed to fall into the escapism that could plague students of Ruskin. She wrote in 1895 that "every man working in the joy of his heart is, in some measure, an artist"—an off-key

¹³²Ellen Gates Starr, "Art and Labor," in Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 65–74, at 73.

¹³³Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 1, 17–24; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 67; Stankiewicz, "Art at Hull House," 37; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 45–50; Alford, "Ellen Gates Starr." See also letters between Ellen Starr and T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Box 9, Folder 3, EGS Papers; Ellen Gates Starr, "Hull-House Bookbinding," in Starr, *On Art, Labor, and Religion*, 79–82.

¹³⁴Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 87; Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 6, 18; Stankiewicz, "Art at Hull House," 36; Jackson, *Lines of Activity*, 254–5; Sadie Garland Dreikurs, OH-024, transcript of oral history interview, 24 June 1980, Series II, Box 2, Folder 26, Hull House Oral History Collection, the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle; John Thoman, OH-025, transcript of oral history interview, 15 Nov. 1985, Series II, Box 5, Folder 78, in the same collection; Welling interview; "Hull-House Bulletin, Autumn 1900," n.d., Series X, Box 43, Folder 429, Hull House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle.

statement for someone living amidst sweatshops—and her bookbinding infamously produced a small number of fancy objects that only the wealthy could afford.¹³⁵

Yet this image of the happy laborer slowly producing beautiful things does not represent Starr's vision. Art, for Starr, was a social product. Like a living thing in an ecosystem, beauty could grow only when every person felt harmoniously connected to the human community, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. The idea that art emerged from joyful service was thus not, for Starr, a demand that the individual change their attitude toward work. It was an indictment of modern society for destroying the loving relationship between humans and the world, and thus making beauty impossible. "We shall have art again when life is artistic," Starr argued.¹³⁶

This social cosmology of art—a catholic vision of beauty—separated Starr from other critics of capitalism in the Arts and Crafts world.¹³⁷ The few could do their best to preserve craft amid the unchristian crush of industrial society, but real art needed to be "of the people if it is to be at all."¹³⁸ The existence of art—of freedom and joyful service in work—required overhauling the entire economic system: building "a new life, a freed life," in which the entire nation could "work in gladness and not in woe."¹³⁹ To produce the art that encapsulated and testified to human flourishing, humans needed to be able to perceive themselves as members of a harmonious whole. That could not happen without serious structural change. "Into the prison-houses of earth, its sweat-shops and underground lodging-houses," concluded Starr, "art cannot follow."¹⁴⁰ If socialism failed, "art will die."¹⁴¹

Although this idea could be expressed in secular terms, beauty was always, for Starr, a Christian concept.¹⁴² True freedom and joy in work required feeling God's love and fulfilling His commands. Starr was drawn to Catholicism by the beauty of the liturgy, of Mass, and of the mystical devotion that so many of her heroes exemplified; her Catholic aunt Eliza was well known in Chicago's artistic circles.¹⁴³ The stakes of art's preservation were thus the highest possible. Because beauty could only emerge from conditions of spiritual harmony, it was a sign and symbol of divine presence. Art flowed from, and revealed, the presence of God. Without it, the soul was alone.

Starr's use of art allows us to decisively separate her from Jane Addams, whose shadow—fairly or unfairly—hangs over every investigation of Starr. Addams, too, used art to explain her democratic vision. "Poets and artists," she wrote in 1909,

¹³⁵Starr, "Art and Labor," 66. See also Helen L. Horowitz, "Varieties of Cultural Experience in Jane Addams's Chicago," *History of Education Quarterly* 14/1 (1974), 76–77; Deegan and Wahl, "Introduction," 19–21. For the most influential analysis of Ruskinian antimodernism see Lears, *No Place of Grace*; for a more celebratory treatment, see McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*.

¹³⁶Starr, "Settlements," 7.

¹³⁷See especially McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, Part 4, though McCarragher mentions Starr only briefly, at 311–12.

¹³⁸Starr, "Art and Labor," 66.

¹³⁹Ellen Gates Starr, "Art and Democracy" (manuscript address, n.d.), 72, Box 8, Folder 5, EGS Papers.

¹⁴⁰Starr, "Art and Labor," 70.

¹⁴¹Starr, 73.

¹⁴²Cf. Stebner, *Women of Hull House*, 87; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 50, 81–3.

¹⁴³Starr, "A Bypath," 170, 176, 179–80; Starr, "Eliza Allen Starr," especially 161; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 43–4.

“reveal ... the perpetual springs of life’s self-renewal.”¹⁴⁴ Yet Addams exploded her concept of art into a metaphor for democratic relationships. Kindness in poor communities was “poetry”; youthful imagination contained art’s “inexpressible joy”; a sense of common purpose among industrial workers was “collective art inherent in collective labor.”¹⁴⁵ Art existed everywhere individual uniqueness was freely expressed and lovingly received. Addams translated Ruskin’s joyous labor to the activities of everyday life: each person was an artist.

Whereas Addams thus used beauty’s *presence* to argue for reform—the presence of joy and imagination, even in the harshest places—Starr argued from its absence. Even the most artistic child in Starr’s world soon loses their instinct for beauty.¹⁴⁶ It was essential, as William Morris had said, to “do our best to keep art alive”; yet without socialism, this defense of beauty was a losing battle.¹⁴⁷ Only “re-creation of the source of art” could build the cooperative commonwealth.¹⁴⁸ Jane Addams was a friend to unions and a lifelong agitator for reform, but her differences from her more radical friend are clear. The source of divine rightness in Addams’s philosophy is always present in the individual soul; relationships need only be altered for it to be tapped.¹⁴⁹ For Starr, individuals are always caught within something much broader: either the confining distortion of the industrial economy, or the loving harmony of God. As they were for Scudder, these were, for Starr, the only forces worth engaging.

Conclusion: “reality: have I found it?”

How can we tolerate it that life should go on so—all the suffering life of little children, all the waste and squalor and brutality and failure and terror and misery of a system which might be changed.

Ellen Gates Starr (1909)¹⁵⁰

The 1930s brought desolation and danger on a global scale, change impossible to ignore. As Ellen Starr battled declining health from the convent, Vida Scudder prepared for the death that took each of her friends in turn. “This ‘still,’ this blessed tranquility ... [is] different from the clouded stormy mood of youth,” she reflected at age seventy-three. But she could not tell “whether it means ... more life, or approaching death.”¹⁵¹ She would live for twenty more years. Interspersed with

¹⁴⁴Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (Urbana, 1972), 3.

¹⁴⁵Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (Urbana, 2007), 37; Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 10; Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 219.

¹⁴⁶Starr, “Art and Democracy,” 8.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁸Starr, “Art and Labor,” 65.

¹⁴⁹Amy Kittelstrom calls this faith in individual capacity the “religion of democracy”: Kittelstrom, *Religion of Democracy*, 7–8, 14–15. On individual and collective in Addams’s thought see also Modaff, “Meet Life Face to Face,” 187–279; Hamington, *Social Philosophy*, esp. 71–81; Hansen, *Lost Promise of Patriotism*; Seigfried, “Social Self.” On the artistic individual in Arts and Crafts see McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 296–332.

¹⁵⁰Starr to Charles Wager, 9 Aug. 1909, EGS Papers, original emphasis. The subtitle of this Conclusion is from Scudder, 28 Oct. 1935, Book V.

¹⁵¹Scudder, 22 July 1934, Book III.

this drawn-out farewell were explosions of writing on subjects as disparate as Lenin, the church year, and Percy Shelley. After a decade of this, Scudder once again considered her legacy. “As to my books; they die; but they did their work,” she decided. “None has fallen to the ground, a wasted seed.”¹⁵²

Scudder was correct. Yet the content of those books, and of Scudder’s life, has rarely inspired historians’ curiosity. She lived just as much in the public sphere as her male counterparts in the Christian left, yet because she spoke in settlements rather than seminaries, Scudder too often appears only as a brilliant aside. Because she turned to theology alongside politics, she also figures as an exception to progressivism’s supposedly liberalizing current. Her category-defying blend of medieval religion with modern politics can lead even those who feature her to conclude that she was at best “ambivalent” and at worst “no theorist.”¹⁵³ Yet seeing Scudder as a theorist—as she saw herself—reveals that her decades of work in settlements, classrooms, and church leagues generated an innovative synthesis of Anglo-Catholicism with materialist socialism. While Ellen Gates Starr did not set out to write a philosophy, she, too, transformed the intellectual materials with which she worked. Her beauty-driven socialism is as much a part of Hull House—and therefore of social work, women’s political activism, Arts and Crafts, and progressive reform—as is Addams’s pragmatism.

Settlements provided a place for Starr and Scudder to re-weave the positions taken by the male hierarchies that define the historiographical landscape. In rejecting the antisocialist stances of the Episcopalian and Catholic churches and the skeptical posture of socialism toward religion, Scudder and Starr set examples that they believed their peers would follow. Driven by the belief that redemption must encompass all of society in order to be real, Starr and Scudder transmuted the progressive search for a social ethic into an embrace of class antagonism, scientific socialism, Ruskinian artisanship, and the necessity of prayer. Why, and when, did this High Church radicalism that grew from the very center of the movement give way to the technocratic, liberal, reformist progressivism that has become much better known? Catholic socialists like Starr and Scudder faced the opposition of organized denominations, widespread anti-Catholicism, and the increasing schism between religion and social science. But their long-standing centrality to the progressive movement shows that High Church radicalism was not as easily dismissed as we may assume. Especially as women continue to gain recognition as intellectuals, it is time to reevaluate settlement ideology with Starr and Scudder’s networks in mind: people like Florence Converse and Frances Crane Lillie, Father James Huntington and Reverend W. D. P. Bliss, Agnes Nestor and Mary Kenney O’Sullivan, the Cowley Fathers and the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross.

In their autobiographies, both women humbly presented themselves as background players in a larger story. And yet they refused to consign themselves to anonymity. “Great intellects,” Starr wrote, “exaltedly sincere and unworldly souls ... these from time to time illuminate the broad roadways.” But she justified her own narrative by adding that “there remain always the little paths ... and the

¹⁵²Scudder, 5 Sept. 1945, Book of Age.

¹⁵³McCarragher, *Enchantments of Mammon*, 349; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 213; and on Scudder’s dismissal as a theorist see Lindley, “Neglected Voices,” 76–7.

many who tread them ... alone and bewildered.” For these people, Starr could “scarce refuse the chance of leaving in some bypath ... a hint of the next turning.”¹⁵⁴ Scudder, too, created a small place for herself in history. “Does my little modern self, with eyes too often sealed to heavenly things, belong in this room with all these Holy ones?” she asked, while sitting in a gallery at the Uffizi. “Yes, I claim my place,” she decided. “There are lots of people on these walls who are not holy ... crowds of little citizens in the background ... or ... just plain folk working in the fields.” Scudder did not dare to see herself as the subject of a painting. But she felt, nevertheless, that her presence had mattered—that it ought to be recorded.

This article has argued the same. Starr and Scudder are integral to the story of progressivism. “I am playing my own part, in this World Redeeming,” Scudder wrote. “I am going to tell my little story.”¹⁵⁵

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¹⁵⁴Starr, “A Bypath,” 197.

¹⁵⁵Scudder, 14 March 1932, Book I. This passage became the preamble to *On Journey*.

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