

## EDWIN MILLER WHEELOCK.

BY CHARLES KASSEL.

ON the 29th day of October, 1901, a rare personality passed away, leaving behind him memorials of intellectual and poetic gifts such as would have cast luster on many a prouder name in literature. He was modest and self-depreciatory and at his death directed that his manuscripts be destroyed, but by happy chance a little book called *Proteus* had been printed in earlier years for circulation among friends, and this work was republished in 1910 by the Open Court Publishing Co. The sublime philosophy of *Proteus*, and its surpassing beauty, made an instant appeal to Dr. Paul Carus, whose discriminating judgment saved from utter loss a prose epic of evolution.

The earthly history of the author of *Proteus* was a heroic and impressive one. A preacher by instinct, his utterance displayed that forefeeling of coming events which marks in every age the great spiritual crusader, and his discourses, during a ministry of more than forty years, amply attest that at every stage of his career he was in advance of the time.

As early as 1857, while minister of the Unitarian church at Dover, New Hampshire, his pulpit had resounded with fiery invective against slavery—and this, too, when the Abolitionist was looked upon askance at the North, when the press was still unsympathetic and the mercantile classes antagonistic toward the agitation, when colleges and universities were silent upon the question and separate accommodations for negroes on railroads and steamboats and in the churches and theatres testified that the state of sentiment at the North then differed little from the state of sentiment at the South now.

When, in 1859, John Brown paid with his life for the plot that failed at Harper's Ferry, the young minister in a deliverance of which a striking passage has been preserved in Von Holst's *History of the United States*, marked the event as the harbinger of the "irre-

pressible conflict." Speaking a few weeks later, from Theodore Parker's pulpit in Boston, our minister reemphasized the prediction, and with remarkable foreknowledge bespoke the course of events. The threat of violence, he declared, which in the preceding year had affected even anti-slavery men with a shudder, would be uttered the following year in every Northern legislature as a thing of course; and within a few years, he said, the attack upon slavery for which John Brown had paid the forfeit of his life would be repeated on a grand scale by the entire North.

The great audience at the Music Hall doubtless referred these prophecies to the exuberance of a youthful and fervid imagination, though to Parker himself, then in Italy, they were significant and momentous. The faith in a pacific solution of the slavery question was well-nigh universal at the North, and more than a year after the delivery of this sermon the belief in a settlement by compromise prevailed everywhere. When, indeed, as late as January, 1861, three months before the storm broke, Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, a Republican and a friend and admirer of John Brown, placed the militia of his state on a war footing, the act, as Schouler tells us in his *History of the United States*, met the ridicule and derision of his entire party.

The early stages of the struggle he had foreseen found our minister at his station anxiously awaiting the event which would serve to him as a signal for action on his own part. President Lincoln, though setting his face sternly against secession, had, to the sorrow and disappointment of the young preacher, disclaimed all intention of interfering with slavery at the South, and Congress itself, on the very day of the battle of Bull Run, had adopted a resolution giving solemn expression to the same sentiment. The Abolitionists were still a small body with limited influence and their program was highly distasteful to the powerful classes. Emancipation of the slaves, indeed, was beyond the power of the Federal Government under the Constitution, and there was every inclination among Northern men to leave slavery untouched where it was already established. But emancipation was inevitable in the progress of the war, little as the fact may have been foreseen by the mass of men, and the eager young minister bided his time and from his outlook at Dover interpreted to his hearers the events gathering to a climax.

The North, meanwhile, was steadily losing. Bull Run ended in a rout, and at Ball's Bluff, too, success came to the South, though the moral effect of these victories was offset somewhat by the

achievements of Farragut at New Orleans and of Grant at Fort Donelson. The Peninsular Campaign, upon which McClellan set out with a splendid army and the high hopes of his government, ended by July, 1862, in ignominious failure. Close upon the heels of this crushing disappointment followed the disaster of Pope in Virginia, and the summer of 1862 went out in gloom. Displacing McClellan in command of the Army of the Potomac, Burnside struck at Fredericksburg in December, 1862, and suffered a terrible defeat, while Hunter, succeeding Burnside, went down before Lee at Chancellorsville in May following.

In that hour of despondency, when the catastrophe was at its height, the subject of our sketch stood like a flaming monitor in his pulpit at Dover. In words that peal like golden trumpet blasts he proclaimed the providential nature of the agonizing struggle, and he foretold complete victory for the armies of the North if only all word of compromise with slavery should fade from the lips of Northern leaders. The finger of the Almighty himself, he said, had marked that hour upon the dial-plate of time as the hour of the nation's deliverance from an incubus that was menacing its very life and destiny. Providence was calling to the North, he declared, to write as the motto upon its standards the principle of freedom for the slave, and it was at the cost of moral paralysis, and consequent physical defeat, that the more powerful side in the contest was suffering the great call to go unheeded.

It is impossible to read the discourses of that period without a deep sense of the tremendous feeling which inspired them. In few of the utterances of the time is there such exaltation of tone. He saw the fearful ordeal as a painful but necessary process in the nation's history. Time had been when the terrible contest might have been avoided, but the nation had paltered overlong and now the bitter surgery of war was needed. In all the suffering and sorrow he felt the invisible hand of the Deity, and on every occasion his voice echoed the thought.

Throughout these remarkable sermons preserved in faded manuscript, there are constant suggestions of the Hebrew prophet, so true is the insight into the meaning of events, so deep the feeling of divine agency at the heart of the storm, so calm the confidence in the outcome despite the blackest prospects. The land had grievously sinned, and the sin must be wiped out in blood as in the days of old, but the fate of the nation was sure, and nothing could defeat the ends of Providence. Again and again he gives words to these thoughts.

In September, 1862, the war entered the phase which our minister had awaited. President Lincoln issued his preliminary proclamation of emancipation and the nation definitely committed itself to the policy which the Dover pastor had from the first so insistently urged. The Abolitionists had won. The movement which had been a hissing and a scorn among the influential classes at the North was vindicated. The ground upon which John Brown had stood at Harper's Ferry was now, as the young preacher had predicted at the Music Hall in Boston, the ground upon which stood the entire North.

The declaration of emancipation was the signal the heroic young minister had awaited. In October, 1862, he gave up his pulpit at Dover and enlisted as a private in a regiment of nine-month men from New Hampshire. Made chaplain shortly after, he accompanied his regiment to New Orleans as part of the Banks Expedition, and at New Orleans, under General Banks, he became conspicuously connected with the work of education for the enfranchised blacks and that labor system for negro refugees which became the subject of such bitter discussion in Abolitionist circles, and which finally an address of rare eloquence and nobility from the young chaplain served to allay.

The connection of the New Hampshire chaplain with the labor system of General Banks represents an incident of surpassing interest in his career. That system was intended to meet the complex problem which inhered in the plague of negro refugees who besieged the federal army-posts and devoured the substance of the Northern conquerors. It sought the return of the refugees to the plantations—a forced return, it is true, under safeguard for the health, just compensation and protection of the blacks, but a forced return none the less. That the system would be assailed at the North as a reestablishment of slavery was foreseen, but instant measures were necessary to save the negroes, who were dying in hordes, and at the same time preserve the plantations from ruin and the army stores from dangerous depletion. It was not because of his talents alone, therefore, but likewise because of his standing and prestige as “a John Brown Abolitionist” that the New Hampshire chaplain was so conspicuously associated with this work by General Banks, and the stamp of his name upon the system, with the reassurance to the Abolitionists found in his eloquent letter to Garrison, rescued a plan vitally necessary at the time from the odium which would otherwise have overwhelmed it.

With suitable details of troops our chaplain and his associates in the work visited the plantations on each side of the Mississippi for many miles, investigating the treatment of the negro laborers by their masters to whom they were hired, correcting abuses and punishing excesses. In the course of this work most of the plantations in the Department of the Gulf came under his inspection, with the living conditions of thousands of ex-slaves.

It was a bizarre work. That the task should be doing at all was sufficiently extraordinary, but that it should be doing by a Northern anti-slavery clergyman, whose very presence on the soil two years before would have been the signal for a hanging, smacked of the unreal. He might have been pictured to the imagination of Northern children as a knight errant faring with his armed followers through a hostile land to right the wrongs of an oppressed and broken race.

In October, 1863, the labor system inaugurated and in fair working order, our chaplain was appointed inspector of schools for freedmen in the Department of the Gulf, and in March following he was made Secretary of the Board of Education for the Department. His report, issued at the close of the year, is a recital of absorbing interest, and in the heroic effort of which it tells, to impart the rudiments of learning to a backward race, under difficulties almost insurmountable, this report occupies a unique place in the literature of the period. Its pages yield a moving story of hundreds of courageous young women, often of Southern lineage, who dared peril and prejudice and braved innumerable hardships that the unfortunate blacks, both young and old, might taste the sweets of knowledge. Against a background of intensely hostile feeling on the part of the native white population and powerful local interests, this obscure drama was enacted under our minister's supervision and that of his associates, and it would be difficult indeed to find a page of Civil War history richer in interest or more grateful to the reader's sense of duty worthily done than is bound up in the four corners of this report.

In the case of Chaplain Wheelock the work held, as may be imagined, a peculiar and powerful interest. It presented an opportunity for putting to practical test the lofty principles to which he had committed himself so unreservedly in the sermons before the war. Of all aspects of the slave system, none had seemed so black in his eyes, and none had been denounced by him with such fire and passion, as the hopeless ignorance to which it consigned its victims. He must, therefore, have regarded it as a providential thing that in the hour of military victory the task of undoing this great wrong and

of demonstrating the capacity of the negro to receive and appropriate knowledge should have fallen so largely to his hands.

The war ending, Mr. Wheelock removed with his family to Texas. Here during what is commonly known as the period of reconstruction, he occupied a number of important public offices. At one time he was State Superintendent of Public Instruction, at another Reporter of the Supreme Court, and his last public service was that of Superintendent of the State Institute for the Blind, which office he relinquished in April, 1874.

In 1887, Mr. Wheelock organized a Unitarian society in Spokane, Washington, and for two years served as its minister. He then returned to Texas and not long after began his pastorate of the Unitarian movement at Austin, in which work he continued for eight years, when the gathering infirmities of age compelled his resignation. It was probably during the interval between his resignation as Superintendent of the State Institute for the Blind and his assumption of the duties of minister of the Unitarian church at Spokane that *Proteus* was written and the fragment which appears in this issue of *The Open Court* under the title of "The Psyche—a Study in Evolution." This fragment, with much of the content of *Proteus*, is found in a sermon delivered at Spokane and in another delivered a few years later at Austin.