

AN INTERPRETER OF DESTINY

EDWIN MILLER WHEELOCK AND THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

BY CHARLES KASSEL

THE corridors of time resound with the clangor of the battle between those schools of philosophy and religion which proclaim the utter freedom of men and movements on the stage of history and those schools which view the experiences of peoples and races as a mighty drama, cast by some supernal intelligence, and whose course and climax are fixed by inevitable law. The surge of the conflict, back and forth, as the one system or the other rose to the ascendant, has left an ineffaceable impress upon thought and character, and the annals of the past sufficiently reveal how subtly each belief works up into individual life and conduct.

Scientifically, the question is insoluble. It reaches farther back into the history of being than science penetrates. In religion, it occupies a region where faith and not reason is the arbiter and where each sect guides its groping way by the word of some inspired page or prophet. It is in the realm of philosophy alone, upon this overshadowing problem, that the eager mind finds measurable scope for exercise.

Back of the whole world-story, with its magnificent panorama of evolution, this question may lie. The last two decades have widened incalculably our thought of the evolutionary process. The revelations of the spectroscope, the latest triumphs of the chemical and physical laboratories, and, above all, the apocalyptic splendor of radio-activity, have disclosed to us a vision of growth and becoming which embraces not only the animate creation as we have hitherto known it but the very metals and crystals and even the atoms of the material fabric about and beneath us.

The scientist today sees with larger eyes than in the days gone by. He thinks of all matter as the outflowing, in all likelihood, of one primordial substance, and he even wonders whether all life as well may not reach back to a mother-element in the cosmic prime. Peering within the atom, until recently deemed simple and indivisible, he finds the electron sweeping with incredible swiftness its orbit about the nucleus in the infinitesimal system, forming as it does a miniature of the solar scheme, and the imposing thought drives in upon him that the atomic order may be the type and symbol of the cosmos itself, with suns and planets as units of galaxies, and these of larger clusters still. Upon this theory the whole visible universe, with others trillions of miles distant, may form a grand system, rolling, through inconceivable ranges of time, about some sublime center.

That the bewildering profusion of worlds may be thus a slow blossoming in space and time, through measureless ages, of a pre-existing Idea, with a principle of growth, unfoldment and decay ingermated and fixed, is neither new nor unwelcome to the philosophic mind, but heretofore we have rebelled against the thought of such a process in the evolution of the animate creation and in the history of man. If we assume, however, that the starry hosts are a harmonious whole, wrought forth in the loom of creation according to a set pattern and to be unravelled and rewoven when some huge cycle is done, we shall find it hard to deny that the course of life and history itself may have been foresketched in outline from the beginning, leaving only the details to the play of secondary causes, including the volition of man.

It is just here we encounter the seemingly hopeless conflict between the idea of necessity and the idea of free will. To solve the difficulty will require a deeper knowledge, and perhaps a higher order of mind, than the race possesses as yet. It may well be, however, that we have made too much, in our philosophic thinking, of free will and moral responsibility. Libertarian in every direction, political, religious and social alike, and disposed to exalt the principle of freedom in all merely human relations, our dislike for the doctrines of the necessitarians may spring from our bias and not from our reason.

In reality, the will to good may be the synonym of the highest freedom, and the will or proneness to evil, where it exists, the badge and measure of its absence. If, because of an invincible revulsion, we are definitely incapable of a heinous act, our moral responsibility may be less, but our freedom, in spite of the seeming paradox, may be greater. For a solution of such questions, fundamental though they are, we must await an illumination beyond us at present. As

with the conceptions of infinity in space and eternity in time, the mind thus far is without the material, and perhaps without the machinery, for reaching a conclusion.

Meanwhile, none the less, the thought is an admissible one that, if such things as Fate and Destiny exist, exceptional natures may not be without the faculty for catching their secret whispers. We can not say that we have sounded to its depths the mystery of mind. Sealed away in the hidden places of the subconscious may lie unexplored chambers, filled with treasures richer than any Pharaoh's, and whose full opening awaits some unknown hour in the history of man.

Even the sober scientist in these latter days, seeing all things in a new and magic light, is ready to believe that in the realm of mind may lie as many marvels as the new century has unveiled in the domain of matter. It was a startling suggestion of John Burroughs, in his "Sheaf of Nature Notes," published in the *North American Review for September, 1920*, shortly before his death, that the mysterious instincts in the insect and lesser animal world may be in reality senses of a psychic order, "and that in what we call telepathy we get hints of the same thing among ourselves." Nor is it without significance that the great naturalist should have reserved for so late an hour the utterance of a thought which must have been long in his mind.

"It seems certain," says J. Arthur Thomson, in his *Introduction to Science* (Home University Library, p. 230), "that in many fields there are men with a remarkable power of intuition, born not made, of whose methods even self-analysis can give no account." Such a pronouncement would not have been possible to a distinguished scientist of the earlier day and it is a striking commentary upon the mystical tinge in modern scientific thinking that this statement should have come from the same hand which, in the recently-published *Outline of Science*, has given to the world a work unique and unrivalled in its field—an authoritative exposition of all the sciences with their interrelations, told in language of majestic simplicity and beauty.

In the issues of the present magazine for September, 1920, February and July, 1922, and March, August and December, 1923, we saw that Edwin Miller Wheelock was not only a writer of remarkable gifts, and a courageous champion of intellectual freedom, but that he belonged to an order of men who look clearly into the future where measures and movements are concerned which make a supreme appeal to their natures. Von Holst, as we found, had, by

a quotation in his "Constitutional History of the United States," paid an impressive tribute to the seer-like character of the young minister's utterances upon the execution of John Brown, and it was indeed a notable thing that from the fact of the raid at Harper's Ferry, and the tragic fate of its leader, he could construct so faithful a picture of the strange events to come, and could so accurately fix their date. No less remarkable were the deliverances which in the early years of the war came from his pulpit at Dover, New Hampshire, proclaiming the higher meaning of the struggle as it proceeded, and emphasizing with eloquent reiteration its fated course and character.

Liberal Unitarian as he was, and disciple of the arch-heretic Theodore Parker, he presented the spectacle of a mind freed from the trammels of the old religious sanctions yet oppressed with an overmastering sense of the providential in human life and history, and his discourses between the outbreak of the war and the end of the year that followed, as dealt with in the issue of this magazine for March, 1924, are an ample testimony to his penetrating insight and the breadth of his forevision. That the prophetic passages quoted in the last installment of this biography ring out so clear and full, and, above all, that they should have been spoken when the Northern cause was at its darkest stage, and facing what seemed almost certain military defeat, is only an added token of the calmness of his faith in the destined outcome of the crisis.

As the war progressed the North found itself increasingly surrounded with difficulties. The world had held its judgment in suspense and awaited the decisive battle which should determine whether the strife would be brief or prolonged. The battle of Bull Run demonstrated that the struggle was a war, and not a petty rebellion, and instantly sentiment abroad crystallized and nations inquired of the Union what it was seeking to accomplish.

Three days after the election of Lincoln, an editorial had appeared in the New York *Tribune*, written evidently by the hand of Greeley himself, recognizing the right of the Southern states to secede, if they desired, and recommending that they be permitted to depart in peace. Such, indeed, had been the feeling of the abolitionists, and a peaceful separation was advocated at the North far more widely, as James Ford Rhodes tells us, than Northern historians now like to admit. Lincoln, on the other hand, while he had set his face sternly against secession, as an impossible thing under the constitution, disclaimed all desire to interfere with slavery in the South.

The state of feeling at the North upon the subject of the South's distinctive institution admits of but one construction. So widely prevalent was the belief in the responsibility of the abolitionists for the tension between North and South that an anti-slavery convention held at Tremont Temple in Boston to commemorate the anniversary of John Brown's execution was broken up by a mob, and the mob was largely composed, according to rumors at the time, of Beacon Street aristocrats.

For the Republicans at the North Lincoln had spoken a word as unequivocal as the action of the mob itself. "Do the people of the South," he said in a letter to Alexander H. Stephens, "really entertain fear that a Republican administration would, directly or indirectly, interfere with their slaves or with them about their slaves? If they do, I wish to assure you there is no cause for such fear."

Congress itself, indeed, on the day of the battle of Bull Run, adopted a resolution, introduced two days previously, which gave the most solemn expression to the same sentiment. The war was not waged for conquest or subjugation, the resolution declared, or to overthrow or interfere with the rights or established institutions of the Southern states, but only to maintain the supremacy of the constitution and to preserve the Union.

That the war must necessarily end in the freedom of the slaves was not appreciated at the North, though at the South Jefferson Davis foresaw from the beginning that the defeat of the Southern Confederacy would mean the end of slavery. The abolitionists were still a small body with limited influence and their program was distinctly distasteful to the politically powerful classes. There was every inclination among Northern men to leave slavery untouched where it was already rooted and established and the Republicans accentuated in every way their cordial dislike of the abolitionist reformers. The emancipation of the slaves was beyond the power of the federal government under the Constitution and the successful party made it very clear they would not war upon the South for the supremacy of the Constitution and at the same time strain or break its provisions in the anti-slavery cause.

Whatever the feeling of the Republican leaders, however, as to the problem of slavery, however clearly they may have realized that emancipation was beyond the power of the federal government under the Constitution, emancipation was inevitable in the progress of events, and the student of the times wonders that this truth was so little appreciated. With the historic panorama unfolded before the mind's eye, and from the vantage-ground of present knowledge,

the fatuity of any hope of compromise is apparent. The war for the conquest of the South could not be fought over a range of years without forfeiting wholly the sympathy of the world. A great moral issue was necessary about which a lofty sentiment could center, alike in the North and throughout the world at large, and in the institution of slavery that moral issue lay ready-made. The triumph of the abolitionists was predestined. A war to subjugate the rebellious states the world might tolerate, if the war were short and successful, but a protracted war, or one of doubtful fortunes, would be certain ultimately to bring recognition of Southern independence in its train and possibly foreign intervention. A war, however, fought to rid the soil of America from the stain of chattel slavery was one which in its very nature made recognition difficult and intervention impossible without doing violence to the sentiment of mankind.

That the war must take on ultimately the character of a crusade against slavery was clearly foreseen by our minister. The prophetic ken which had stood him in good stead through the preceding years did not forsake him now and the sermons coming from the pulpit at Dover betray an insight into events that were passing and a sureness of feeling as to the outcome which lend peculiar impressiveness to the manuscripts of those years. In an early sermon of this period, he said:

“We are now reaping that which we have sown. Our mouths are filled with the fruit of our own devices and that despotism whose chain we so complacently fastened round the ankle of the unoffending slave is now seeking to twist its bloody links around our own necks. Let the land now undergoing the agonies of dismemberment testify to the depth of our sin and the need for reform. The nation has stood for five long months meekly parrying the deadly thrusts of treason and returning none of them in the temper in which they were delivered. We lost the battle of Manassas because we chose to go the half-witted way to work. There were four millions of Americans intensely and irrevocably loyal in our enemy's rear. There wanted but a move and a word and the whole rear of the foe was our own. But it was thought better to fight with one arm tied up and the result was suitable. We gave up our brethren to the slaughter, we sullied our banner, we buried our friends and our good name—but we saved slavery. Thus stands the case today. The war is simply and solely one for the defense of our national unity and life. We are fighting as a nation from the same instinct which would prompt each of us, as an individual, to defend himself if an attempt were made to cut his body into three and thirty pieces.

“But we are in a revolution and revolutions never go backward and only seem to stand still. The ball of revolution, once fairly in motion, is beyond human control. So it has always been. Luther did not mean to split the Roman church—only to reform it. Hampden and Cromwell did not mean to destroy the English monarchy—only to curb its prerogative. Wesley did not mean to sever himself from the national church—only to shake it out of its sleep. The Continental Congress did not mean independence—only redress of grievances. But when the hand of God has struck the hour and turned the stream of history, men are like reeds in the blast and whole nations are swept before the motions of his will.

“The signs are plain to all eyes that the system which has caused the carnage of all these battlefields and made oaths the most solemn brittle as straw and taught lying and stealing as cardinal virtues shall die amid the convulsions it has raised. In the loyal slave states, if any such can be found, insurrection will be suppressed, the institution left to its own chances. But wherever slavery is used to help the work of treason on it will fall the blow of the federal arm till, from sunrise to sunset, the eye of day does not rest on a solitary slave. To this end the internal spirit of this national uprising is clearly tending. On this sublime height the nation is planting itself. It will deal with the slave power as with one found guilty of treason against the majesty of the republic. It will liberate the loyal men in the Southern states from the reign of terror that there prevails, and then, in concert with them, prepare a New South, reconstruct its now degraded state sovereignties, prevent that beautiful land from becoming the desperate haunt of brigandage and piracy and forever end the ownership of man in man. On treason’s head this just retribution is impending.

“The cause of the war is simple. This is a slave-holders revolt. It has no other parentage. Slavery alone has split a happy people into two warring parts and wrecked the foremost government of the world. Believe it not, my friends, when you are told that the army of the republic must cleave its way from the Potomac to the Gulf at the cost of the best blood of the nation and leave the cause and the sole cause of all this carnage protected and powerful for future mischief. This is utterly impossible.

“Peace can only come by burying the cause of the war so deep that no trump of resurrection shall ever reach it. Only thus can our lost stars be recalled to their orbits in the federal sky. The hour is at hand, its dawn already whitens dome and spire and hilltop, when

the dullest will see that there is no alternative between emancipation and national dismemberment.

“There are not many orphans and widows and bereaved brothers and fathers without sons as yet, but wait until Southern treason has hung crepe on thousands of our homes, then there comes an uprising compared to which this present excitement will be as frost to fire; the slave power and the war will both die on the same day, smitten through and through with the trenchant blade of complete, unanimous abolition!”

Again, in a later sermon of about the same time:

“This monstrous thing stands in the midst of the republic like a pyramid as of skulls and serpents, of cruelties cabled into law, reminding us of the sight that once, in a South American forest, nearly froze Humboldt’s steady soul with horror—the spectacle of a pyramidal column of living, knotted snakes, interfolding, intertwined in one body.

“The next step in the divine plan for the progress of this great nation is the destruction of slavery. That is God’s purpose in this war. It is as plain as the hand writing on the wall and needs no interpreter. Every star on our banner, every stripe on its folds, is now singing the hymn of emancipation and eternal union. It is the harvest-time and the tares are to be burned. What the North always failed to do for itself even He who causes the wrath of man to praise Him is accomplishing through the blind madness of the South. Their armed and desperate revolt is as though a decayed tooth should pull itself out—as though a cancer should drop away or a gangrened limb amputate itself, when the nervous fevers of the patient would not suffer the operation to be performed otherwise.

“The time has been when this ferocious sin that now convulses a continent and wraps our republic in flames might have silently and gradually disappeared—the slow and kindly action of moral and economic forces acting upon it as the April sun upon our winter snows. This method for thirty years the free states have pressed on the slave-power in vain. It is too late now. The moments for fulfilling higher duties are always transient. Noiselessly as apparitions they come; they are here—they are there—they are gone. The lips of argument now are silenced; reason pleads no more and arms must settle this high debate.

“The slave system, armed, desperate, maddened, is at our door. It has thrust us into the red path of war; it has attacked the republic at its heart and one of the two must go to the wall, crushed and forever destroyed. The struggle is no light one—it is for life and

death. One of the two forces must go down. Either liberty must perish or slavery die. Our very life as a nation is at stake.

“Let no one think that a victory at Vicksburg or on the Rappahannock, the blockade of the Southern ports, the retaking of a few fortresses, will vindicate our insulted honor and end the war; and then that we can peacefully arrange for a general settlement and division, they forming one confederacy and we another. Not so. If this union is broken asunder it will be broken into atoms and we become as a herd of Mexican states.

“The Lord has made us *One Nation* and we can not become two or three or four. We are one people or we are nothing. The day that sees our recognition of a slave empire on our soil will see our national annihilation. Every cause of warfare would still remain, stung into tenfold rage; the very first question in dispute would have to be decided on the battlefield; each meeting by land or sea would be a hostile collision; the intervals of truce would be but as brief breathing-spaces for a new struggle and the interminable war would swiftly drag us down the steep of disorganization and anarchy to the lower deep of European dictation and control.

“But some will say, O you can not conquer the South. You can not subjugate eight millions of people. I know it. We do not wish to conquer the South. The slave power is not the South any more than Boston is Massachusetts. It is the slave power—the eternal foe of free government—that, first silencing every loyal voice at home and refusing to submit its traiterous work to the popular vote, now grasps at the nation’s heart. That power we can destroy in a single campaign and we must destroy it or be ourselves destroyed.

“When God calls upon us to execute his decrees, like Jonah of old we may close our ears to his call but in our blind disobedience we shall only stumble upon a worse fate and after many stripes turn back to our work at last.”

The summer of 1862, as we have seen, beheld the North farther than ever, to all seeming, from a successful end of the contest. Discouragement was in every Northern heart. Of the mercenaries with which the Union armies were filled toward the close of the struggle there were few as yet—the fighting forces were composed of the rarest blood of the North and East, consecrated to the cause by an impassioned feeling of its utter rightfulness; but the god of battles, for the time, was with the South.

The great struggle, nonetheless, was approaching now the psychological hour when the choice must be made from which the whole North had shrunk. With the possibility of foreign intervention, and

the certainty of foreign aid, the triumph of the Southern cause was perilously near, and with its triumph would come the blight of a divided empire on the American continent, with bloody contests in the future. The intuitive mind of Lincoln felt the approach of a supreme crisis and already he was preparing to take a bold and decisive step, and one which should fill the soul of our minister with an unmingled joy; but the preparations for this step rested as yet in the consciousness of the patient executive at Washington, unknown to any save his most intimate counselors, and in the meanwhile the Dover pulpit continued to echo with the prophetic utterances of the young preacher. Said he in July, 1862:

“We can not make crises—God makes them and offers them to our hands to use. We cannot control events; they will flow on in His providence—He gives them to us to work with. Twelve months have passed since the first great federal defeat—twelve months filled with meaning louder than words or than cannon—events so significant as to make eloquence tame and vapid. The American people were called from their farms and workshops, where they labored with faces turned earthward, with brains, arms and hands intent on the conquest of material nature, and were whelmed in a sea of untold disgraces and sacrifices.

“But not one of our sufferings could be spared and our defeats will prove more gainful than victories. The experience of the last sixteen months of faction and anarchy is fast producing in the nation the conviction that the rebellion and its cause must sink together into a common grave.

“A small party at the North—continually growing smaller—still cower before the power that stirred up the rebellion and talk of putting down the revolt while respecting and protecting its mainspring and cause.

“The war really began not with the siege of Sumpter but in the fall of 1855 on the plains of Kansas. Every slave state save Maryland and Delaware had an army on the plains of Kansas that liberty might be killed, but a handful of Northern men with a few rifles said to slavery, you have brought this upon us and you shall cease to exist in Kansas. They also said to those whose shackles they struck off, seize arms and fight for freedom with us. Thus Kansas was saved and thus will the Union be saved, if at all.

“There are those who have been hoping for the reconstruction of the ‘Union as it was.’ That delusion is now dispelled. The slave power stands forth unchangeably and implacably disunion. It has ceased to palaver. It has discarded forever the stars and stripes.

Henceforth it will have empire or the grave. You can not soothe it. You can not conciliate it. No depth of abasement on our part will lure it back. It will not negotiate—it will not capitulate—it will conquer or die; and its success means the subjection of the working classes of the North to the auction block.

“Let those, great and small, who have whelmed the republic in this wanton war pay for it with their goods and lands and chattels and lives. Now is the time to settle our long account with eternal justice for the working classes of the South. Have we not been brayed long enough in the mortar of a slave rebellion to have our negro folly depart from us? This is no time for quackery, sentimentalism or tenderness to the rebels. We have poured out treasure enough to buy up half a continent. We have lavished streams of the most precious blood. The bones of our brothers lie bleaching on the soil of every rebel state. It is the second year of the war and we have but touched its borders in the cotton states. It yet remains a question whether free institutions shall endure or be crushed into ruin. We must do speedily the one thing we have too long forborne. We must speak the one word that has died on our tongues.

“The cotton states contain three millions of people devotedly loyal and true. They will not wait for either bounty or draft. They are already drilled—drilled by a hundred years of bitterest oppression—every drop of their blood is earnest—covered by God with black faces so that you may know them at a distance and always to be trusted. Call them to your aid! Give the rebellion into their hands during the sickly months of summer and the autumn will witness the close of the war. The President promises to do this if necessity compels, but so will the rebels if driven to the wall and the danger is that we shall be too slow and too late.

“The hand of destiny is moving fast on the dial-plate of time. It is a race between Lincoln and Davis which will reach emancipation first and whichever does will succeed in the end. When our army draws near to final success the South is already pledged to write emancipation on her banners, identify those waiting millions with her cause and welcome the protectorate of a European power. They like ourselves will throw everything overboard before they will submit to defeat. We then would not conquer her if we could and we could not if we would—the sympathy of the world will be with her and the contempt of the world upon us.

“But—but,” says some friend, who has not yet emerged from the chrysalis, ‘you are advocating John Brownism and abolitionism.’

It does look like it, certainly, but if your sensibilities are very delicate and the rose smells any sweeter by another name call it military necessity. Battle is a swift educator. We are all abolitionists now or will be after a third retreat from Richmond, while the main difference between Wendell Phillips and Abraham Lincoln seems to be that what the one calls abolition the other terms abolishment.

“John Brown’s crime was that he saw this day a little sooner than we saw it and his democracy was just three years in advance of ours. The lesson for which he set the text five hundred thousand men are writing in characters visible from Harper’s Ferry to New Orleans. His soul, multiplied by half a million, filling the heavens with flame and the earth with thunder, is ‘marching on.’

“Our past union was one of diplomacy, not of ideas; of law, not of love; states married, not matched; chained together, not welded into one. It was a union of ‘two snarling hounds leashed together,’ but out of this war will come a better, a homogeneous union, lasting as the granite that underlies the continent.”

Almost on the very day these last words were spoken, President Lincoln imparted to his cabinet the project of decreeing the emancipation of the slaves by executive order as a war measure, although the actual promulgation of the proclamation would await a Union victory. It was on July 22nd, 1862, that the draft of the preliminary proclamation was read to the cabinet but it is a striking commentary on the doubts which infested even the mind of Lincoln upon the subject that on August 22nd, a month later, he should have written to Greeley the oft-quoted letter giving it as his primary purpose to save the Union, whether with or without slavery.

Clearly as our own minister may have foreseen the certainty of emancipation, we cannot marvel that Lincoln hesitated. He was above all a practical statesman. He hoped, perhaps he knew, that somehow the issue of the struggle would bring with it the end of slavery in America, but he could not be sure that emancipation was even yet expedient.

Sentiment abroad was distinctly unfavorable to the Northern cause. The English historian Grote, who had many fine words for democracy in Greece, felt no sympathy with the Union. Carlyle was without real feeling against slavery in America. Even Gladstone, up to July, 1863, was hostile. The chief newspapers of England were frankly Southern in sympathy, as were the leading English statesmen. Great Britain, indeed, and France as well, was secretly opposed to the Northern cause, and among the nations of the world, Russia alone was consistently the friend of the Union. In

English harbors vessels were building, over the protest of American ambassadors, which were meant in the fullness of time to break the Southern blockade. With the exception of D'Israeli, who was always opposed to intervention in American affairs, and of Bright, whose fine nature was sensitive to struggles for freedom, little came from the British shores to give encouragement to Lincoln.

It is one of the touching episodes of the time, however, that while British statesmen and British press were following the promptings of British interests, which dictated the opening of the Southern cotton ports, British workingmen, suffering unemployment and extreme privation from the stoppage of cotton supplies for English mills, clung stubbornly in sympathy to the Northern cause, recognizing instinctively that chattel slavery in whatever form and wherever practiced held a menace for the working classes. They were still without the ballot, as they had been without the ballot in the days of the American Revolution, and their feelings were not reflected in the action of the English Parliaments and ministries, but they could make their voice articulate in other ways and the note of sympathy for the North which came from all meetings of English factory workers seemed a happy omen in the midst of so much discouragement.