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A Tale of Two Gospels

Helen Jean Wade was born on February 9, 1904, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was the year Theodore Roosevelt assured US control of efforts to dig the Panama Canal, one of the most complicated feats of engineering ever attempted. It was the year Eugene V. Debs clinched the presidential nomination of the recently formed Socialist Party, pledging a new movement for solidarity among the working class to fight the iron grip of capital. It was the year Henry Ford climbed behind the wheel of his latest Red Devil automobile and, zipping across an ice track carved into Lake St. Clair, Michigan, broke the reigning speed record: 91.37 mph.

But the origins of Jean's story stretch further back. From one perspective, the narrative of her life was set in motion on the day in 1893 that her father, Robert Mifflin Wade, decided to sign up for a class at the Wilkes-Barre Business College. He graduated soon after with a degree from the Commercial Division as well as three months' training in shorthand and typewriting under his belt.¹

Robert's family were farm people, Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania Dutch, and knew the satisfactions but also the strain of manual labor. He had worked, at various times, as a coal miner, a railroad worker, a lumberjack, and a hand at a plate glass factory. His was backbreaking, often unrelenting labor. The summer he worked on the railroad as part of a "paddy gang," he once recounted, "I got up at four o'clock every morning and, after getting my lunch packed, walked one-and-a-half miles and rowed a boat across the Allegheny



FIGURE 2. Portrait of Jean's father, Robert Mifflin Wade, n.d.

River before going to work at seven o'clock, and every evening . . . went through the same performance to get home again."²

The timber and glass, coal and iron he helped to churn out of mill, factory, and mine were the raw materials of a brave new American world. The train tracks he labored to build knit the country and its expanding markets together at unprecedented speed. In America's urban centers, skyscrapers rose up, steel and glass palaces out of the pages of a futurist fairy tale. The skyscrapers were designed to meet

a skyrocketing demand for office space—offices where the complex business of administering the modern production and distribution of goods could be managed by a phalanx of lawyers, accountants, recordkeepers, typists, and stenographers. Robert had sensed a turning of the tides. He had dedicated himself to producing the hard, raw materials of modernity. But the future, he wagered, belonged to paperwork—and he wanted a part of it.

After graduating from Wilkes-Barre Business College, Robert hit the pavement in search of clerical work. A letter of recommendation from one of his professors declared him an “earnest student of sound talents and excellent attainments,” “thorough and conscientious in his studies.”³ His brother Joseph Marshall Wade dashed off a letter to him on October 3, 1895, with fifteen dollars enclosed. “Get yourself a pair of pants and a good tie of modern design,” he instructed him. “It don’t pay to look too plain.” He went on to urge his brother to keep himself washed and clean shaven, and to get regular exercise. “You must make it a part of your business to keep a clean head.”⁴ In 1896, Robert, Joseph, and their brother William founded their own commercial school, the Wade Pennsylvania Business and Shorthand College, whose mission was to churn out the steady stream of paper pushers required to meet the labor needs of an increasingly incorporated America. “Business as it is now conducted could not do without this army of deft workers any more than it could spare the railroads,” a 1903 brochure from the college assured prospective students.⁵

And increasingly, this new middle-class army of salaried professionals, clerical workers, and salespeople was populated by young women. “White-collar” work at the turn of the century offered an acceptable path of employment for middle-class girls of limited means as well as working-class girls hoping to climb the social ladder. The 1903 brochure, after running through the advantages that a business education could provide an ambitious young man, hastened to add that women were equally likely to benefit from a business education. “Stenography has given ladies, who have to work, a refined occupation for which they are well adapted,” the brochure declared. “Thousands of them are now employed in the various lines

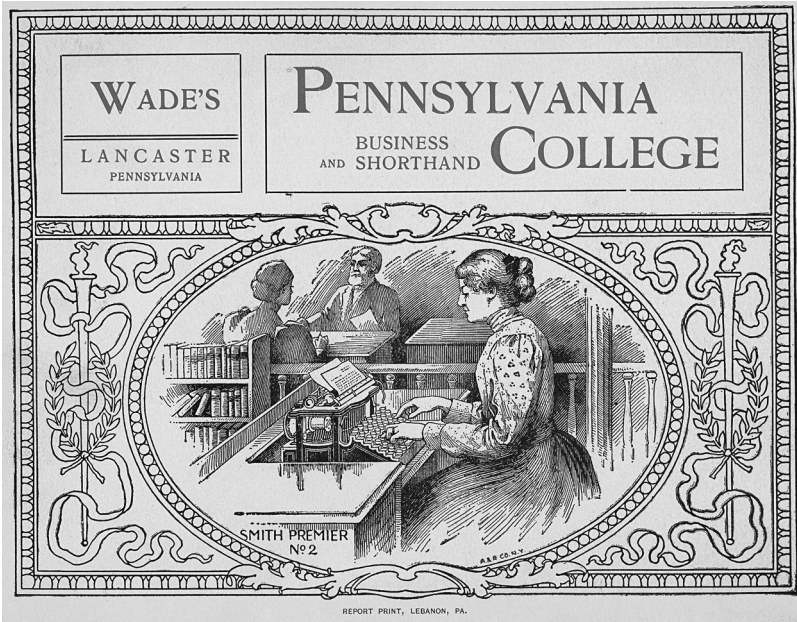


FIGURE 3. Cover of a brochure for the Pennsylvania Business College, 1903. Robert Wade was co-owner of Wade's Pennsylvania Business and Shorthand College, founded in 1896. Jean was a graduate of the school and taught there for one year before taking a position as secretary to the head of the advertising department at Armstrong Cork, a local flooring manufacturer, in 1920.

of business. . . . There are firms that employ several hundred ladies.”⁶ On the booklet’s cover: an engraving of a neatly coiffed and dressed young woman seated at a desk, clicking away at the keys of a Smith Premier typewriter.

Jean attended public school for only two years, before her father decided it would be more efficient to educate her himself at his business college. In 1915, at the age of eleven, she was awarded a Certificate of Efficiency from the Remington Typewriter Company for typing 50 words a minute. She was the youngest pupil ever to receive a certificate of proficiency from the Gregg Shorthand Company. She picked up bookkeeping, letter writing, and business math with equal speed. In short, Jean soon proved herself a paperwork prodigy. In 1915, the institution of the “advertising agency” was still in its infancy. But Jean’s eventual choice of career as an advertiser, helping to grease the wheels of a corporate capitalist machine that grew

beyond the most fantastic expectations of its turn-of-the-century exponents, was a natural extension of her father's work.

This work was successful in America in part because it fit so seamlessly into the traditional religious fabric of American culture. As the industrial and market revolution of the 1830s and '40s blazed relentlessly ahead, upending centuries-old patterns in social and economic life in its quest to make America over in its image, it braided multiple, frequently contradictory threads pulled from the country's Puritan past. "Business Is King," proclaimed one of Robert's brochures—a declaration whose faint tinge of religious enthusiasm was no accident.⁷ Almost half a century later, at the height of the Cold War, Jean would deliver a speech to fellow advertisers conferring a sacred status on their public taste making: "It is a frightening thing, an awesome thing," she mused, "to know that we are holding in our hands not only the wellbeing of [an] individual can of soup or box of cake mix but we are serving as . . . [guides] to a confused, driven, harried, helpless, crazy, mixed up world." In a rhetorical mode more fitted to the pulpit than the boardroom, she concluded her oration: "Are you big enough for that? Are you strong enough for that? Are you brave enough for that? . . . Have you *prayed* enough for that?"⁸

The belief that free-market capitalism will deliver us from evil has been—and continues to be—key to the story we tell ourselves about America. Jean Wade Rindlaub worked tirelessly to convince American women that in their purchasing power, they held the keys to the long-awaited Kingdom.

The idea that wealth, work, and salvation were inextricably linked in an individual Christian's life was a core tenet of Protestant theology and *a fortiori* of Puritan American culture. According to Max Weber's thesis, the forbidding Jehovah of Calvinism left man on earth to work out his salvation for himself, aware that his place among the heavenly elect or the eternally damned was predetermined and that nothing he did could alter it. To devote himself single-mindedly to his work and to fruitful multiplication—whether of children or of capital—was the closest this lonely Christian might come to proof of salvation.

But it was not enough simply to be diligent in one's calling. To ignore providential chances to increase one's profit, and thereby multiply the glory of God, was equally a sign of theological backsliding. Weber quotes the seventeenth-century Puritan theologian Richard Baxter: "If God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or to any other), if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward, and to accept His gifts and use them for Him when He requireth it." Profit was an absolute good, in and of itself, and the profit motive therefore above reproach. Nor did the successful businessman need to trouble his conscience about material inequality here on earth. The distribution of earthly favors, like the distribution of heavenly favors, was entirely in the hands of Divine Providence, "which in these differences, as in particular grace, pursued secret ends unknown to men."⁹

This theological model joining salvation to rugged individualism, both spiritual and economic, worked well in a setting where economic independence and property ownership was the norm, and formed the basis of the white American male's political identity. Up through the antebellum period in America, the majority of white men were self-employed property owners or could reasonably expect to become such, once released from indenture or apprenticeship. Access to capital—and thus grace—appeared roughly democratic. George Washington was fond of quoting the Old Testament prophet Micah's vision of the New Jerusalem as a world of abundance and equality in which "each man shall sit under his vine and fig tree," "and none shall make him afraid." Washington took the passage as a fitting symbol for the republican "paradise" of America, where gentleman farmer and small producer alike could rest secure in his property (and prosperity).¹⁰

The coming of the Industrial Revolution, which heightened inequities between owners and workers, unsettled this theological and economic orthodoxy. No one saw the radically altered nature of the American theological landscape more clearly than the Unitarian pastor and Marxist *avant la lettre*, Orestes Brownson. As early as 1840,

Brownson limned the coming battle between “wealth and labor,” lambasting the emerging factory system as the antithesis of a Christian order of things. Brownson called on true Christians to recognize the hopeless position of a laboring class who “own none of the funds of production, neither houses, nor shops, nor lands, nor implements of labor, being therefore solely dependent on their hands,” and with no chance of accumulating capital.¹¹

In denying the worker access to capital, Brownson claimed, the wage system stunted his spiritual growth as well, denying him “that free scope . . . to unfold himself in all beauty and power, and to grow up into the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.” Brownson insisted that in the new context of modern capitalism, it was not individual but systemic faults that were the root of sin: “No man can be a Christian who does not refrain from all practices by which the rich grow richer and the poor poorer, and who does not do all in his power to elevate the laboring classes, so that one man shall not be doomed to toil while another enjoys the fruits.” In a justly ordered society, Brownson insisted, “each man shall be free and independent, sitting under ‘his own vine and fig tree with none to molest or to make afraid.’”¹²

The communitarian critique of competitive free-market capitalism would not win the day, however. Mainstream antebellum republican thought eschewed any whiff of class conflict, deriding it as a “European import irrelevant to a society of ‘self-made men.’”¹³ “Free labor” republicanism insisted that, in a country that was as open and afforded as much mobility as the United States, it was still possible for a man to jump from the working class to the owning class. Anyone with a little pluck, diligence, and an eye for the main chance could succeed; as Abraham Lincoln once famously said, if a man failed to make it into the entrepreneurial class, “It is not the fault of the system . . . but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune.” The inability to advance economically was an individual failure, not a social one.¹⁴

This economic bootstrap narrative, backed by a stern Protestant work ethic, was an article of faith in Jean’s household as she

was growing up. Of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian stock, Robert Wade was a deeply religious man, trained as a child to hold a “reverential respect” for the village pastor. Whenever his mother spotted the minister coming down the country road past their house, she would immediately send Robert out to dispatch a chicken in the backyard. Before the pastor’s “horse was unhitched and in the stable, the chicken was . . . boiling in a pot.”¹⁵ As an adult Robert was a church elder and a member of the Brothers of the Presbytery; on the side, he dabbled in biblical commentary. He wrote church lectures on many themes, but devoted the most extended of these to the topic closest his heart: the relationship between faith and economic prosperity.

Robert Wade’s meditations are as clear an expression of the Protestant prosperity gospel as one might hope to find in the archives of a provincial nineteenth-century businessman. In one speech titled “Our Duty to the Poor,” Robert cited scriptural evidence to argue that Christ took the side of the poor, not as against the rich but to help the poor to help themselves. For, Robert specified, the causes of poverty were to be sought nowhere other than in the character of the poor man himself. “What is property?” he asked. “It is the product of intelligent skill, of thought, applied to material substance. All property is raw material that has been shaped to uses by intelligent skill.” “When intelligence is low,” he reasoned, “the power of producing property is low.” It stands to reason, then, that the ignorant will always be tools in the industrial machinery, and the intelligent will be “the master workmen and capitalists.” In addition to ignorance, “the appetites and passions” of men were equally responsible for poverty. Those who blamed the government, the power of the trusts, or insufficient capital for their own lack of prosperity needed to turn inward, for “it is the demon of laziness . . . , drunkenness, gluttony, and wastefulness” that truly explains their want of fortune.¹⁶

The poor, then, needed “moral and intellectual culture,” not alms; a hand up, not a hand out. The Gospel was “a new power that is kindled under men that will lift them from ignorance and degradation and passion into a higher realm,” he asserted, and he who knew not the word of God was “poor indeed.” In preaching to the poor, Christ taught them “how to develop their outward condition by developing

their inward forces.” By telling the poor that, as sons of God, they held the power within themselves to “grow . . . into the likeness of [their] father,” Christ was “preaching prosperity to them.”

In true Puritan fashion, Robert scoffed at those who suggested that the coming Kingdom of God would be a world of leisure. The “vine and fig tree” camp should be taken with a grain of salt. “It was not to bring in a golden period of fruitfulness when men would not be required to work, that men should lie down on their backs under the trees, and that the boughs should bend over and drop fruit into their mouths,” that Christ came to earth, he explained. “No such conception of equality and abundance entered into the mind of the Creator.”

In a Sunday school lecture, Robert read a passage from Numbers where the Israelites, delivered out of Egypt, are still wandering in the desert. (He paused in his narration to make the odd comment that the golden tabernacle housing the ark of the covenant likely cost “a million dollars.”) Moses dispatches twelve spies to travel to Canaan and bring back a report on the land and its inhabitants. Joshua and Caleb alone among the spies have enough faith in God’s blessing to recommend they take it by force: “If the LORD delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it unto us—a land which floweth with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8).¹⁷

Robert highlighted Joshua and Caleb as models of Christian inspiration and the fighting spirit Christian soldiers must adopt to make progress in the world. He closed out the rousing lecture by drawing an analogy between the Israelites poised to take the Promised Land and America: “Dear friends we stand tonight very much in the same situation as the Children of Israel did when they stood on the border of the land of Canaan. A world of opportunity lies before us, the richness of which has never been equaled in the history of the world.” And at the last minute, this triumphant taking swerved into a triumphant business deal: “Talk about inspiration,” he mused. “We businessmen subscribe for a little magazine called ‘Inspiration,’ but if you will take the Bible and study the life of the young man Joshua, . . . you will get more inspiration to the square inch than you can get from a square yard of such a magazine.” And just to be clear on the

link between the hand of grace and material profit, Robert added: “If you study [the story of Joshua] from a mere business point of view it will be worth hundreds of dollars to you.”¹⁸ Outward success was a direct reflection of how profitably one had turned to account the “inward forces” and the “new power” that the Gospel has kindled in the souls of men. Profit, Robert knew, was a sign of providential grace.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the republican vision of America as a nation of small independent producers and farmers was beginning to strain credibility. The emergence of a permanent industrial working class flew in the face of America’s prized image of itself as a classless society. Equally worrisome, the rise of the big corporate trusts threatened America’s founding republican commitment to keeping economic and political power broken up and broadly diffused. During the merger movement of the 1880s and ’90s, giant combinations in industry and finance such as Rockefeller’s Standard Oil and J. P. Morgan’s banking empire emerged as the largest consolidated units of capital and power in the country, making even state governments appear puny by comparison. There arose a groundswell of revolt against this new form of aggregate capital that looked poised to do away with the earlier model of Yankee individualism and free enterprise. From many quarters people looked to the federal government to bust the trusts, to break up or regulate this sinister new form of “collectivism.”¹⁹

Still, many saw the breathtaking changes brought by large-scale industrial capitalism as heralding a utopian future of better living for all. The magic of mass production and speedy distribution via the nation’s ever-expanding railways and canals seemed to confirm that a New Jerusalem, a land of peace and plenty not unlike Washington’s fig-tree idyll, was still a live possibility. Of course, America had always been imagined as a land of abundance (when it wasn’t imagined as a wilderness).²⁰ In the 1605 play *Eastward Ho!*, a character rhapsodizes of Virginia: “Why, man, all their dripping pans are pure gold, . . . and for rubies and diamonds they go forth on holidays and gather ’em by the seashore to hang on their children’s

coats.”²¹ With the rise of industrial production and modern modes of transport, this abundance—now in the more prosaic form of cheap, mass-produced consumer goods—suddenly seemed as if it might be within everyone’s grasp, a universal bounty heretofore only glimpsed in myth and fable.²²

No one was a more tireless early spokesperson for the power of corporate capitalism to spread the blessings of abundance than the economist Simon Patten, who was named to the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania’s fledgling Wharton School of Business in 1887. In 1907, Patten argued that the developed world, having definitively passed from a “scarcity economy” into a “pleasure or surplus economy,” could now go about planning and rationalizing the “equitable distribution of [our] surplus.”²³ Corporate capitalism, he said, was key to these distribution efforts. Patten conceded that businessmen of the past had been “isolated” individuals whose “primitive,” scarcity-driven instincts led them to pursue their own narrow self-interest. But the shift to an abundance economy and the resulting corporate merger movement, whereby bigger combinations of capital facilitated the efficient flow of goods, had changed all that. By inducing businessmen to take the “large view,” corporations incentivized cooperation rather than selfish striving. “The growth of large-scale capitalism,” Patten determined, “has resulted in the elimination of the unsocial capitalists.”²⁴

Patten’s rose-colored vision of corporate capitalism as the royal road to more equitable distribution of the blessings of abundance found a ready audience, particularly among Protestant clergy and Progressive intellectuals. On the one hand, liberal Protestant leaders or “Social Gospel” advocates in the first decades of the new century were sympathetic to Orestes Brownson’s prescient account of the ravages of unregulated capitalism. In his 1912 book *Christianizing the Social Order*, Protestant minister Walter Rauschenbush points out that thinking of salvation and Christian duty in individualist terms was the product of particular historical circumstances that, in the age of corporate capital, no longer exist. “The Golden Rule is not really adequate” for the needs of modern society, he argues. “It is indeed love we want, but it is socialized love.” Political and social equality

and freedom mean very little, he suggests, without economic equality.²⁵ Yet the Protestant establishment stopped short of calling for an overhaul of the capitalist system and the privileged legal and economic status it granted corporations. Instead, they looked hopefully toward corporations as allies, not antagonists, in the “progressive” quest for abundance. Corporations would help engineer the coming Kingdom of God where all would enjoy the fruits of modern productivity and, at long last, the lion would lie down with the lamb.²⁶

In this, they echoed leading Progressive intellectuals and journalists. Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly, and economist-cum-political commentator Walter Weyl, typified a strand within turn-of-the-century liberal thought popularizing the idea that standardized national consumption would raise living standards across the board and weave together an increasingly fractured population. In his widely read 1912 book *The New Democracy*, Weyl asserted cheerfully not only that expanding abundance was key to eradicating poverty in America, but that it would bring with it a new and higher national morality: “Democracy means material goods and the moral goods based thereon.”²⁷ Like Patten, Weyl looked to corporations as good-faith partners in the communal pursuit of prosperity, further strengthening “big” business’s reputation as steward of the public trust.²⁸

The emerging class of corporate magnates were quick to endorse this benevolent, managerial spin on their core mission. As Roland Marchand has argued, corporations from the 1880s through the 1920s took painstaking efforts to craft their public images as responsible, stable, progressive “institutions” on a par with the church and state. Procorporate sentiment helped produce the cultural ideal of the “business-statesman,” a leader whose hand in directing the economy was every bit as crucial as the hand of the politician.²⁹ Adman Elmo Calkins, in his 1926 book *Business the Civilizer*, was eager to confirm that business had left behind its mercenary, antisocial origins and had gained a Progressive conscience. He attributed the uptick in the overall corporate conscience to the high “character of the men who have gone into [business]” since the turn of the century, most of whom are “graduates of the colleges and universities.” While at

an earlier time this elite would have entered the learned professions, Calkins argues that “such men now realize that business is the true field of high adventure . . . [and] have taken their brains and their ideals” into it—with uplifting results. “The large point of view, good will, fair play, welfare work, are all results of a higher code of business ethics as surely as they are the source of greater profits.” Ethics and profits were, far from being contradictory principles, partners in bringing about the Good Society.³⁰

Such disparate stakeholders, from captains of industry to Protestant clergy to Progressive journalists, were united in their almost worshipful trust in efficiency as the key to progress, both moral and material. By the end of the nineteenth century, the thermodynamic concept of “mechanical efficiency,” the drive to maximize the energy input-output ratio of a machine, had blended into the idea of commercial efficiency, or the drive to maximize return on investment. The businessman and the engineer could now tinker with both dollars and energy to ensure maximum productivity. Mechanical and commercial efficiency were accepted as good in and of themselves, “progressive” tools in the forward march of civilization. By osmosis, this cheerful faith began to bleed into the social sciences and even theology. Society was imagined as a well-oiled, frictionless mechanism, and “social efficiency” extolled as the ultimate product of a well-tuned industrial, commercial, and spiritual system.³¹

Yet the very looseness of these “cooperative” corporate catchphrases meant they could signify a wide range of things to a wide range of people. “Cooperation” could refer to anything from a genial but unenforced spirit of “give and take” between managers and employees, to actual ownership and control of the means of production by the workers. Similarly, industrialists and businessmen could claim that they were providing high-quality “service” to their customers by bringing the best products to market at the lowest possible cost. The ambiguity of these terms would provide cover as corporations continued exploitative practices under the guise of benevolent “teamwork” and wealth creation for all.³² A naïve liberal faith in this new “harmony of interests” managerial state helped

hammer the final nail in the coffin of more socialized visions of how labor and capital might relate.

Federal legislation enacted between 1901 and 1921 under the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson did work to pose a critical counterweight of sorts to the concentrated power of the trusts. The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, followed by the Clayton Antitrust Act and the formation of the Federal Trade Commission in 1914, sought to blunt the outsized economic and political power of combined capital. But ultimately, despite their passionate rhetoric, these administrations, too, were committed to maintaining a system judged too big to fail. And they worked, accordingly, as much to accommodate corporate capital as to keep it in check.³³

As joint owners of the Pennsylvania Business College in Lancaster, Robert Wade and his brothers cannily navigated America's changing work ecology. As the demand for stenographers and typists grew, so did the demand for easily accessible and affordable training. In 1885, the number of students enrolled nationally in commercial education courses was roughly 47,000; by 1900, that number had nearly doubled to 81,000 students.³⁴ The Pennsylvania Business College offered a variety of on-site and correspondence courses. Typewriting and stenography were popular, as was the comprehensive "Commercial Course" centered on accounting and bookkeeping, with additional training in business writing, business law, spelling, arithmetic and rapid calculation. Graduates, the Wade brothers promised, went on to work in the offices of "all the great Railroads and Transportation Companies, Federal and State Governments, Banks, Manufacturing Companies, Trading Companies, Insurance, Lumber and Mining Companies, Commission Houses, and a lot of other business firms too numerous to mention."³⁵

The college's catalogs were a model for what would form the heart of procorporate rhetoric for at least another half century, aligning the corporation with a vague commitment to national "teamwork" or, in its overtly evangelical forms, "brotherhood," while simultaneously

underscoring business's role as the purveyor of higher living standards. On the ennobling qualities of business pursuits, the Wades quoted Andrew Carnegie, who once pronounced that the modern businessman acts not merely in self-interest—"the dividend which [he] seeks today is not alone in dollars"—but in pursuit of moral development, providing "abundant room for the exercise of man's highest power, and of every good quality in human nature." The modern businessman earns, in addition to mere dollars, the satisfaction of knowing he is helping to carry civilization and human happiness ever forward.³⁶

Predictably, the college's voluminous promotional and descriptive literature reflect the Wade brothers' conviction that theological and economic striving worked hand in hand. Their pamphlets and brochures are peppered with appeals to prospective students not to let their hidden potential lie dormant, not to miss the opportunities for profit and advancement Providence places in their paths. In 1909, one pamphlet throws down the gauntlet to public school teachers to "increase your educational attainments and thereby *double your earning power*." Teaching is fine, J. M. Wade declares, if all you want is a reliable paycheck—but ambitious folks yearn for more. While "our salvation is our work," he acknowledges, we are obligated to select work that allows us to develop our God-given potential. "If we want to come up to the full measure of our possibilities," he suggests, "we must select work that is educative, that offers progression, that will develop as well as compensate us."³⁷ By investing in business and stenography training, he says, students will profit both materially and spiritually. Failing to invest in one's spiritual and material betterment when the opportunity presents itself is not only foolish, it is also sinful.³⁸

The college's pamphlets are generously sprinkled with upbeat jingles and quotes reminding readers to seize their chance or lose it forever. The incipit to one pamphlet is an unattributed ditty entitled "Opportunity": "'Tis a long, weary road to the bye and bye,/and a 'sometime' that seldom arrives;/Why not take the pathway that leads thro' today,/Make each day the 'now' of our lives?" "Go forth into the future and with a stout heart and purpose prepare for the

next deal,” another maxim counsels. “You can be defeated only by yourself.”³⁹

Robert Wade was not the only businessman of the Gilded Age to associate Gospel-fueled power and profit. The 1880s and '90s witnessed an explosion of Jesus biographies, not a few of which echoed the luck-and-pluck, rags-to-riches narratives that saturated dime store fiction of the same period. Eager to shed the effeminate, long-faced Jesus of the Victorians, biographers repurposed the Savior as a muscled, can-do man of action. The Reverend T. Dewitt Talmadge, after a rugged tour of the Holy Land, composed a 600-page life of a relatable Jesus, a Jesus that men could turn to for quick and easy advice amid the hustle and bustle of modern economic life. Talmadge undertook this labor at the suggestion of a fellow passenger on his steamer bound for the Orient who encouraged him to “write a life of Christ which a businessman . . . may profitably take up and in the few minutes before [he leaves for work] and after he returns, read in snatches and understand.” That the title of Talmadge’s biography, *From Manger to Throne*, could almost double as the title for a Horatio Alger novel is no accident.⁴⁰

The connection between “Gospel power” and business profit was popularized in the first decades of the twentieth century not only by clergy but by businessmen as well. Among the most popular of these authors was Orison Swett Marden, self-made man and author of such inspirational titles as *The Masterful Personality* and *Prosperity—How to Attract It*. Marden was an advocate of Christian “New Thought,” close cousin to Christian Science, and shared the latter’s belief that the path to health and wealth lay simply in “right thinking.” Only by exiling mental doubt and “encouraging our friend thoughts,” Marden urges, do we “unlock the door to the great within [ourselves]” and reach our full potential.⁴¹ Marden’s idiom is tinged with a proto–New Age pantheism, larded with exhortations to his readers to “cultivate . . . the consciousness of your oneness with the Source of all prosperity, the Source of the All-Supply.” Yet his theology is the direct, if heterodox, descendant of the Puritan doctrine of grace as “inner power” that man has a duty to develop to its fullest. One of the greatest tragedies in life, Marden sermonizes, is to fail

to “answer for the talent [the Almighty] has given us.” If we listen for His voice in our soul, he suggests, and “do our best in whatever situation we are placed,” then “new power will be developed with every forward step we take.”⁴²

As a devout Presbyterian, Robert Wade probably thought Marden’s appeals to God as the All-Supply sounded pagan. But as businessman, he recognized a fellow traveler, and his college pamphlets accordingly quote liberally from Marden’s inspirational magazine, *Success*. The Wade brothers borrow Marden’s swooning prose to assure their prospective students that a business education is both an insurance policy against poverty and a chance to take part in the ever-expanding, “dazzling” commercial life of the nation, “a story that reads like a romance.”⁴³

Yet for all their seize-the-day wisdom and tantalizing descriptions of the businessman as swashbuckling adventurer, the Wade brothers’ pamphlets are careful to caution prospective students that the economic conditions that made possible a Rockefeller or a Carnegie no longer exist in America. One catalog explains the changed business ecology and the managerial revolution of the new century, whereby the small businesses of yore are swallowed up by national corporations, “owned, not by those operating them, but by people unskilled in the particular lines required to manage them.” As a result, “the opportunity now to persons of small capital, or none at all, is in a salaried position” in the ranks of that “corps of trained, salaried men, most of whom do not own a single share of the[ir] company’s stock.”⁴⁴ The promotional literature doesn’t call attention to the fact that a white-collar worker in a salaried position may toil away an entire lifetime without ever acquiring any capital or economic independence to speak of—the very promise that, for centuries, had guaranteed the dignity of (white) labor.

This failure to recognize that the social and economic realities of corporate capitalism were incompatible with the rugged individualism of the earlier proprietary-competitive capitalism was endemic in early twentieth-century America. The relations between labor and capital, and indeed the very nature of capitalism and property itself, had radically shifted since the end of the Civil War. Yet American

culture lagged, continuing to romanticize the ideals of individual freedom, independence, and initiative as keys to economic success. The Wade brothers' promotional pamphlets embody this disconnect with particular clarity.⁴⁵

One Pennsylvania Business College graduate who heeded the Wade brothers' challenge to maximize return on her God-given talents was Helen Jean Wade. After completing her education, she briefly took up a position as a teacher there. But Jean knew that, in the words of her alma mater, this job was little more than a kind of idleness, and that she could better employ her expansive energies elsewhere. In 1920, at the age of sixteen, she was hired as secretary to the head of the Advertising Department at Armstrong Cork, a local flooring manufacturer. She had eagerly answered when opportunity knocked. Now, heeding her father's advice, she was poised to step forth into the future and "prepare for the next deal."

Among the most consistently kept of Jean's records are her personal finance ledgers. The earliest of these notebooks dates from 1922, when she was eighteen; the whole series—through 1929—offers a fascinating glimpse into the day-to-day life of a young unmarried white-collar woman in the American provinces. Jean recorded her expenses under a number of broad categories: "Home"; "Gifts/Charity"; "Luxuries"; "Necessities." Every month in the "Home" column she has penned in a neat "45," presumably what she contributed to the family coffers for food and lodging. That was a sizable portion of her monthly salary, which in 1923 was \$139. She kept herself neat and tidy, presentable at work, as regular entries in the "Necessities" column indicate: "Hair," "Gloves," "Hat," "Dresses Cleaning" and, once, a fifteen-cent shoe shine. Scattered here and there are the few "Luxuries" she allowed herself: a thirty-cent ice cream sundae; a twenty-cent pair of earrings; a one-time splurge for a "Book on Bridge," \$1.50.⁴⁶

But by far the most populated column, month after month, is that for "Gifts/Charity." In addition to weekly or biweekly generic contributions to "Church," "Sunday School," "Missions," "Near East," and "Red Cross," every month brought its own allotment of special

charitable cases that read like something out of a Dickens novel. “Deaf Mute Home” (\$5); “Tuberculosis Society” and “Map for Sunday School Teaching” (\$1 each); “Poor Family” (\$10); and “Leper Fund” (\$2.50). In spite of her father’s rather stern attitude toward the poor and ill-fortuned, the young Jean devoted a large portion of her free time—and an even larger portion of her monthly paycheck—to help balance the favors so unequally parceled out at birth by an inscrutable God.

The American theological landscape at the turn of the century thus presented two intertwined, often contradictory narratives about the relationship between economic abundance and Christian faith. On the one hand, profit could be tied to the “progress”—and prosperity—of the solitary pilgrim making his way toward God. On the other hand, profit could be the “progressive” vehicle by which the collective industrial mechanism distributed its blessings to all. Jean’s upbringing, both professionally and religiously, placed her squarely at a crossroads. If Robert Mifflin Wade’s economic theories retained a Calvinist flavor, exalting the solitary Christian soldier-businessman whose treasures were a sign of individual grace, they could also be flipped, gesturing toward the expansive economic vision of the Progressives. Jean would blend the two visions in her lifelong efforts to influence women’s consumption: the masculine field of individual capitalist Christian striving was the sacred vehicle that would bring about a Peaceable Kingdom of maternal plenty for all.