“About the year 1825, a change began to come over the minds of the people” of Concord, Massachusetts, remembered Edward Jarvis, a physician and local historian. “It was produced, in some measure, by the temperance advocates. But, in greater part, it was a moral and intellectual epidemic—one of those silent unrecognized changes in public opinion that creep over a community, [when citizens] occasionally find their views of things, and the motives of action that had governed them, giving way and other [views and motives] taking their places.” Jarvis perceptively summarizes the change in attitudes and behavior that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century, a transformation that stigmatized jolly fellows and marginalized both their outlook and world.

A surge of moral reform in Concord and elsewhere made jolly fellowship the antipode of respectability. There were, of course, many restrained and sober men before this period of reform and certainly many rowdy ones afterward. There was, however, a clear contemporary perception of a profound shift in male comportment in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some antebellum moralists affirmed a golden age of virtue that had existed in an idealized past, a period that few of them could actually remember. But within living memory of people in the mid-nineteenth century there was widespread agreement with Jarvis of a turn toward sober and more restrained living. The boisterous impetuosity that characterized jolly fellowship gave way to more self-controlled behavior. George Davis expressed delight in his 1856 history of Sturbridge and Southbridge, Massachusetts, that “a blessed change has succeeded” eradicating drinking and gambling among
Jolly fellows respectable men. Ohioan John Morris, writing in 1873, similarly believed that “the morals and social condition of the people of these United States have undergone a remarkable change. . . . Rampant rowdyism and drunkenness is not nearly so prevalent.” Once drunken fights marked every holiday, but now the “glorious fourth,” and St. Patrick’s day pass[ed] off quietly,” brawling firemen disappeared, even election days were usually tranquil. In Cobb County, Georgia, “a change of sentiment came over the people,” and temperance societies were organized that reduced drinking and disorder. Writer Samuel Goodrich bristled at the idea of a “degeneracy from the Revolutionary standard of public virtue.” In a conversation in the 1850s with William Grayson, he asked Grayson to compare the “manners and morals” of present-day Charleston with that of sixty years earlier. Grayson answered immediately that “the improvement of the present times over the past was incalculable.” Once, every Sunday and holiday was marked by drinking and fighting, but now “the riotous sensuality of the old times had disappeared.” Goodrich explained that he “had put the same question to a great number of persons, in every part of the country, and had received the same reply everywhere, . . . the good, wise virtuous old times were to be found in the imagination only.”2

Jarvis confidently asserted that in Concord, “about the year 1825, a change began to come over the minds of the people,” but few others were able to match Dr. Jarvis’s chronological exactitude. The table in appendix A is compiled from first-person accounts in reminiscences, autobiographies, and local histories in which the author refers to a significant decrease in male disorder. The information is intended only to give a very general sense of timing. The changes were rarely complete or unilinear. In some villages the change took place within a few years; in others it was gradual, spanning two decades. Several authors refer to an initial dramatic decrease in disorder in the wake of revivals or temperance enthusiasm, then a resurgence in jolly behavior as the initial reform impulse faded. Henry Clarke Wright, later a noted reformer, remembered the 1817 revivals as having a transforming impact on the upstate New York village of Norwich, noting that “nothing else was talked of.” All “amusements among young people were abandoned.” Yet Clarke later explains that after several weeks the excitement ebbed and that it was not until around 1828 that daily drinking of liquor halted.3

It is possible to perceive a pattern whereby moral improvement occurred first in the East and then spread to the West and South, but there are striking exceptions. That moral reform was well underway in both the East and Old Northwest regions by the 1820s and 1830s is clear, but the timing is less clear in the South. Jolly fellowship had nowhere been jollier, and the battle lines had never been more clearly drawn. Grayson dates the beginning of “the Change in Society” in
Charleston to 1803 when there began “a great awakening” of religion that diminished “deep drinking, hard swearing and practical joking.” In Henderson County, Kentucky, religious revivals in the first decade of the nineteenth century, according to its historian Edmund L. Starling, checked the “looseness” that had previously reigned in the area and brought virtue and respectability. Yet there were other places in the South where there seems to have been no real decline in disorderly demeanor until decades later. Ted Ownby in his book *Subduing Satan* (1990) shows that despite the progress of moral reform with its emphasis on self-control, jolly behavior survived in some places into the late nineteenth century and even into the early twentieth century. Heavy drinking, gambling, and fighting continued. Court days and holidays were still tumultuous. Cockfighting and dog fighting remained common. In many cities and much of the Trans-Mississippi West, like the South, enclaves that sustained traditionally rowdy male behavior persevered.4

Reform in personal conduct had made significant national headway by the 1840s, even in the South. Observers were often able to date, at least loosely, the onset of improved male conduct in their own communities. There was, however, no agreement as to why it had happened. Most believed that a decrease in drinking had been the crucial element. Here the timing can be determined relatively precisely: William Rorabaugh’s statistics show a steep decline in per capita adult alcohol consumption from an estimated 7.1 gallons in 1830 to 1.8 in 1845. Moralists saw drinking as the critical factor in loosening self-control and stimulating sinful behavior such as gambling, swearing, and Sabbath breaking. The founding of a temperance society signaled Concord’s “change . . . over the minds of the people.” Jarvis accepts that a decline in drinking was central in reforming behavior, but he sees it merely as a manifestation of a deeper change in outlook. Heavy consumption of alcohol had been the rule in Concord since its founding. The real question for Jarvis, as for others who reflected on it, was why in 1825 did people want to have a temperance society? Why after generations in which drunken brawls and wild pranks were taken for granted did Concordians begin to reject such behavior?5

Jarvis saw “a moral and intellectual epidemic” that profoundly transformed mental attitudes. There was simply no longer any desire to do such things—jolly fellowship became unappealing, the prospect of a sober, pious life more enticing. To Jarvis this shift was essentially voluntary: “Men came, themselves, to their natural fullness of power . . . [and] gradually and imperceptibly found their reasons for drinking losing power over them.” Jarvis’s use of “men” in this sentence is significant. He, like many others, saw male jolly conduct as the linchpin of
social disorder, and much of the reform discourse was aimed specifically at men. In Jarvis’s view, men were drawn to a staid and subdued, and presumably more affluent, lifestyle. There was coercion involved, but, Jarvis argued, it was not sinister; it took the form of enlisting the influence of public authorities to achieve the widely held aspiration of an orderly community. Jarvis grounds his change-in-mentality interpretation in a secular framework, but religious commentators focused on the metamorphosis in personality that followed spiritual conversion. Christian attitudes infused American society, and men and women born again during revivals had their lives dramatically altered.6

Not everyone was convinced that male character actually had been transformed. Behavior had changed, but had underlying attitudes? Many men still found drinking, fighting, and gambling alluring, but the social, economic and psychological costs were now too high to indulge in them. John Habermehl, who spent much of his life as a boatman on the Mississippi, agreed that male conduct had altered. “The outer surface of men becomes more refined,” Habermehl conceded. Men’s true nature, however, remained unaltered, because “religion is generally located in the upper story.” “Desire was held under restraint,” but “the lumber remains the same.” Refinement was just a crust over a jolly filling. Habermehl maintained an essentially Hobbesian view of human nature: men’s passions can only be controlled by force, spearheaded in this case by churchmen, the middle class, and women for their own ends. Behind self-control was social control. The “natural inclination” to carouse endured, but it was now “kept in check by the moral force of public opinion” and the law.7

As public attitudes changed, the indulgence of earlier days diminished, and those who refused to adapt paid a cost for disorder. In an era in which the vast majority of Americans lived on farms and villages where life was governed by face-to-face relationships, the waning acceptance of jolly fellowship had a powerful impact on behavior. Drinkers, fighters, and gamblers were singled out and ostracized, their marriage prospects were clouded, and their chances for economic success dimmed. Many came under psychological duress. Respectable neighbors constantly pointed out the immoral nature of jolly fellowship to make reprobates feel guilty about their roistering. Such things were not just wrong; they were sinful. Legal coercion certainly played a role. Arrests for “crimes against public order” increased. John Morris, himself a former professional gambler, saw the significance of law enforcement in the shift away from disorder. In the 1830s, he noted, there were no police “worthy of the name, even in large cities.” Once ignored, drunkenness, assault, gambling, and disorderly conduct could, by midcentury, result in arrest. There is no doubt that decorum was, as Habermehl argued,
often forced on unwilling men. However, the rest of this chapter suggests that drawing a line between self-governance and governance by others is often difficult, and interpretations that emphasize social control do not capture the breadth and depth of religious awakenings and other personal reforms of the period.8

Although Morris accepted the importance of compulsion in reforming male character, he was convinced that even more significant was a transformation in public attitudes. True, police forces were larger and better trained and organized, “but if the people had not learned to appreciate good order, the police would be powerless.” Formerly, Morris remembered, “people enjoyed a fight, and so far from assisting any lawful authority to prevent or break up a disturbance, would actually hinder them in their discharge of duty.” In the 1870s when Morris was writing, onlookers often stopped brawls before the police arrived. There had been regulations virtually everywhere on the books for decades against public drunkenness, gambling, and fighting, but without popular support such laws proved unenforceable. “No law can stand in a government like ours,” a Rhode Island reformer explained, “unless it is in unison with public opinion. . . . The powerful voice of public opinion will blow it away like chaff before the wind.” Liquor regulation could be effectively implemented only where temperance enjoyed a large measure of public approval. Mississippi, for example, had passed an ordinance in 1839 to curb drinking by prohibiting sales of distilled liquor in amounts less than a gallon. However, in Warren County there was little sentiment in its favor, and the grand jury blandly pronounced the act “in advance of public opinion” and refused to issue indictments.9

Jolly fellowship went back centuries and was central to the temperament of too many men and too widespread to be repressed by anything short of overpowering force. Norbert Elias, in outlining his theory of the “civilizing process,” has argued that in Europe a pivotal factor promoting decorum was the formation of centralized governments that monopolized violence. In the United States the national, state, and local governments did not have—nor did most people want them to have—the sort of authority it would have taken to suppress jolly fellowship. The Ann Arbor Michigan State Journal explained in 1836 that American liberty made it necessary that order not be based on compulsion: the French have “an iron government . . . to keep the passions of men within bounds. We have to govern ourselves.” It was taken for granted that sovereignty was too weak to effectively curb disorder without a change in attitude.10

All of these factors—a shift in outlook, social pressure, better law enforcement—played a role in the transformation of male behavior. Many men no doubt were truly remade, but the persistence of a jolly strain in American culture
throughout the century suggests that many still found jolly values alluring. In other chapters, I show that disorderly comportment still held a deep fascination for large numbers of men who no longer themselves drank, fought, or played pranks or perhaps even consciously wanted to.

Why did this change occur? The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a social and cultural transformation: the development of the factory system, the rapid advance of commercial agriculture, the growth of cities, the creation of an urban middle class, railroads, the spread of newspapers, books, and magazines, the rise of the common school and the emergence of mass political parties. Traditional gender roles were recast. There was an upsurge of religion. Nineteenth-century commentators listed multiple reasons for improvement in manners and conduct. Some pointed to better education. Others argued for the significance of improved transport and communication, which eroded parochialism and gave a greater exposure to the outside world. Most observers, however, focused on the spread of market values and the religious revivals of the era, and they, like later historians, puzzled over the connection between them.11

“IT IS BETTER THAT EACH SHOULD DO HIS OWN WORK”

Some commentators saw economic changes as the primary cause of the reformation in male comportment. As canals and railroads were built, small towns found their local economies increasingly integrated into national and even global markets. Farms became capitalist enterprises. Local artisans faced the hazards of competing over a wide geographical area. The increase in personal wealth in the first half of the nineteenth century was erratic and halted by the 1837 depression, but overall, the evidence suggests that probably more people benefited than not from the growth of capitalism. There were now opportunities for men and even women to make money in new ways. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wealth seemed to many largely a matter of luck, a gamble. Many were unpersuaded that steady work guided by foresight, calculation, and self-control would be rewarded; life was too unpredictable. It was almost impossible to save enough to be safe. The path to security lay less in individual initiative than in cooperating with friends and neighbors to weave a web of reciprocal obligations. Individualism was perilous, and accumulating social, not economic, capital seemed the safest course. Because “people had less means of affecting their purpose within themselves” in Concord, according to Jarvis, “mutual sympathy and cooperation” were needed. Life was often precarious and interdependence was a simple fact, understood as such.12
With economic growth, individualism began to seem possible, even desirable. Some men embraced autonomy; others found it forced on them by capitalist development. The reciprocal assistance that was so characteristic of American eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century rural and small-town life eroded. After a fire burned down a village store in the Hudson Valley in 1803, the \textit{Hudson Bee} praised the way “neighbors . . . intend to volunteer their services” to rebuild it. When a tannery burned in 1828, the \textit{Catskill Recorder} viewed coolly efforts to solicit donations for reconstruction, explaining that “we are opposed to the practice of assisting by public subscription those who sustain losses by fire,” and it criticized the tannery owners for not having insurance. Jarvis thought that Concordians were “no less kind, sympathetic and generous than their fathers,” but most believed “that it is better that each should do his own work.” “You help me” was no longer automatically followed by “I'll help you.” Immigrants from the Old World were unpleasantly surprised to learn that in America when you asked for aid, the answer often was, as one German put it, “Help youself.” Sympathy toward others certainly did not disappear—it may not have even diminished—but it did change. Compassion, like all feelings, now should be controlled. “Sympathy,” the \textit{New Englander} explained in 1858, “should be feeling, but regulated feeling, the action of the heart guided by purest reason.” Charity became less direct and impulsive; more deliberate and broader but more diffuse. The period that saw the rise of universal benevolence seems to have witnessed the decay of spontaneous personal benevolence.\footnote{13}

Sharp fluctuations characterized the American economy in the first half of the century, but more and more men became convinced that success lay in their own hands; with diligence and prudence they could make their own way in the world. Jarvis, a pioneer in psychiatry and medical statistics, described the change. In early nineteenth-century Concord, the typical farmer in the area “produced little more than was sufficient for the year’s sustenance and often fell short of that.” Then “habits of labor changed.” All over New England littered, slovenly farmyards were cleaned up. Houses were painted, animals fenced in. Horses replaced oxen. Agricultural societies were formed. Farmers planted new crops and adopted better varieties of old ones to take advantage of the growing Boston market. People labored more steadily and systematically. The reward was “more return for the cultivation of his labor,” Jarvis remembered. The diet improved: more meat was eaten, wheat bread replaced rye, and items like coffee became widely available. Consumer goods once possessed only by the wealthy now were within the reach of ordinary people. Carpets, pianos, and easy chairs appeared in homes. Clothing got better.\footnote{14}
There was now a greater incentive for orderly conduct. Self-control, sobriety, and industry seemed a more realistic path to achievement than it earlier had. The vision of personal economic and social independence must have been captivating for many. You could be your own man. These changes and growing individualism, some observers believed, curtailed jolly behavior. Rev. Joseph Doddridge watched the economic development of the frontier regions of western Maryland and Virginia in the last decades of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Though a minister himself, he put more emphasis on the civilizing effects of economic growth than on religion in improving character. He recalled when drinking and fighting were routine throughout the area. The introduction of commerce, Doddridge believed, gave “a new current to public feeling and individual pursuit.” A higher standard of living brought improved deportment. “Had the hunting shirt, mocasson and leggins continued to be the dress of our men, had the noggin, the trencher and the wooden bowl continued to be the furniture of our houses, our progress towards science and civilization would be much slower.” With material progress, Doddridge explained, people abandoned their rough material objects and manners for “that of civilized man”; they were transformed and “assumed a new character, a new line of life.” Doddridge noticed areas that had been bypassed by these developments when he was writing in 1824. In these places “the costumes, cabins, and in some measure the household furniture of their ancestors are still in use. The people of these districts are far behind their neighbors in every valuable endowment of human nature.” They were lazy. Schools and churches were rare and intemperance common.15

It is noteworthy how often improved dress was cited as a critical factor in reformed demeanor. In an era in which appearance was seen as a key to character, clothes helped to make the man. A slovenly appearance symbolized slovenly attitudes. As with the more orderly farmyards, personal neatness symbolized the rewards brought by individual application. Where once homespun was a sign of republican virtue, by the nineteenth century it was a mark of demoralizing listlessness. In Illinois, Thomas Ford remembered, linsey-woolsey shirts and buckskin britches were replaced by cloth coats and wool hats around 1830. Women began to wear shoes. “With the pride of dress came ambition, industry, the desire for knowledge, and love of decency.” The writer Alfred Henry Lewis noted the same phenomenon in New York City. When a worker began to wear a suit off the job, he became mild mannered. “He must,” Lewis explained, “live up to his costume. He must be polite, courteous, a gentlemen of dignity. And he must not fight.” For these writers higher living standards were the cause, not the result, of improved personal decorum. It was, however, likely the process was more complex. As new
opportunities opened, men took advantage of them through more regular and industrious exertion, which in turn paid economic benefits.\textsuperscript{16}

These benefits were not equally distributed. For economic winners, and for those who hoped to become winners, refinement became a way to distance themselves from the losers. Decorum was part the story of middle-class formation. Gentility was associated not just with higher living standards—a pianoforte and étagère in the parlor, silver spoons, and broadcloth suits—but also with a specific comportment. Although there were certainly boisterous wealthy men and refined poor men, economic success was increasingly associated with a code of social conduct. “The culmination of a genteel lifestyle,” Richard Bushman has written, “was a genteel person.” Restrained, disciplined, well mannered. Not a jolly fellow. Fighting was uncouth and laughing at others impolite. “Raillery,” exposing someone to “Shame and Contempt,” Henry Fielding warned in his classic essay on manners, is not “consistent with Good-Breeding” and marked one as a boor.\textsuperscript{17}

“A GREAT AWAKENING OF RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT AMONG THE PEOPLE”

Although some commentators cited the increase in living standards as crucial in reducing jolly behavior, most suggested religion played a more important role. “Prayer meetings and songs of praise have killed off and stilled forever the sound of midnight revelry and debauchery,” John Bolton O’Neall and John A. Chapman argued in their history of Newberry County, South Carolina. The timing of the improvement in comportment corresponds loosely to that of the religious revivals later labeled the Second Great Awakening. The perceived moral decline that followed the Revolution was especially worrisome in light of the widespread view that republics were fragile and could succeed only where virtue prevailed among citizens—virtue, many clerics believed, that could be sustained only through the Christian religion. The late eighteenth century witnessed the beginning of a vast effort to save souls. The 1790s saw numerous revivals in both North and South; the well-publicized 1801 Cane Ridge revival in Bourbon County, Kentucky, for example, converted hundreds of whites and blacks. The period 1815–18 again saw religious awakenings throughout the country. The preaching of Charles Finney in upstate New York marked the onset of another wave of religious excitement in the 1820s and 1830s. Revivals waned in the 1840s in the East, but the South saw many awakenings and thousands of converts during this time. In 1857 and 1858 there were revivals in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities.\textsuperscript{18}

The revivals had their most visible and spectacular manifestation in outdoor
gatherings like Cane Ridge, but their impact on comportment seems limited. Camp meetings were a source of entertainment; for many, they were a welcome break from the monotony of daily life on the farm or small town—in short, a spree. English immigrant clothier William Brown, traveling west in the early 1840s came on a Methodist camp meeting fifteen miles outside of Cleveland. The great majority “were enjoying themselves comfortably with smoking, drinking, or chewing tobacco, chatting with the women or talking politics with the men.” The disorder that routinely arose when men congregated was a regular feature of such gatherings. Ohio schoolteacher John M. Roberts, a Universalist who attended an open air revival only “to study human nature,” noted the circus atmosphere and wrote in his diary that he saw “more gamblers than preachers, more whiskey than religion, more swearing than praying, more drunkenness than psalms, more fighting than kissing.”

Most awakenings did not take place at camp meetings but occurred within churches, and institutional religion seems more likely to have been able to influence daily lives than dramatic but sporadic events like outdoor revivals. Such church-based awakenings were diverse: some, like some of the early Finney revivals, were marked by intense emotionalism in which whole villages were caught up. Most—such as the decorous awakening in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1816 where “at no time [was there] an overwhelming, sweeping revival, but almost every week some were converted to God”—were less impassioned. Afterward, the churches incorporated and instructed the converts.

The 1817 Norwich, New York, revival suggests both the complexity and the significance of the religious excitement that swept through America in this period. Settled in 1788, Norwich was the seat of Chenango County, New York. Joshua Bradley, who compiled an account of American revivals, likely exaggerated when he claimed that the village was “notorious for vice and almost every species of wickedness.” It was not, however, a very spiritual community: an agent from the Missionary Society of Connecticut reported in 1814 that “very few of the settlers were religious people.” There had been a few revivals in New England and elsewhere in 1815, but a killing frost in June 1816 and the attendant distress spurred a wave of awakenings. In Norwich, according to Henry Clarke Wright, then a twenty-year-old apprentice hatter, the preaching of John Truair, invited from nearby Sherburne by the Congregational church to spend “a few weeks among them as an evangelist,” triggered the revival. Wright remembered the handsome Truair as “thoroughly versed in the art of moving the feelings, and producing an excitement in society.” The reading of an account of the recent awakening in
Lenox, Massachusetts, created a sensation in Truair’s congregation, according to Bradley. Who among them would be saved? Who would be damned? Prayer meetings multiplied, Wright remembered, and “praying and singing were more frequent and energetic; exhortations and appeals to the unconverted were more earnest.”

“A certain class of youths” in the village decided to try to halt the awakening by holding a New Year’s party to greet 1817. The best hall in town was rented, a famous fiddler hired. Wright listened as Truair, from the pulpit, denounced the celebration as an “atheistical design . . . to ‘drive the Lord away from Norwich’” and announced a prayer meeting for the same time. It was, Bradley recounted, “emphatically a sealing time.” The inhabitants “were called upon to act decisively. . . . They halted between two opinions . . . on one hand they were solicited by their evil propensities to go and enjoy the pleasures of mirth . . . [;] on the other they were impressed by the Spirit of God to turn from vanity.” Some who went to the party “were so much affected and so greatly distressed, . . . they left the ball-room and sought relief in tears.” Wright explained that “when it was known how signally the ball had failed, the remark was usually made, that the dancers had found the Lord too strong for them.” “From this time,” reported Bradley, “the work became general. . . . Business was in great measure suspended. Religious meetings were attended almost every day of the week.” Two Universalists were converted, as were several village leaders.

To devout Christians like Wright the issue was a momentous one—eternal salvation. He began fervently praying for his rebirth. Suddenly and dramatically “as I thus lay brooding over my condition, there was an instantaneous revolution in my feelings; from deep anguish, I passed to great joy.” Later Wright came to reject the idea that “religion was a thing to be hunted for and found” and concluded revivals were the work of man, not God. At the time, however, he was convinced that “I was then and there made a Christian.” He wrote a letter to his family in Hartwick, New York, to warn them: “You are,” he stated, “in a state of rebellion against the Almighty.” All were in danger of damnation. “I invite you—I entreat you—I pray you—I beg you—I warn you—to prepare yourselves to stand before the awful Judge. . . . Come, now, my brothers and friends, and let us give glory to God. Amen.” All over Norwich, Bradley reported, the converted went “with trembling and affectionate concern . . . to their ungodly friends, who were distinguished for profligacy and infidelity, and conversed with them about Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.” Eventually, the enthusiasm waned, and men and women went back to work. But the fruits of the revival were significant: the Congregational church
added sixty new members, the Baptist church one hundred. Each built a new building within the year. “This village which was once the strong hold of satan,” Bradley believed, was now a Christian community.

To Bradley the cause of religious revivals was simple: God was working among the people. Others, including many Christians wary of religious enthusiasm, agreed with Wright that they were largely an emotional response to clerical manipulation. Historians also have tended to focus on secular causes of the awakenings. According to some scholars, the religious resurgence was the work of a Protestant clerical establishment that, buffeted by growing egalitarianism and religious disestablishment, looked to the awakenings to restore their languishing authority. Others have seen the revivals as promoted by businessmen to create a tractable and orderly labor force in the period of early industrialization. The increasing attention that evangelists paid to personal probity is consistent with such an argument.

The relationship between the economic changes of the early nineteenth century and the period’s religious revivals is complex and not completely clear. There likely were places where religious enthusiasm was affiliated with a clerical attempt to maintain power or with the spread of market values. Certainly businessmen encouraged the awakenings. Finney’s “Western revivals” in upstate New York in the 1820s and the great 1830–31 Rochester revival, historians have argued, were connected to the rapid economic and social changes taking place in the wake of the building of the Erie Canal. However, the duration of revivals over a period of decades and their wide geographical range makes it difficult to use such examples to formulate a general explanation. To the degree to which we accept the waves of revivals known as the Second Great Awakening as a single event, then they began in the late eighteenth century in the rural, agricultural, slave South, not in the urbanizing, industrializing Northeast. From this broader perspective, the religious zeal of the period seems to make more sense viewed as one of the recurrent bursts of Christian fervor that have marked American religious history.

“ORDER IS HEAVEN’S FIRST LAW”

Why, if so many observers are correct, did religious enthusiasm translate into such a dramatic change in comportment? Unbridled enthusiasm had long been denounced as incompatible with piety, and church edicts condemned disorderly behavior. The Methodists’ “Rule of the United Society” (1743) explicitly prohibited intemperance and fighting. But most Christians before the nineteenth century did not see a serious contradiction between moderate drinking, gambling,
and voluntary fighting and a devout life. Ministers imbibed and sometimes even wrestled and played pranks. The Second Great Awakening was distinctive in its connecting conversion and comportment—religious enthusiasm became more closely tied to rigorous standards of daily life. Many Protestant denominations in the early nineteenth century became more outspoken and relentless in condemning “licentiousness,” which in this period meant not just sexual impropriety but a whole constellation of disorderly behavior, including drinking, fighting, gambling, Sabbath breaking, swearing, and theater going. Much of the censure was aimed at specifically male behavior, but women too were admonished to avoid alcohol, gossip, dancing, and undue familiarity with men. Church courts began to enforce rules against such sinful conduct more vigorously. Rowdiness was now incompatible with Christian existence; in historian Donald G. Mathews’s phrase, piety became coupled with propriety. “Order and discipline,” Mathews discovered, “were probably the most universally applicable words which Evangelicals used to describe the Christian life.” Alexander Pope’s dictum that “Order is heaven’s first law” was cited by Presbyterian minister John Todd to specify how Christians should make their way in the world.26

Churchmen involved in the revivals were convinced that their impact on conduct was nothing short of miraculous. The Great Revival in the first decade of the century was said to have had a profound effect on the South. A cleric reported in 1805 that formerly when men got together in Bath County, Virginia, “drinking, swearing, horse-racing, fighting, and such like practices were common among them—but now . . . you seldom see one pursuing any of these practices.” David Ramsay concluded in his history of South Carolina that “great good has resulted” from Methodist activities. This “is evident to all who are acquainted with the state of the country before and since they commenced their evangelism in Carolina. Drunkards have become sober and orderly—bruisers, bullies and blackguards, meek, inoffensive and peaceable.”27

The religious press brimmed with accounts of a marvelous metamorphosis in behavior. Many of the accounts focused specifically on male conduct. After an 1820 awakening in Provincetown, Massachusetts, men returning from sea were amazed when they walked the streets “to hear no swearing, to see no fighting” and shocked that “the place of carnal mirth was not to be found.” Finney’s preaching in Utica “made ‘new creatures’ of gamblers, and drunkards, and swearers, and Sabbath-breakers.” In the rough Wisconsin lead mining region, Rev. John Lewis reported in the Home Missionary, that formerly groceries had been crowded every day of the week. “Intemperance was very general, gambling almost universal . . . [and] fighting, often very severe, was common.” In the spring of 1845 Lewis
began protracted meetings. “The holy spirit was evidently present.” A temperance society formed. “Fighting is much more rare. A physician told me a few days since that it is now a rare thing for him to be called upon to bind up a broken head. In short we are becoming quite a moral, respectable community.”

Male milieus associated with jolly behavior were redeemed. Militia training day in Irasburgh, Vermont, had traditionally been “given up to drinking and rioting.” There had been “a general revival of religion” in Vermont in 1827, and “much anxiety rested upon the mind of Christians” that the customary militia revelry would impede the movement. The officers proposed an opening prayer: “The Company was formed into a hollow square, and two deacons offered up their heartfelt prayers,” to the astonishment of onlookers. The review continued “with much solemnity,” and the afternoon “was turned into a religious meeting at the courthouse.” This June training “was the day of New Birth of 16 individuals,” according to the anonymous author of an 1856 local history. Many colleges were also caught up in the religious excitement. There were forty-one separate revivals at New England colleges alone between 1811 and 1840. After an 1812 awakening at Williams College, it was reported that “various petty mischief and tricks which had been so common before, entirely disappeared.” At Amherst “a revival in 1831 immediately changed . . . the whole aspect of the College. Many of the most thoughtless & Immoral young men here, have submitted themselves to Jesus Christ.” Even workplaces were converted. One minister described how in a cotton textile factory in Whitestown, New York, during the Western Revival of 1826, employees, many in tears, “knelt in prayer around the machinery” and pledged themselves to Christ.

Such descriptions cannot be taken at face value. Many accounts were written more to kindle and sustain religious fervor than provide a factual report of conversions. Even some clerics admitted that nearly miraculous stories of triumphs were exaggerated. Baptist preacher Wilson Thompson was told that after an awakening in Cincinnati in the 1820s, “the very air in the city seemed changed” and that the entire community was enveloped in Christian gravity. When he visited the Queen City, the disappointed Thompson discovered that, as he rather suspected, things were much the same as before. But if accounts were often inflated, there is no question that the awakenings brought thousands into churches. William McLoughlin Jr. estimates that between 1800 and 1835 the proportion of Americans who were members of Protestant churches grew from 7 percent to 12 percent, a significant increase. This also means, of course, that 88 percent were not members of Protestant churches. Many were Protestants who attended church
services but were not admitted members. Others included Catholics, freethinkers, and those simply unconcerned about religion.30

Women played a central role in revivals and the subsequent reform movements, of which temperance was the most crucial in the reform of male comportment. Before the revivals women had been more likely to join churches than men and less likely to drop out. As in the First Great Awakening, most of those converted during the Second were women. A sample of new members during the 1799–1801 revival in Connecticut determined that 70 percent were women. In Baltimore about two-thirds of the converts in the 1820s revivals were female, about equal to their percentage in churches before that. Even in the 1857–58 urban awakening, the famed “Businessmen’s Revival,” which was said by many churchmen to have been marked by an increase in male religious enthusiasm, 60 percent of converts in New York City were women. In Oneida County, New York, and elsewhere, much of the organizational infrastructure for the awakenings was provided by women through local tract and Bible societies. Also as in the First Great Awakening, many of the converts, male as well as female, were young, the children of church members. Many others were former members; relatively few seemed to be without prior church connections.31

Which raises an obvious question: how many of the men doing the drinking, fighting, gambling, and “petty mischief and tricks,” all said to have declined so dramatically, actually were among the converted? How many jolly fellows were reborn as Christian comrades? Some were. William Grayson relates that a key to the 1803 Charleston revival was the conversion of the wealthy Robert Barnwell, one of the leaders of the town’s coterie of boisterous Revolutionary War veterans said to be “addicted to deep drinking, hard swearing and practical joking.” Barnwell became “an active and devout member of the church.” Storekeeper Hermon Camp kept whiskey in his Trumansburg, New York, shop and freely treated his customers. Converted during an 1831 awakening, he became, literally a new man, according to an 1890 history of the village. This formerly “light-hearted, open-handed, freethinking man became an austere and uncompromising Calvinist.” He joined the temperance movement and “abandoned the sale of liquor and began to war against its use and sale which he fought to his dying day.”32

The majority of the tavern crowd no doubt remained, like most Americans, unconverted, and many were active opponents of revivals. Jolly fellows were surely among the “camp rowdies” that constantly attempted to disrupt religious meetings. Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright denounced them as “doggery-haunting renegades of the towns and villages around.” Most were probably at-
tracted by the socializing and drinking that occurred at camp meetings, but others may have been drawn by contempt for a movement that they saw, correctly, as threatening their lifestyle. Often the opponents would pitch their tents a few hundred yards away from the religious gathering, and the rowdy camp and the revival camp would survey each other like rival armies. Different harassing tactics were used. The rowdies would ride around yelling. Opponents, according to Cartwright, would sometimes hover in adjacent woods “to bark like dogs, to howl like wolves, to hoot like owls.” On one occasion they infiltrated the worshipers and “pretended to get religion, and jumped and shouted at a fearful rate.” Sometimes men attempted to break up revival services in churches. Baptist evangelist Jacob Knapp’s sermons excoriating drinking and gambling generated a fury. In Rochester a mob packed the pews, Knapp claimed, and drowned him out and later systematically broke the church’s windows.\textsuperscript{33}

Clerical accounts of a dramatic reformation of morals were overdrawn: only a relatively small percentage of the population was converted and most of those were women, and resistance was widespread. Yet many observers, even some hostile to awakenings, acknowledged that the era’s religious enthusiasm had diminished disorder. William Grayson understood that many converts were “swayed by sympathy” rather than principle and that many others were “crafty self-seekers” who viewed a profession of faith as in their interest. After a few months most new members became backsliders. Still, Grayson remained convinced that the awakenings had produced “ample, genuine invaluable fruits . . . [with] manifest advantage . . . to the moral condition of the people.” But could the relatively small number of true converts really have such a significant impact? Many thought the answer was “yes” because even men and women who themselves were unmoved by the religious enthusiasm became more orderly. Revivals were said to have a ripple effect, and nonconverts, perhaps from the shame they felt when they compared themselves to their sanctified neighbors or perhaps simply from politeness, altered their behavior. The \textit{Pittsburgh Gazette} thought that “human nature is insensibly actuated by . . . secret springs and touches” and that the presence of dignified, reverent inhabitants “restrains the disorderly in the streets where he walks or the neighbourhood where he lives.” In Bath County, Virginia, after an 1805 revival, even “those who make no pretension to religion, still appear under great restraint.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Hoosier Village}, published in 1912 by pioneering rural sociologist Newell Leroy Sims, presents a unique and perceptive account of a revival’s influence. \textit{Hoosier Village} is a community study of “Aton,” obviously Angola, Indiana, an isolated town in the northeast corner of the state that had been bypassed by antebellum
moral reformation. The change in deportment occurred mostly in the 1860s, late enough for Sims to interview people who experienced it. Thus his account is worth examining in detail. In the 1850s, “impulsive action” was still the rule. Drunks reeled through the streets and “fights occurred with great frequency.” Dances and political discussions often ended in brawls. Card and billiard playing were rampant. A religious awakening began in 1867 among the Disciples of Christ and spread to other denominations. “All classes seem to have been equally susceptible to its influence.” Church membership shot up. “There is a feeling that ‘you have to go to church,’ and ‘one must join the church for everybody does.’” Those who did not attend services came under intense pressure. The church “folks kept dinging away at me until I got tired” and joined, grumbled one man. Sims himself “felt the force of this custom.”

Churchgoers achieved a critical mass that allowed them to influence the entire village. The church “rigidly enforced its moral standards” until it became “the leading factor in forming the social type of the group,” and “through constant repetition in season and out of season,” these moral standards “crystalized into a customary way of life.” Guilt was crucial. The constant emphasis on probity subjected people to mental stress by making them uneasy about their unrighteousness. “Their badness goads their consciences.” Eventually the strain became too much, and people succumbed, recognizing they simply would be happier being respectable. Legal coercion also played a significant role in implementing the new standard of conduct: arrests for intoxication and assault shot up. But even more influential, Sims believed, was the informal coercion of public opinion. “Gossip plays the part of an invisible policeman, keeping watch over every individual, prying into domestic circles, thrusting himself into places of business, patrolling every street and alley[,] . . . inspiring fear and controlling conduct.” Churchgoers had a sympathetic and personal concern for the state of others’ souls, but their methods of ensuring salvation included duress. Anyone who even considered using “liquor as a beverage” was ostracized. Not just drinkers, but gamblers, women who were “flirty,” and alleged transgressors of any sort risked becoming community outcasts.

The change in attitude was profound. “An evolution has taken place in the type of individual dominant in the community.” People before and after Angola’s moral reformation represented “two vastly different social moulds.” In an earlier era

the typical man was a fighter; . . . he was self-indulgent, ready to drink and gratify his passions in excess; he was aggressive, inclined to regard right as
might, and rather impulsive in his actions. The present social environment produces as the prevailing type the austere, dogmatic Puritanic individual, who is a champion of denial, a believer in fair play and justice, a devotee of religion and reform movements.

Sims summarizes the change in terms of ideal types, but he is aware that reality is more complicated: “Only in a rough way can the two periods be defined; since the transition from one to the other, like all other social changes, has been gradual.” Although Sims may underestimate the role of personal religious commitment, he captures the significance of the change and suggests the mechanisms by which the evolution in emotional patterns advanced.37

“SUCCESS OF TEMPERANCE REFORMATION [IS] VITAL TO THE INTEREST OF TRUE RELIGION”

The revivals had instigated the moral awakening of American society, but they were not, by themselves, enough. A wide variety of changes would be needed to transform America into a righteous nation. The goal was not simply pious and sedate Christians but a pious and sedate American society. It would thus be necessary to coax—or, if required, compel—others to modify their sinful behavior. Lyman Beecher was perhaps more than anyone responsible for pushing nineteenth-century Protestantism in a more censorious direction. A Connecticut Congregational minister and dynamic preacher, Beecher was sympathetic to religious awakenings, even as he criticized the emotional excesses of the Finney revivals. Like many others, he was dismayed by the immorality that he saw flourishing in the early republic, and his sermons condemning Sabbath breaking, profanity, intemperance, gambling, dueling, and slavery were published and widely circulated.38

In A Reformation of Morals Practicable and Indispensable (1814), “practicable” is a key word. It signaled Beecher’s comprehension that many people believed that, however desirable, eradicating long-standing transgressions like drinking was impossible. Alcohol, after all, had been part of daily life for generations. But he argued, American Christians must try. Here the revivals played a critical role. In A Reformation of Morals Beecher asserted that the recent awakening of religion showed that the spirit of God was moving in the land and that the time was ripe for an all-out offensive against any and all immorality. Change was feasible—thousands had been converted and brought into churches. Now was the time for the godly to mobilize to eradicate sin.39
Beecher questioned whether, despite the many glowing claims, awakenings by themselves could transform America into a morally healthy nation. What was needed were institutions to further advance moral improvement. The vehicle Beecher proposed was “local voluntary associations of the wise and the good to aid the civil magistrate in the execution of laws.” This was a traditional strategy, first employed in England after the Glorious Revolution and sporadically used in eighteenth-century America. Beecher understood that public authorities in the United States lacked the strength to enforce propriety on the unwilling, but with the aid of a Christian public mobilized through voluntary organizations, success might be achieved. Beecher believed that “in a free government moral suasion and coercion must be united.” He hoped such associations would shame miscreants into decorous conduct. But there was also a role for compulsion—the necessary laws were on the books, but “laws unexecuted are worse than nothing.” Christians must probe for iniquity and report it to public authorities.40

To implement this program, Beecher in 1813 had helped form the Connecticut Society for the Suppression of Vice and Promotion of Good Morals. The vision of an American society characterized by godly concord proved powerfully attractive. Beecher’s initial concern had been with New England, but moral societies sprung up all over the nation—in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Alabama. The Andover (Massachusetts) South Parish Society for the Reformation of Morals was created in 1819 to “discountenance immorality, particularly Sabbath-breaking, intemperance and profanity.” Some groups, like the Schenectady, New York, Society for the Promotion of Good Morals, formed in 1814, proposed only “to faithfully and affectionately counsel and admonish” those who practiced intemperance, profanity, and Sabbath breaking. The New Jersey society, however, vowed to employ “the full effect of the laws of the state against vice and immorality, by aiding civil authorities” in punishing drunkards, blasphemers, and horse racers.41

At first simply one aspect of a broad campaign to improve humanity, decreasing alcohol consumption emerged as the central focus of the personal reform effort. Beecher increasingly emphasized how drinking was the root cause of much of the sinful behavior he condemned. Alcohol was the key that unlocked jolly fellowship: it loosened self-governance and thus led to fighting, gambling, swearing, and other disorder. The Congregational Christian Spectator in 1819 labeled intemperance “that parent of almost all other vices in our country.” To Rev. Lebbeus Armstrong, a pioneer temperance organizer, alcohol became “the curse of all curses.” To reformed drinker James Campbell, drink was nothing less than “the cause of all human misery.” The temperance movement helped consoli-
date the reform in comportment that resulted from revivals and helped ensure it would endure. Jolly fellows could disregard the religious enthusiasm of the period, though at their peril. The goal of the temperance movement, however, especially after the shift to prohibition in the 1840s, aimed to close the taverns and put an end to the regulars and their world. Temperance became the touchstone of the reformers’ vast project of human betterment, an issue of intense conflict, central to the reformation of male character. To growing numbers of people, according to Kentucky physician Daniel Drake, “the village church and the village tavern did in fact represent two great opposing principles: good & evil,—the spirit and the flesh. One might have been taken as the symbol of Heaven—the other of Hell!”

The antidrink movement gained ground in the 1820s, and by 1833 the American Temperance Society claimed it had one million members affiliated with local chapters. The earliest organizations battled only excessive drinking, but the logic of their arguments about the immense dangers of alcohol caused the United States Temperance Union (the American Temperance Society’s successor) to condemn “all [substances] that will intoxicate,” including beer and wine. Teetotalism led to bitter controversy, but eventually it came to dominate the movement. In 1840 six artisans in a Baltimore tavern formed the Washington Temperance Society. Earlier organizations had been religiously oriented; the more secular Washingtonians, on the other hand, appealed to artisans and workers and attracted hundreds of thousands of adherents. The fraternal and semisecret Sons of Temperance was started in New York City in 1842 and by 1851 was said to have a membership of a quarter of a million. But it was becoming obvious that for all the pledges not to touch alcohol, drinking continued throughout the country. This failure led to a turn away from voluntary teetotalism toward legal prohibition. In 1851, Maine, after a tenacious campaign by Neal Dow, president of the Maine Temperance Union, passed a law that effectively banned sales of liquor in the state and in the 1850s twelve more states in the East and Midwest followed suit.

Temperance was strongest in the East but received support everywhere in the country. Although there were fewer societies in the more rural South, voluntary abstinence was strong there as well. The Virginia Temperance Society was founded in 1826 and by 1835 had thirty-five thousand members. The Sons of Temperance had half its membership in southern states; in Alabama it was estimated in 1849 that the organization had enrolled between fifteen to twenty thousand men, one quarter of the state’s white male population. Even in the Louisiana backcountry, the cause was said to be “spreading like wildfire” in 1842: “From every direction we hear of the organization of temperance societies, and of the redemption of many confirmed topers.” In the Old Northwest, the movement
started slowly but quickly burgeoned. In Cincinnati eight thousand men took the Washingtonian pledge in 1841. Midwestern states were among the strongest supporters of a Maine law, and in Michigan seventy thousand residents signed petitions in a successful 1855 prohibition campaign.44

The role of women was pivotal. Insulated from the tumult of business and politics, women, it was argued, were particularly virtuous and thus able to provide
moral instruction to men. Was it not obvious, Sara Josepha Hale asked, that the wife was “the heart of humanity, as her husband was the head?” “Woman,” Hale explained, is “God’s appointed agent of morality, the teacher and inspirer of those feelings and sentiments which are the virtues of humanity.” The majority in many churches and more likely than men to be converted in revivals, women were vigorously involved in antebellum benevolent and reform movements. “Feminine influence,” in the absence of strong government, became for many moralists, both men and women, the key to reforming male character. The advice literature of the period urged men to seek the company of virtuous women, who would restrain misguided behavior, and men themselves came to accept women’s superior virtue. The mere presence of women, as other chapters in this book show, was often enough to make men behave, and women’s absence seemed to many men a license for jolly fellowship.45

The American Temperance Society encouraged women to work through their families and churches to counter the influence of alcohol. Both the Washingtonians and the Sons of Temperance had large female auxiliaries. Women who joined these societies signed the pledge and engaged in benevolent acts. Part of their effort was to halt female drinking. But equally significant, “feminine influence” was viewed as critical in converting men to the cause. Women encouraged, even pressured, men to sign the pledge and ensured that those who signed kept their word. “Teetotal or No Husband” read a banner in a precession of the Worcester Daughters of Temperance; in Vermont temperate women were urged “to kiss the lips of Temperance men to ascertain whether they keep their pledges” not to drink.46

Women’s support of temperance is obviously consistent with their support of moral reform in general. But for women, temperance was far from the abstract issue that was world peace or prison reform, or even, outside the South, slavery. They knew, often from personal experience, the demoralization that drink could bring wives and families. For them, the gleaming vision of a sober, orderly America was especially attractive. When “a change began to come over the minds of the people,” women had less reason to be attached to the old order than men did. What did jolly fellowship have to offer them, except the occasional entertaining story of the antics of the tavern regulars? It was for men only; men went to the tavern and the grocery to drink and carouse while women stayed home. One wonders what went through the minds of the wives of jolly fellows as they spent their evenings, and their money, in taverns.47

The breadth of the movement was striking. There were young men’s temperance societies, workers’ societies, sailors’ societies, Catholic societies, black
societies. College students founded antidrink societies. There were temperate volunteer militia and fire companies. In Pittsburgh, in 1843 the Blues militia joined the Washingtonians en masse and signed the pledge. There was a strong African American temperance movement in both cities and southern states. Even some slaves championed temperance—one Virginia planter claimed “that a large portion of my slaves have given up use of spirits.” A whole temperance culture emerged with temperance books and newspapers, temperance songs, temperance dramas, temperance canal boats, temperance livery stables, temperance hotels, temperance groceries, and even temperance taverns.48

The most famous temperance novel, Ten-Nights in a Bar-Room, published in 1854, illustrates how high the stakes seemed. Written by veteran author Timothy Shay Arthur, it was intended as a brief for the Maine law. Only a minor best seller when first published, its strong sales during the rest of the century, often to anti-drink groups who distributed it free, made it a publishing phenomenon. Equally popular was the 1858 stage adaptation that for the remainder of the century was second in number of performances only to Uncle Tom’s Cabin on rural circuits. Ten-Nights in a Bar-Room is set in the Sheaf and Sickle, a newly opened tavern in the previously upright village of Cedarville. As the narrator visits Cedarville over the years, he chronicles the community’s progressive degradation. It is the tavern, more than alcohol itself, which is the origin of Cedarville’s corruption; its masculine bonhomie lures men out of the home and into drink. The regulars rule the Sheaf and Sickle under the tutelage of tavern keeper Sam Slade and eventually come to dominate the village. Slade on stage was one of the great villains in nineteenth-century theater, an insinuating, cowardly, callous man.49

The Sheaf and Sickle works its malign influence on Cedarville. As in Uncle Tom’s Cabin—published two years earlier—the worst evil is the destruction of families. Like Stowe, Arthur assumes women have a key role to play in moral redemption: there are virtually no female drinkers in Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, and women try to halt men’s drinking. In the book and play’s most famous scene, Mary, the daughter of inebriate Joe Morgan, a once-respectable farmer, comes into the tavern to plead with him to return home. In many stage versions Mary appealed to her father by singing Henry Clay Work’s temperance ballad, “Father, Dear Father, Come Home with Me Now.” A drunken Slade throws a glass at Joe but hits Mary, and she dies a noble, lingering Little Eva-like death. But even female influence is not enough—only men themselves can bring about the needed reformation. Cedarville’s decline continues. “Neglect, decay and dilapidation were visible, let the eye fall where it would.” The inhabitants become “derationalized through drink,” coarser, more profane, slovenly, savage. Clothing
is old and torn. Men gamble. Fights break out. Cedarville is regressing to what America had been before “the change in society.” The Sheaf and Sickle, in short, has done nothing less than reverse human progress. Finally, after Slade is killed by his drunken son, the men of Cedarville demolish the Sheaf and Sickle and prohibit the sale of liquor. Men regain control of their lives from the dominion of drink.⁵⁰

Alcohol was a way of life and to abandon it totally was a decision of momentous significance. In Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1827, an interdenominational group met and drew up a temperance pledge. Some came forward and signed, “but others hesitated: to resolve not to use ardent spirits themselves, nor permit it to be used in their homes, seemed so much like entering into a new world, and adopting new modes of life, that they hardly knew what to say or do.” As long as temperance focused on voluntary abstinence and moral suasion, controversy was sharp but restrained. When, however, temperance supporters began to endorse local options that allowed communities to ban liquor sales and later to push for statewide prohibition, open, bitter conflict broke out. “There is no neutrality in this warfare,” warned the Temperance Recorder. “If you drink none, you are for us, if you drink any, you are against us.” The balance of power varied widely from town to town, and the reluctance of established political parties to become involved contributed to the fluid nature of the situation. In each place, there was usually a coterie of jolly fellows and a growing number of temperance men and women but also many who equivocated. There were nondrinkers outraged by the bullying nature of some temperance campaigns. There were drinkers who suspected that prohibition was good for society, even though they personally enjoyed alcohol. In many places the conflict was intense and prolonged.⁵¹

The first inhabitants to stop consuming alcohol were met with incredulity and ridicule. On New Year’s Day 1824, thirteen-year-old Horace Greeley announced his decision to stop drinking distilled liquor. Indignant Westhaven, Vermont, neighbors seized him at a sheep washing, held him down, and poured alcohol into him: “The liquor was turned into my mouth, and some of it forced down my throat.” The young M. M. “Brick” Pomeroy remembered that when he refused to take a drink with his fellow employees in a Corning, New York, print shop in the 1830s, he was “jeered, ridiculed, sneered at and laughed at for being a milksop.” To give up drinking seemed like surrendering one’s manhood. But as the movement gained adherents, it was drinkers who found themselves disdained. Temperance opponents reacted with the violence and pranks that were so characteristic of jolly fellowship. During a temperance meeting in 1831 in Orleans County, New York, “there came a sleigh load of men . . . [who] took a bottle from their pockets
and went to drinking &c” and “tried to force spirits down one of the members.” The house of a leading prohibitionist in Providence, Rhode Island, was blown up in 1838. An Illinois minister who preached in favor of a Maine law, had a mob throw eggs, rocks, and firecrackers at his house and then march around it “barking like dogs [and] howling like wolves.” In Tallahassee, Florida, an 1833 meeting to organize a temperance society was packed by “the rabble” who unanimously supported a total abstinence provision and then voted to add one absurd amendment after another to the organization’s constitution.52

One repeated battleground was Independence Day. Traditionally a time of heavy drinking and fighting, temperance supporters claimed the holiday for their own. Alcohol-free July 4th celebrations were organized all over the nation. The Pittsburgh Spirit of Liberty reported in 1842 that in western Pennsylvania, the “friends of temperance seem to have quite a monopoly of the celebration of the Fourth.” Not quite everywhere, however. In Muncy, Pennsylvania, when the local temperance society announced an Independence Day observance, another announcement shortly appeared for a celebration for “citizens who are not members of the temperance society.” Both groups made elaborate preparations. On July 4, 1842, “the temperance folks,” recalled one participant at the alcoholic fete, “were tempering their glowing patriotism with cooling draughts of lemonade,” while their antagonists “were arousing their love of country to a much louder pitch with copious portions of ‘inspiring John Barleycorn.’” There were patriotic speeches and fifty toasts, including denunciations of temperance and abolitionism. Writing decades later, the narrator explained that he was leaving out of his account certain incidents that would dismay contemporary readers. “Times have changed,” he concluded, “and we cannot judge them by the standard of to-day.”53

Slowly temperance forces gained ground. Although drinkers put up a strong fight, they increasingly found themselves on the defensive. In Washington County, Ohio, the district attorney, a staunch Presbyterian, was a strong temperance man who used every legal tool at his disposal to harass those who continued to imbibe. He held the post for years, “notwithstanding the efforts of the ‘jolly boys’ at every election, to oust him from office,” John Morris mournfully remembered. By 1845 per capita adult alcohol consumption was down to 1.8 gallons, one-fourth of what it had been fifteen years earlier. Once hospitality demanded every visitor be offered a drink. In the Western Reserve region of Ohio by the 1830s, when visitors called, any liquor was hidden immediately, unless the host “wished to insult” guests, “in which case, the first thing he [did was] to set the whiskey-bottle before them.” Many groceries had stopped selling liquor altogether. In Martinsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1854 only one of three stores sold alcohol and that one stopped
by the end of the year. Horace Greeley claimed that by the 1860s in many villages it was impossible to buy liquor and that tipplers could fill their jug only by sending it to the city.\textsuperscript{54}

Teetotalers were optimistic that temperance by itself would reform American society and bring about an orderly nation, but reformers did not ignore other moral improvements. There were antigambling campaigns in a number of places, mostly in the South and West, and regular antigambling societies in cities such as New York. Students at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and Transylvania College in Kentucky created organizations to eradicate wagering. In some places reformers lobbied for new antigambling laws; in others they urged that existing laws be enforced. The 1851 New York State Act for the More Effective Suppression of Gambling, drawn up on advice from J. H. Green, a reformed gambler, not only instructed district attorneys, sheriffs, and police to enforce the law but made them subject to arrest if they did not.\textsuperscript{55}

The playing of cruel practical jokes began to wane. Although vicious pranks faced little public criticism until the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, the \textit{Memphis Appeal} in 1844 detected a change in popular attitudes. “Instances of practical joking seem to have become more rare, and the relish for this species of amusement less keen, than in former times.” Was it the \textit{Appeal} wondered, because “of the advancement of arts and sciences” and railroads, “which by adding a variety and extension to business and pleasure, scarcely allow a man time to be idle, to stay in one place long enough ‘to get the blues’ or to devise the ‘ways and means’ by which to expel them?” Or was it because “the bump of benevolence, or philanthropy, in the human cranium has . . . become enlarged?” Nowadays people believed that the pain to the victim “nine times overbalances the amount of enjoyment derived by the adverse party.” Whatever the cause, “one thing is certain; there is evidently a decline in practical joking.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{“Driven into a corner”}

The day when it was possible to live a drinking, brawling, prank-playing life and remain a highly regarded member of the community was passing. “True manliness” meant self-control. Timothy Shay Arthur in \textit{Advice to Young Men on Their Duties and Conduct in Life} (1847) advised that “a modest deportment is that which best becomes a young man.” His “inward disorders” must be “subdued and brought under the control of good principles.” The sentiment was not new; moralists had been praising self-governance since the eighteenth century, and this standard of demeanor continued to gain influence. Similarly, male honor
was enhanced not by fighting but by refusing to fight. In an 1843 book for teenage boys titled *Conquest or Self-Conquest; or, Which Makes the Hero?* young Frederic is goaded into battling the school bully Arthur Macon, who proceeds to break Frederic’s arm. When Frederic’s arm heals he wants to retaliate, but after a talk with his father, Frederic comes to understand that honor is achieved not by conquering others but by conquering one’s passions. He decides he would show “more courage in not fighting Arthur Macon than in fighting him.” This wins the respect of the other boys, and he becomes, as the title of the chapter puts it, “A Champion though No Fighter.” Frederic joins the navy where his refusal to drink and gamble awes his fellow sailors, and eventually he becomes a hero in the War of 1812. Restrained manhood was developing into a powerful and increasingly articulate and coherent discourse in sharp contrast to discursively inchoate jolly fellowship.57

Sobriety was now a “credential of character.” Anyone with ambition had to at least appear to live a sedate and temperate lifestyle. This was especially true among the small but growing middle class. Adventurers by this time did not appear suited to what had become a more rationalized economy—a gambling temperament was less likely of reward. It now took, in an oft-repeated phrase of the period, a “system” to succeed. “Form habits of system, in everything,” John Todd advised. “System” meant taking a steady and methodical approach to work, keeping good records, and maintaining tidy arrangement of offices and workshops. It also meant cultivating an orderly personal disposition. The advice literature of the period agreed that the desire for wealth must never take precedence over living a moral life. But aggressive impulses, which no longer could be physically externalized by respectable men, could honorably be channeled into getting ahead in business. Here revivals and the personal reforms of the period intersected with capitalist development. Often only abstainers were hired for responsible jobs. “Other things equal,” a member of the Sons of Temperance boasted, a pledged applicant “has an advantage of place and occupation over an unpledged applicant.” Those whose habits were not abstemious and orderly had trouble getting financial backing. The Mercantile Agency credit reports routinely commented on drinking habits and deportment. “Likes to drink too much” and “leads a sporting life” stigmatized one businessman, “too fond of a spree” another. After examining credit agency ratings for his history of Kingston, New York, Stuart Blumin discovered that “there is a fairly close correspondence between ‘good habits’ and the fortunes of men.” Those whose personal qualities were judged satisfactory generally succeeded; those of “questionable habits,” on the other hand, like Eugene Best, a member of a rowdy “Bumble Bee Boys” gang, failed to pros-
Also significant, especially in villages and small towns, was the companionship of women. Women embraced the reform and temperance movements, and their influence was considerable. Henry C. Noble, a young Unadilla, New York, bachelor learned just how committed women were to the era’s reform efforts when he and others attempted to hold a cotillion in 1831, apparently in an attempt to counteract the spiritual effect of the great Rochester revival. They discovered, however, that they “can get but few ladies to go. Many of them have got a kind of religious scruple about the matter.” Churches and benevolent organizations, along with the ubiquitous singing societies and the increasingly rare husking bees, became the main places, perhaps in some villages, the only places, to meet women. Respectable young women now insisted on morally correct suitors. “Tee-total or No Husband” was more than just a slogan, as English immigrant jewelry maker Henry Walter learned.

After his first wife’s death in New York City, Walter drifted around the East before finally settling down in New Britain, Connecticut, in 1845, age thirty-two. While there he was introduced to “one of the nicest Girls in New Britain” by a friend, who urged him “to try and get her.” The friend arranged a meeting, and they became acquainted, but Walter discovered that “though she might be pleased with me, She would not from principle marry me.” Walter soon learned why: she had received letters denouncing him as a reformer’s nightmare. One message, he learned, claimed he “was seen coming from a certain house disguised with liquor. Another I was playing cards, still another I was profane. . . . And the last point was, That she . . . could not mate herself with one who was an Unbeliever.” Walter pleaded innocent to all charges, but although no dissolute atheist, he seems, in truth, not to have been very devout or have much interest in personal reform. Walter began regularly attending church and won over her mother, who was convinced that anyone who paid such close attention to dull sermons could not merely be feigning interest. With her encouragement, he resumed his efforts, and this time was successful. Now married, Walter continued to attend church, largely it seems to please his wife, who he conceded was “the Christian head of the family.” To what seems to be his own astonishment, during a service in August 1851, he was saved. “I was . . . a new creation. . . . Everything seemed changed. I wanted to speak to everyone I met about the Saviour I had found, or rather who had found me.” This formerly footloose man was now a “home lov-
The claims of Sara Hale and other didactic writers about the importance of “feminine influence” were in Walter’s case no exaggeration. Only by altering his lifestyle to conform to the ideal of the pious, temperate man could he marry the woman he loved. Walter was genuinely transformed, but many others found themselves forced to live up to the ideal of the devout, sober, self-controlled man that employers, young women, and respectable society demanded. There is little doubt that such conforming to expectations led to hypocrisy. Many men likely took a drink as soon as they got out of town. Horace Greeley believed that large numbers of men were forced “to maintain an exterior decency which would once have exposed them to ridicule” and that they gratified interior appetites in anonymous cities. “Men away from home” was a nineteenth-century expression for jolly behavior, implying both male hypocrisy and the likelihood that men would carouse when separated from women, family, church, and community. In cities or areas bypassed by reform, men continued to drink and gamble without reserve. Big Bill Otter never became Sweet William. Living in western Maryland and later Baltimore, he persisted in his hard-drinking, hard-fighting, prank-playing lifestyle with little restraint.

A great many men, however, in the mid-nineteenth century were neither Walters nor Otters nor conscious hypocrites—they were caught in the transition between an age when male revelry was customary and an age in which manly respectability was the standard. The diary of Edward Carpenter, a cabinetmaker in Greenfield in western Massachusetts, suggests the complicated response to the demands of restrained deportment. Carpenter was a backer of the moral reform movements of the day and a reader of self-improvement literature. A temperance supporter, he subscribed to a Washingtonian newspaper and was disappointed when “the Rum party” prevailed in local elections. Yet he continued to drink “small beer.” Carpenter “took a hand of High low jack & the game” but explained that it was “just for amusement for I never played for money.” He was one of the town’s mechanics who organized a boycott of the riotous Mansion House Tavern and voted to suppress, by force if need be, the nightly disturbances caused by “a lot of rowdies.” Yet he enjoyed local brawls, and he eagerly came out to the street to watch a battle “between a saucy fellow named White & a chap by the name of Rundel. White got some hard knocks & I was glad of it.” Carpenter was well versed in the moral reform agenda of the period and believed that he himself, the community, and the nation would benefit from it. Greenville had not yet been caught up in the absolutism that characterized reforms such as temperance, and
Carpenter seems to have felt that indulging in minor vices did not compromise his general commitment to ethical improvement.  

John M. Roberts, a schoolteacher in Madison County in central Ohio, was equally ambivalent. Roberts was fascinated with the drinkers, fighters, and gamblers of the vicinity, yet he maintained his distance from them. He enjoyed associating with the German American Long brothers, “a jovial, ranting [trio of] old bachelors . . . fond of fun and whiskey. They are of the old school of men.” Yet despite his love of such company, Roberts remained ambivalent about their jolly lifestyle and felt guilty after his own sprees. After revelry with a “jovial, rollicking set of chaps that take things easy and good natured as the law will allow,” Roberts was troubled that he was “getting to be almost too well acquainted. I am not in favor of getting to[o], as I think that familiarity breeds contempt.” For all his drinking, Roberts favored Ohio’s Maine law, perhaps feeling that it would help him govern his own jolly tendencies and maintain his self-control.  

Men like Carpenter and Roberts were between two worlds. There were surely Carpenters and Roberts in every community, as well as born-again Walters and rowdy Otters. More Walters, surely, in Connecticut and more Otters in Maryland, but for all the individual and regional variations the trend was clear—the “old school of men” was dwindling, jolly fellowship was fading. Public places like the tavern and street were shunned by respectable men; the home became the place to demonstrate honor and manhood. The temper of the times had changed. Reformers in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, boasted that “gambling, drinking and profanity, which once were our disgrace,” are now “forsaken or driven into a corner.” Disorderly comportment still fascinated large numbers of men, but fewer and fewer followed an unruly lifestyle.  

Jolly fellowship was a male comportment with connections to conduct in the European past, and the slow shift toward more rational and self-controlled conduct, Norbert Elias’s “civilizing process,” had been going on for at least two hundred years. America, with the possible exception of the South, was never as reckless and violent as Europe had been. Although Indians were routinely victims of deadly violence, the eighteenth-century homicide rate among whites in the United States appears to have been relatively low. However, what seemed reserved to one generation could seem unrefined to the next. “Violence” is a relative concept. As Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie suggests in his discussion of the betterment of conduct in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Languedoc, a tavern brawl is restrained compared to a jacquerie. Pranks were a tamer form of aggression than a physical attack. American society in the late eighteenth century was still, in comparison to later periods, marked by a great deal of casual disorder.
and violence. In a long-term trend toward refinement, the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s might be seen as a reforming spurt, marking, perhaps, a final consolidating phase of the civilizing process.  

“LARGE CITIES AND THINLY SETTLED PLACES ARE THE EXTREMES OF SOCIAL LIFE”

This “moral revolution,” as one cleric dubbed it, begun by the revivals and continued by temperance and other benevolent movements, would, reformers hoped, usher in a new age of Christian virtue not only in America but throughout the world. Overall progress was being made. There was widespread satisfaction by the 1840s that in most villages behavior was better, though there was still room for improvement. But reformers were increasingly aware that America encompassed domains where personal regeneration seemed to have stalled. The growing confidence about rural and small-town life allowed moralists to turn their eyes to those areas where reform was much less impressive, most prominently cities and the West.  

William Alcott, editor of the Moral Reformer, observed that “large cities and thinly settled places are the extremes of social life. Here, of course, vice will be found in its worst form.” Only in small, established communities, where “every body knows every body and feels an interest in every body,” had revivals really flourished, Calvin Colton believed. In urban areas and in the West the march of personal reform had been slower, and drinking, gambling, and fighting persisted. Alcott’s view of a “middle landscape” of morality was widely shared: villages were bulwarks of rectitude in contrast to cities and the frontier where disorder still thrived.  

The moral danger of city life was, of course, a staple of Anglo-American discourse, and, although the early nineteenth century saw the appearance of a cogent defense of urbanity, prorural sentiments remained strong. William Cowper’s axiom that “God made the country and man made the town” was widely quoted. Many religious tracts and reform novels of the period contrasted the virtuous village with the evil city. The problem was, as the usually urbane Knickerbocker magazine explained, “great cities are not, to the mass of inhabitants, favorable to the growth of virtue . . . [and] few have the moral power to resist its influence.” The anonymity of urban life freed men and women from communal restraint. Migrants, warned the Evangelist and Religious Review, all too often were “swayed into the broad road of destruction by the immediate and powerful influence of the city.” Popular novels of the period like George Lippard’s The Quaker City
(1845) portrayed cities as stygian worlds of wickedness. Home missionary societies turned their attention to urban areas, especially New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, built churches, established Sunday schools, and made visitations to slum areas.68

The frontier was also cause for concern. Congregational cleric Timothy Dwight was disheartened by the settlements he visited on the New England frontier in Vermont and Maine. “A considerable proportion” of this population, he explained, “will, almost of course, consist of roving, disorderly, vicious men.” This was not, in Dwight’s view, such a bad thing. The frontier functioned as a safety valve, siphoning off unruly men from Connecticut, making the Land of Steady Habits all the steadier. However, as Americans pressed west, farther and farther from the Atlantic seaboard, farther and farther from New England, clerical concern grew. Lyman Beecher was convinced that the “religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West,” where, clerics worried, disorder, infidelity, and Catholicism reigned. In the East, James L. Batchelder, explained, the “principles and actions of citizens . . . who make no pretensions to piety, are guided and restrained” by the “pure principles of the Bible.” But “a different state of things prevails in the West. There Christianity floats on the bosom of troubled waters, like the Ark, tempest tossed.” Western ministers like Peter Cartwright disputed descriptions of their region as a moral swamp, but eastern reformers remained troubled. There was a concerted effort in the 1830s—motivated by both sincere concern and denominational rivalry—to bring the Gospel to the Ohio-Mississippi Valley. Led by the American Missionary Society, the campaign was strongly supported by the American Temperance Society, the American Bible Society, and the American Sunday-School Union.69

There was, as reformers perceived, a clear correspondence between “the extremes of social life,” the frontier and city. American “progress”—the growth of cities and westward expansion—was, paradoxically, fortifying traditional male comportment. Both cities and the West, as will be seen, contained male domains, and in both, jolly behavior not only endured but thrived. Such sites emerged as redoubts in an increasingly temperate and restrained America. In such places, and especially in New York City, jolly fellowship became concentrated and distilled into a counterculture. The preservation, indeed intensification, of jolly fellowship in these locales was to have significant implications for American culture and society.