

THE HERALD OF EMANCIPATION

A MEMORY OF EDWIN MILLER WHEELOCK

BY CHARLES KASSEL

WAR, as a subject of ethical speculation, fills a large place in literature. Its champions and apologists have built up whole libraries in its defense, while those who challenge its rightfulness under any circumstances rank among their number some of humanity's profoundest philosophers and noblest religious teachers.

Upon its face war is absurd and criminal. It is the perpetuation of an order of life we look for only in the lowest nature. The motive of achievement at any cost belongs to a stage of evolution which, in many other departments of activity, man has long outgrown. Though the arbitrament of reason instead of force in the disputes of individuals is not of old date, and trial by battle was carried over from nature into the historic period, courts have long supplanted the contest of arms in the decision of private quarrels.

It is only in the controversies of peoples that war still persists. There, in spite of logic and religion, and against what would seem to be the urgings of common sense, the old impulses linger, breaking out into murderous fury, and, when the instinct of nationality is aroused, acts of savagery from which in other moments the hand and heart would shrink in horror, take on a heroic aspect, and even an epic grandeur. How much is biological and how much psychological in the war-madness of nations might be hard to say.

Sometimes, however—and not unoften, possibly, at the present stage of the human story—war, tragic and terrible an instrument though it be, serves a needed use. From its fiery baptism nations rise, now and then, into transformed life and purpose. When nothing else can break the stubborn crust of national habit, when abuses have struck too deep a root or false systems of thought cast a hopeless spell over the mass of minds, the sword of some Alexander cuts the knot no statesmanship can untie.

War, indeed, to be justified at all, must be looked upon as an act of national surgery, relieving what disease, misfortune or evil custom have brought about. The philosophic mind, musing upon the mutual slaughter of peoples, is driven to the thought of war as a scalpel wielded for human good, though at the cost of suffering and mutilation. What the surgeon's table is, therefore, in the lives of individuals the battlefield may be in the lives of nations. It is only in this way that we may measurably reconcile the thought of an anguished world, writhing in the pangs of universal conflict, with the idea of a beneficent Fate or Destiny working in the affairs of men.

Perhaps it is needful, after all, that nations exulting in their pride of strength, and heedless or forgetful of loftier things, should be wracked and broken till out of suffering, in time's alembic, wisdom is distilled. It is the lesson of common experience magnified to national proportions. No less of peoples than of individuals is it true that those who gain nothing from the discipline of life must suffer the buffetings of evil fortune. All evils are remediable, if taken soon enough in hand, and a world periodically torn asunder may learn at last to substitute methods of restraint and accommodation for self-seeking and mutual distrust. Meanwhile the shock of battle continues to resound through history and, where moral in contrast with mercenary issues are at stake, exalted and heroic natures hail the contest as a providential agency for correcting wrongs which will not right themselves.

On the whole, perhaps, the great conflicts within and between nations, whatever the immediate cause or pretext, have served higher ends than could be foreseen. Certain it is, moreover, that throughout all human annals, from Homer on, a belief has lived in an influence mightier than man's shaping events to its own will. Awful as is the spectacle of death in mass, disheartening as may be the thought of armies washing out in torrents of blood evils that should have yielded to a more rational process, lofty souls seem always to hear beyond the frightened or boding accents of the time the calm voice of the ages, with its admonition to steadfastness and patience.

In the hour of war it is to our poets we go rather than to our statesmen for prophetic vision of far-off events. The statesman deals with cause and effect, more or less immediate, but something in the poet's genius penetrates beyond to an inner world where events exist in first principles. It was the poet, or what is often the

same, the prophet, in Edwin Miller Wheelock—flowering later into the magnificent rhapsody he called *Proteus*—to which we owe the rare utterances that form the burden of recently published installments of the present biography. It was scarcely the logical faculty which wrought out those striking deliverances. Had it been so the full vision of coming things would not have been denied to so many others of the fine mindworking with the same problems at the time. It was rather in his case a native insight into the great principles underlying the course of history and which are not always discernible by the practical mind.

In the September issue, 1920, of this magazine, we beheld in rapid outline the episodes of a career unusual among clergymen, of however liberal a gospel. The issues of February and July, 1922, March, August and December, 1923, and March and July, 1924, retraced in more leisurely fashion the swifter steps of the biographical sketch and paused to examine the remarkable discourses which, in the fateful years just before and just after the outbreak of the Civil War, came from the inconspicuous pulpit of the Unitarian Church at Dover, New Hampshire.

It was no small piece of intuitive forevision which saw in the raid at Harper's Ferry the symbol of a nation in arms and in the gallows-tree of John Brown the promise and potency of a new crusade, nor was it of merely petty moment that through all the early years of the war—when defeat sat upon the banners of the North and Northern statesmen shrank from the thought of enforced emancipation—the redoubtable young minister, again and again, in tones like rolling thunders, could proclaim the imperative need of abolition, whether constitutional or unconstitutional, as the indispensable condition of union victory and even of national preservation.

It is easy to suppose at this distance of time that all men reasoned so. Viewed across the chasm of the years Lincoln's great proclamation seems the voice of a united nation, held back only by the desire of a military triumph as a proper setting for so august a decree. Let the reader who cherishes this delusion compare the discourses quoted in earlier portions of this biography with the utterances usual at the time from pulpit and press and the lips of distinguished statesmen at the North.

The victory of Union arms which Lincoln awaited as the fitting hour for promulgating the plan of negro freedom did not come, but on September 23, 1862, thinking further delay dangerous, the Presi-

dent availed himself of the check administered to Lee at Antietam and gave out the preliminary declaration requiring the Southern states to return to their allegiance within one hundred days upon pain of having freed by Presidential order all slaves within their borders. It is familiar history, of course, that the Southern states disregarded the proclamation and that it was accordingly followed on January 1, 1863, by a final edict of emancipation.

Thus, in the autumn of 1862, the nation definitely committed itself to the policy which our minister from the very beginning of the war had so insistently urged. The abolitionists had won. The movement which had been a hissing and a scorn among the respectable and cultivated classes of the North was vindicated, and John Brown's gibbet had become the fount and spring of victory.

The Dover minister was not of the Garrison order of abolitionists. He was more militant, though he did not share the contempt which John Brown expressed for the followers of Garrison as being reformers who talked and did not act. In general, however, abolitionists of whatever class were a distinct type, standing apart in thought from the rest of the community, though sympathetic toward reforms of all kinds. Because, now, abolitionists ceased to be looked askance upon and were taken to the bosom of Republicans, it may not be amiss to pause a moment for a glance at the order of men whose unique triumph meant so much in the nation's history.

Says Schouler in his history of *United States of America Under the Constitution*, Vol. 6, page 225:

"The new course which the Civil War now took brought into closer union all who could co-operate for the great end of emancipation and gave political standing to the sect hitherto aloof from affairs of the Free States known as the "Abolitionists"—a mere handful in point of numbers identified with a few Atlantic cities, but respected and courageous in their conviction. Non-voters for the most part, noncombatants, critics and unsparing ones of passing events, their ground was reached by the Northern people and their responsible leaders through the process of dire experience. Advanced Republicanism came now to recognize that the abolitionists were after all right in their moral conviction, whatever might be said of their practical methods, and to accept them as preachers and forerunners of the faith with a growing reverence. . . . Though great prophets they were no politicians; and that public opinion must be watched and guided they never regarded. They were the avowed dis-unionists on the Northern side of the line and their plan for getting rid

of slavery was to leave its defiling company. . . . The abolitionists moreover had grown to be extremely intolerant; half friends and enemies they anathematized and long training with pen and speech made them pungent in personalities and exasperating to the last degree. All who could not come up to their ideal standard they lashed without mercy, which meant for years past every Republican leader from Lincoln down. Long variance with prevailing modes of thought lead them to upraid the churches, to largely repudiate religious worship, to pronounce the society of the age as false and accursed, to distrust even the Almighty for permitting wrong to flourish upon the earth. Yet it must be owned, and the now inevitable conflict deepened that impression, that they were persons of thorough earnestness, disposed for their cause to make worldly sacrifices, despisers of sham and self-seeking; that they had great moral courage and for opinion's sake braved social ostracism at the North. They contributed of their worldly goods to the cause; they were plundered, were robbed, practiced self-denial, bore all the martyrdom of menace; some went to jail, one was shot dead. There was much intellectual force among them, especially as writers and speakers. For all this, something in their narrow methods had repelled Lowell, Emerson, the Beechers, Greeley and other practical champions of freedom, and even such antislavery statesmen as the two later Adameses, Sumner and Thaddeaus Stevens."

It is a notable tribute to the calmness of Lincoln that while he appropriated the thought of the abolitionists and made it do service for the Union cause, his feeling for the people of the states still in rebellion was ever present as a check against hasty or ill-considered action. In his annual message to Congress, December 1, 1862, he took as his text the words, "Without slavery the rebellion could never have existed, without slavery it could not continue," which time and again had formed the burden of the discourses at Dover; but he was reluctant still to enforce too sudden a change in the status of the negro, lest the disruption of economic and social relations at the South react disastrously both upon the whites and the blacks.

Making mention of the fact that the President in this message pleaded for gradual emancipation, appointing January 1, 1900, as the time when it should be completed, James Ford Rhodes, whose richly freighted volumes we have so often quoted from, pauses sadly to comment upon the indifference which Lincoln's plea encountered, and to lament that the message was not considered by Congress and that it was without noticeable effect upon public opinion. "It is

matter of regret," says this historian, "that fortune had not at this time favored Lincoln with signal military victories to give to his words the strength that enforced the decrees of Caesar and Napoleon."

Whatever the reluctance of the great emancipator, the subject of this biography saw in the preliminary declaration the certain pledge of negro freedom. To him the words of Lincoln were an indubitable proof that the hand of Providence was guiding the struggle from the beginning. He had felt, and in stirring tones had said, that the bloody strife was divinely meant to rid America from the stain and reproach of slavery, and now his intuitive feeling was vindicated and the handiwork of the Almighty in the shaping of events was plain.

With the great consummation attained, the thought of our preacher turned from the sterner things that were passing to gentler themes. A deep satisfaction filled his soul and it reflected itself in kindlier phrases and softer tones. The noblest evidence which comes to us in the manuscripts of this changed attitude is a beautiful sermon delivered in October, 1862, called "The Christ." The pages of that discourse breathe a spirit unwontedly tender. The warrior nature of the man was set aside and it was the poet, the ministering pastor, who was speaking again.

This discourse is the last of the manuscripts coming to us from the pastorate at Dover. It may, indeed, have been the very last of the sermons delivered from that pulpit, for the late fall or early winter of 1862 saw a farewell on the part of our minister to the priceless friends his first pastorate had made. He was about to take a step unusual in the life of a clergyman—a step which was to give to his utterances of the preceding years an emphasis they could not otherwise have worn, and which, so far as concerned his own future, was to involve consequences he could not foresee.

In every life there is a supreme crisis when the soul is tossed upon the surge of doubt, and then a decision is fateful and charged with mightiest significance. Such was the present hour in the career of our friend. A long life was before him in the midst of those he loved and with lordlier honors in his chosen calling easily within reach. Beside him was the devoted wife of his bosom, his young son, and a little daughter less than two years old. The choice was a hard one between the charm of the home circle and the grateful labors of the pulpit and study, on the one hand, and the call of duty as it sounded in his own conscience on the other, but the behest of

duty, even with its privations and its danger to life and limb, rose above the blandishments of professional glory and even the powerful feeling of the husband and father.

So it was that in October, 1862, our minister resigned his pulpit at Dover and enlisted as a private in the 15th New Hampshire Infantry. On November 24, 1862, his congregation met and gave expression to their feeling in words still preserved to us in the manuscript—words sufficiently indicative of the affection and reverence in which he was held by those to whom he had ministered.

A retrospective glance reveals that in the enlistment of the brilliant and earnest young minister as a soldier in the Union cause his whole future swung away, radically and permanently, from what would have been its destined course. In New England, a pulpit orator of power and grace, even in the Unitarian church, could not long remain obscure, and, even as it was, the name of the minister from Dover was known far beyond the borders of New Hampshire. A few years more, and a call would surely have come to a larger pastorate where the field for his culture would have been wider and less secluded, and here his gifts and intellectual powers would have found an ample theatre for their expression. In the country's literary centers, moreover, the exquisite English of which he was capable upon occasions would have led to extended authorship, and this, coupled with his powers as a preacher, might have carved for him a distinguished niche in the Pantheon of illustrious Unitarians.

These hopes, if he cherished them at all, were dashed now for all time. A missionary and crusader in every grain of his being, the years at the South, during the war and after, convinced him that his divinely appointed lot was not in a place of scholarly ease at the North, where a Unitarian would be in the house of his friends, but at the South where Unitarianism was unknown, and, where known, was identified with that abolitionism which had proved the South's undoing. So long as the war lasted, and while reconstruction was in progress, he would have felt it incumbent upon him to remain and do the work allotted to him, whatever his plans for the future. The conclusion of the war and of reconstruction, however, with his experience of Southern feeling and his increasingly sympathetic understanding of the Southern viewpoint, saw the conviction that Unitarianism was in his hands as a fitting instrument for the promulgation of its teachings in the South, and his dedication to the task became all the easier when he found, as the years went

on, that the health of his beloved wife took kindly to the warmth and brightness of Southern skies.

Whatever the satisfaction to our minister that he was fulfilling a high mission, whatever the happiness which may have come from the light of the returning health in the eyes of his cherished companion, repeated it must be that the new life upon which he entered now blasted for him those higher hopes of pastoral and literary achievements which we might have indulged on his behalf and which, more or less strongly, he too must have felt. To Unitarian thought, administered by whatever hand, the South was intellectually inhospitable, and when promulgated by a Northern minister, by an abolitionist of the John Brown type, by a Union soldier and a friend and servant of the Reconstructionists, the work became almost a forlorn hope. The beautiful discourses which were spoken from his simple pulpit in the sunny South to the merest handful of a congregation may rejoice us now as we read them, as they rejoiced the sympathetic few who heard them, but their influence was bounded by the narrowest limits, as he knew must necessarily be the case. Patiently and uncomplainingly he did a work which there was no one else to do and the inevitable reward was a life of comparative obscurity, literary and ministerial.

Let it not be thought, moreover, that the surrender of the Dover pulpit was an act of an enthusiast drunk with the victory of his cause and who saw before him the victor's meed. The hour of the resignation and enlistment was a gloomy one. The North, with whose fate in the light of history the emancipation of the negro was so closely blended, maintained a solemn stillness when that word was uttered by its President, and vented its feeling in the fall elections of 1862. The importance of the anti-slavery crusade as a necessary preventive of foreign intervention, and as an essential prerequisite to Union success, was largely lost upon the North, and the heart of Lincoln was saddened. Says Rhodes in Volume 4, page 162, of his great work:

"Lincoln himself, with his delicate touch on the pulse of public opinion detected there was a lack of heartiness in the response of the Northern people. . . . His despondency is revealed also in his reply to an address by a pious Quaker woman and in his *Meditation on the Divine Will*, in which his belief in a divine Providence mingled with his present disappointment to produce doubt whether indeed God were on our side. . . . In October and November elections took place in the principal cities with the result that New York,

New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin, all of which except New Jersey had cast their electoral voice for Lincoln, declared against the party in power. The elections came near being what the steadfast Republican journal, the *New York Times*, declared them to be, a vote of want of confidence in the President. Since the elections followed so closely upon the Proclamation of Emancipation it is little wonder the Democrats said that the people protested against Lincoln's surrender to the radicals, which was their construction of the change of policy from a war for the Union to a war for the negro, and many writers have since agreed with them in this interpretation of the result."

It might readily have been foreseen that the talented preacher from Dover would not long remain a private in the ranks. A chaplaincy awaited him, and in that office he accompanied to New Orleans the regiment of volunteers which was to form a part of the Bank's Expedition. The regiment was composed of nine-months' men and was raised under the call of President Lincoln for ninety thousand.

Among the manuscripts is a discourse delivered evidently to his regiment before their embarkation, and it is eminently deserving of quotation in full.

"David, the ruler of Israel, was involved in a terrible war. The peace of the land was unjustly disturbed by sedition and revolt. There was much suffering and hard fighting but through it all David was filled with the ever-deepening conviction that the Lord was his strength, teaching his hands to war and his fingers to fight.

"His foes were God's foes. He knew God to be on his side. So we doubt not that God is with us. He must be with us for it is against his truth and justice that our foes are fighting. God speaks to us and in us and bids us do what we can to maintain the right, through all griefs, however bitter, through all conflicts, however stern.

"We know that we are right, my friends, just as David knew it, by the living witness of our souls. We need no other proof. We know that God does keep us and bless us and cheer us and will continue to help us so long as we seek and try to deserve his help. We know that our brave men have gone out to fight not for evil but for good—not for Satan's sake but for God's.

"We, the peace-loving men of the North, having tried reasoning, expostulation, compromise, all in vain, to ward off a terrific evil, have at last left our quiet homes and taken up arms *religiously*

—under a clear sense of duty—in defense of a principle greater than life.

“The defense of justice, law, country, to a true man, is a necessity. He is obliged to defend these, cost what it will. A necessity is laid upon him so to do even as it was laid upon Paul to preach the gospel of Christ. Says Paul: ‘Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.’

“We, then, who are going into this earnest conflict put on the Christian armor and go our way feeling that in very truth we are carrying the banner of the Lord. If we enter upon it as a religious war, if we go to it in obedience to the call of God, we shall be invincible. It was said of the soldiers of Cromwell that they were doing the Lord’s work. One the eve of battle they lifted up hymns and prayers against the sky. No swearing was heard nor was a drunken man seen among them, and in no battle, from first to last, were their backs ever seen by the enemy.

“Let this regiment keep profanity and intemperance out of our camp and lean upon the Almighty arm, and the same may be said of us. The spirit of a long line of ancestry will roll through us and breathe upon us, we shall be lifted out of ourselves and look with contempt upon death. If we have needed in peace the hope, the strength, the inspiration of Christian faith, much more will we need them now. Be faithful to your own souls if you would have God upon your side. Say nothing and do nothing that you may not carry up to him in prayer.

“We have learned already in this war that the genuine stuff that enters into the composition of a soldier must be a courage higher than that inspired by rowdyism or rum. Ellsworth’s Zouaves were drawn from the grogeries and bar rooms of New York to fight the battles of our country; and the regiment broke in pieces at the first shock of battle at Bull Run and went back to its holes of vice. But in that battle there was an Ohio company which drew off with ranks unbroken. They were without rations from Friday afternoon till Monday. They went through that terrible fight and long march with empty stomachs, but full hearts, and three days afterwards were rested and ready to fight again. On returning to Cincinnati they were met by a grateful people with showers of roses as the company who kept cool amid the rout. Their captain was one who a few years ago was seen playing in the streets of a New England village, a boy belonging to an earnest Christian home, within which his manly virtues were nurtured and prepared.

“My friends, we are beginning the soldier’s life. Let us begin aright. Much depends on this. There is a tendency in the soldier’s position, in the entire change of his mode of life, to make him drop to a lower moral level than that which he held at home. Camp life, with its novelties worn away, is often to be felt as a dull and hard routine. It is rest, drill, guard-duty, and then guard-duty, drill and rest. The checks and safe-guards of home are removed. Gambling, profanity and drinking are yielded to even by those who have never practiced them before and men fall who would have been safe elsewhere and who would be safe still if they felt any touch of the old home life. Let us strive to be at once good citizens and good soldiers, brave men and honest Christians—still guarding the old sanctities of home while we bear the sword, and sending a daily counter-acting influence into whatever temptation and sin may surround. Thus shall we gain the approving smile of heaven, and we shall be able to say, with David of old, It is the Lord who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.”

It is by a peculiarly happy chance that we find preserved for us the story of this regiment in the early stages of its history, and the account affords an interesting glimpse of that life so new and unaccustomed, into which our minister was now initiated. The report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New Hampshire for the year ending May 20, 1865, as contained in Volume 2, page 447, of the *Records of the New Hampshire Historical Society*, of Concord, New Hampshire, and presented by that Society to the Newbury Library at Chicago, describes the journey of the regiment to its destination and its preparation for actual service:

“On the morning of the 13th of November, Colonel Kingman having been ordered to proceed with his command to New York and report to Major-General N. P. Banks, the regiment broke camp, marched to the railroad depot, and at 8 o’clock A. M. left on a special train for New York via Worcester and Norwich. Arriving at Allyn’s Point about 7 P. M., went on board the steamer ‘City of New York’ and reached New York early the next morning, November 14th. Proceeded to Park Barracks at 8:30 o’clock A. M. where rations were furnished. At 4 o’clock P. M. the line of march was taken up for Union Race Course, Jamaica, Long Island, distance nine miles. Arriving there at 8:30 o’clock P. M. the officers and men were obliged to seek quarters for the night upon seats occupied by spectators at the races, as the tents which were to have been sent in advance of the regiment had not arrived. Next day, shelter tents

were furnished and those, though better than no tents, afforded but a poor protection against the storm of this day and the resulting weather and the men suffering extremely. On the 17th their hearts were gladdened by the arrival of A-tents.

“This encampment was designated as Camp N. P. Banks and was under the command of Col. T. E. Chickering, 41st Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. Here the regiment remained while the details of the secret expedition of which it was to form a part were completed. On December 3rd the portion of the regiment which had not already gone through struck their tents and marched to Brooklyn City Armory, where they remained during the night.

“The next day companies E, G, I, and the remainder of Company H embarked on board the Propeller Prometheus. This detachment was commanded by Col. Kingman and was accompanied by the Adjutant, Quartermaster, Surgeon and Chaplain. Sailed December 5th and reached Fortress Monroe, after a rough passage December 8th at 2 o'clock A. M. Made Hilton Head where a supply of coal was taken December 13th, arriving at Ship Island December 21st, at 3 o'clock P. M. proceeded immediately to New Orleans, thence to Carrollton, where we disembarked December 22nd and encamped on Shell Road, joining the detachment already arrived.

“The location of the camp was low and near the swamps and the frequent rains soaked the ground so that often times the mud was very deep, rendering the situation very unpleasant. On the 22nd of the month, however, the condition of affairs was somewhat bettered by removing the camp a short distance to drier ground. On the 28th of January the regiment was assigned to the First Brigade, Second Division, 19th Army Corps and ordered to remove to Camp Parapet. Up to this time there had been considerable sickness in the regiment but the losses by death had been small.

“On February 2nd the Brigade was reviewed by Gen. Dow. On the 19th the Brigade marched to New Orleans and passed in review before General Sherman and on the 15th received orders to be ready at a moment's notice to embark for Baton Rouge. On the 20th Chaplain Wheelock was detailed as Deputy Superintendent of Negro Labor by special order No. 78 Headquarters Department of the Gulf.”

To the student familiar with what was to come the detail of Chaplain Wheelock as Deputy Superintendent of Negro Labor, notwithstanding its inconspicuous place in this recital, is full of meaning. His attitude toward the negro question was well known and it was altogether fitting that any task affecting the welfare of the blacks near the Union army posts should be entrusted to his hands. The story of that surpassingly interesting work, in the midst of an environment menacing to his very life, must be reserved for another section of this biography.