

Is There a John Maynard in *The Redskins*?
By Norman Barry

The main characters of *The Redskins* cannot be regarded as particularly heroic or even religious. Although Hugh and Uncle Ro, for example, do return from Europe to Ravensnest when they finally receive word that the anti-renters are becoming ever more active, they immediately decide upon a disguise to avoid being tarred and feathered by their own tenants. Remarkably, the thought of leaving Uncle Ro's mother, Hugh's sister, and the two wards of Uncle Ro completely unprotected at the 'Nest, never seems to be an issue. Hugh's Episcopal religious background apparently received little support while travelling. Both the African American Jaap and the native American Susquesus, it will be remembered, had never even been converted to Christianity.

The only possible candidate to fill the shoes of a Maynard is the Episcopal priest, Reverend Warren. Hugh, from correspondence he had received, at least, knew who Rev. Warren was:

My letters had told me that the Rev. Mr. Warren was a widower; that Mary was his only child; that he was a truly pious, not a sham-pious, and a really zealous clergyman; a man of purest truth, whose word was gospel--of great simplicity and integrity of mind and character; that he never spoke evil of others, and that a complaint of this world and its hardships seldom crossed his lips. He loved his fellow-creatures, both naturally and on principle; mourned over the state of the diocese, and greatly preferred piety even to high-churchism. *Redskins*, Vol. I, Ch, V, p. 84

Particularly Cooper's signal characteristic of the Helmsman, his love of God, is repeated in *The Redskins*:

The last incumbent had been a whining, complaining, narrow-minded, selfish and lazy priest, the least estimable of all human characters, short of the commission of the actual and higher crimes; but his successor had the reputation of being a devout and real Christian—one who took delight in the duties of his holy office, and who served God because he loved him. *Redskins*, Vol. I, Ch. XIII, pp. 206-207

Compared with "old John Maynard," a Reverend is not "weather-beaten" nor is he "bluff." Yet his love of "his fellow creatures" coupled with "great simplicity and integrity of mind and character" and his "love of God" certainly mesh with the attributes of a John Maynard. It is this combination of attributes that support Maynard to sacrifice himself for the good of his fellow-man. Rev. Warren's fearless actions in the novel support this interpretation. As Hugh reports, Reverend Warren was indeed fearless:

Mr. Warren ascended the steps of the piazza with a mien as unaltered, and an air as undisturbed, as if about to enter his own church. The good old gentleman had so schooled his feelings, and was so much accustomed to view himself as especially protected, or as ready to suffer, when in the discharge of any serious duty, that I have had occasions to ascertain fear was unknown to him. *Redskins*, Vol. II, Ch. XIII, p. 192.

The role of a "shepherd" does not clash with the role of a "helmsman." "Like father like daughter," his protective daughter Mary does not hesitate to use force to free Hugh from the deadly grip of Seneca, who was intent on burning the Ravensnest mansion to the ground. The Reverend himself openly expressed his rejection of the godless use the meeting house by simply

walking out during “prayer.” His addressing the mob of disguised anti-renters bent on the destruction of Hugh’s Ravensnest can only be interpreted in light of his unwavering belief that the truth can always be stated with God as our armor.

That an Episcopal priest should receive such accolades in Cooper’s third Littlepage novel is not that surprising when one considers where “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was initially published, Cooper’s own religious background, and the fact that his brother-in-law was the Episcopal Bishop of Western New York. That Cooper was only able to officially join his wife’s and children’s church shortly before his death also suggests that he regarded certain aspects of the Episcopal Church as too constraining. In *The Crater*, published only one year after *The Redskins*, an attempt to establish the ideal mini-republic, encounters a setback, due to the monopolistic preaching of Rev. Hornblower, the dogmatic Episcopal priest.

“Men should never blink the truth, Bridget; and least of all, in a matter as grave as religion.”

“Quite right, Mark, when it is necessary to say anything on the subject, at all. But, after all, the apostolic succession is but a means, and, if the end is attainable without dwelling on these means, it seems to me to be better not to conflict with the prejudices of those who wish to influence. Remember that there are not fifty real Episcopalians in all this colony, where there is only one churchman, and he of that sect.”

“Very true, but Mr. Hornblower naturally wishes to make them all churchmen.”

“It really seems to me, that he ought to be content with making them all Christians.”
The Crater, Ch. XXVI, p. 282

That Cooper or a Leatherstocking might have felt more comfortable with Reverend Warren’s religious views can be seen in the following excerpt, which suggests that Nature itself can turn one’s thoughts to the Divine:

[Rev. Warren:] “The earth itself is but one of God’s temples....”
The Redskins, Vol. I, Ch. XIV, p. 219.

Bibliography:

Cooper, James Fenimore, *The Crater*, Vol. 30 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing Classic Texts). ISBN 1-4438-1366-4.

Cooper, James Fenimore, *The Redskins Or, Indian And Injin: Being The Conclusion Of The Littlepage Manuscripts*, in Two Volumes (New York: Burgess & Stringer, 1846). Kessinger Publishing’s Legacy Reprints. ISBN 143044861X.

Jan. 29, 2023