

Fall History & Heritage -- #8 (October 31)

Our study of America and the West, based this year on George Grant's *Christian Almanac* and William Bennett's *America, Vol. 1*, continues below:

Herman Melville -- (*Almanac*, Oct. 25)

As Jesus observed about us (fallen sinners) in His Scriptures, we tend to look but not see and to listen but not hear. We go by appearances, seldom by reality (John 7:24). It may be that all generations, to some extent, can be counted on to misread their own times and misjudge the men who gain status and standing in their days.

Take the literary career of **Herman Melville (1819--1891)**, for example. When he died in relative obscurity in New York City, the newspaper obituaries noted his short-lived success as an adventure writer and little else. The masterpieces for which he is best known today (*Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd*, *Redburn*, and others) were commercial failures back then, forcing Melville to lay down his pen and take up other work (customs inspection on the docks) in order to survive. The brilliant writer's depth of character development, symbolic representation, literary allusion, and theological insight went unnoticed and unrewarded. However, about 30 years after his death (in the 1920s), some scholars resurrected his genius, and their secret eventually found its way to the eyes and ears of the general reading public.

Melville's career is one of many reminders of how fickle and foolish conventional "wisdom," fashionable opinion, and success in the marketplace (whether of goods or ideas) can be. It also shows why we're better off to learn some real history than to immerse ourselves in today's headlines or "current events" in an effort to appear relevant.

Or as one writer put it (the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft), better to read the eternities than the times.

Theodore Roosevelt -- (*Almanac*, Oct. 27)

Born of Dutch ancestry in New York and bred in an informal aristocracy of wealth, **Theodore Roosevelt (1858--1919)** became America's "most colorful and controversial president since Lincoln, the most versatile since Jefferson." Before he was fifty he had served in many public posts and engaged in an astonishing variety of works: from New York City Police Commissioner and U.S. Undersecretary of the Navy to running a cattle ranch and editing newspapers and magazines.

Some find fault with his political career (mostly in the Republican Party) and his presidential administration in Washington D.C., at the turn of the 20th-century (1901--1909). At home, TR expanded federal ownership and jurisdiction over vast tracts of land, and tried to rein in with centralized regulation big businesses ("malefactors of great wealth," he called them). Abroad, Roosevelt added to overseas

possessions and projected an image of imperial power, at least in a budding sense. Some simply brand him a war hawk and a blustery nationalist.

But what can't be faulted is his genius, his magnanimity, his determination to improve and reform everything to which he applied his mind, his heart, and his labor. Of Teddy Roosevelt, George Grant writes, "He read at least five books every week of his life and wrote nearly fifty on an astonishing array of subjects---from history and biography to natural science and social criticism. He enjoyed hunting, boxing, and wrestling. He was an amateur taxidermist, botanist, ornithologist, and astronomer. He was a devoted family man who lovingly raised six children. And he enjoyed a lifelong romance with his wife."

Small wonder even his rivals and critics respected him.

Maryland -- (*America, Vol.1, pp. 42-43*)

This Anglo-American colony can be traced to Sir George Calvert's conversion to Catholicism and his subsequent appeal to King Charles I for permission to settle the north shore of Chesapeake Bay? Sir George died before any action was taken on his request, but a charter was eventually granted to Cecilius, his son, in 1634. Before long, however, Protestants outnumbered Catholics in the new colony, prompting authorities to decree a Toleration Act (1649) securing religious liberty to all professing Christians.

Jesuits or Society of Jesus -- (*America, Vol.1, pp. 47-48*)

Isaac Jogues was among the 17th-century French missionaries of **this Catholic order of priests and monks** who met martyrdom at the hands of North American Indians? Generally, the fearless French priests ventured hundreds of miles throughout Canada and the Great Lakes and had some success, notably among the Hurons. The Iroquois confederation, however, proved unreceptive to the visits of those they called the "black robes"; the Mohawks, for instance, tortured and tomahawked the saintly Jogues.

smallpox inoculation -- (*America, Vol.1, p. 53*)

Ben Franklin's scientific career got off to a none-too-promising start when, as a teenager in the early 1720s, he campaigned with his older brother in the pages of their *New England Courant* against **this new medical procedure?** The breakthrough had been reported by the Royal Society of London and was strongly supported by the pious and learned Mathers of Boston (Increase & his son, Cotton). The latter felt compelled to critique the youthful Franklins' benighted journalism.