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THE BLUNDERING GENERATION ¹

BY J. G. RANDALL

When one visits a moving picture, or reads Hergesheimer's *Swords and Roses*, which is much the same thing, he may gather the impression that the Civil War, fought in the days before mechanized divisions, aerial bombs, and tanks, was a kind of *chanson de geste* in real life. "The Civil War in America," writes Hergesheimer, "was the last of all wars fought in the grand manner. It was the last romantic war, when army corps fought as individuals and lines of assault . . . charged the visible enemy." "The war created a heroism . . . that clad fact in the splendor of battle flags."² Hergesheimer feeds his readers chunks of sombre beauty, winterless climate, air stirred with faint cool music, fine houses, Spanish moss and cypress, trumpet vine and bay blossom, live oaks and linden, bridal wreath, japonica, moonflower, and honeysuckle. In his foreword to "Dear Blanche" he writes: "Here is a book of swords . . . of old-fashioned dark roses . . . [of] the simpler loveliness of the past." His pages live up to the foreword. He gives dear Blanche "The Rose of Mississippi," "The Lonely Star," "Shadows on the Sea," and "Gold Spurs." Of "Jeb" Stuart he says:

Ladies in Maryland gave him the spurs and ladies wherever he chanced to be gave him the rosebuds. . . . Naturally he was in the cavalry. He was different. . . . [He] wore a brown felt hat . . . with . . . sweeping black plume; . . . his boots in action were heavy, . . . afterwards he changed them for immaculate boots of patent leather worked with gold thread; but he danced as well as fought in his spurs.³

The picture is filled in with red-lined cape, French sabre, yellow

¹ Presidential address delivered before the Mississippi Valley Historical Association at Omaha on May 2, 1940.

² Joseph Hergesheimer, *Swords and Roses* (New York, 1929), 297, 299.

³ *Ibid.*, 267.

sash and tassels, The Bugles Sang Truce, The Dew is on the Blossom, orders given when asleep, animal vitality dancing in brilliant eyes.

Escapists may put what they will between the covers of a book; unfortunately the historian must be a realist. Whatever may be the thrill, or the emotional spree, of treating the Civil War romantically, it may be assumed that this has not been neglected. This paper, therefore, will attempt a very different task, that of weighing some Civil War realities, examining some of the irrational ideas of war "causation," and pondering some aspects of the Civil War mind.

Without stressing that Zeebrugge or Westerplatte or the Karelian Isthmus matched any Civil War exploit, or that aviation is as smart as cavalry, it is sufficient to note a few comparisons. If the World War produced more deaths, the Civil War produced more American deaths. If weapons have become more brutal, at least medicine and sanitation have advanced. One seldom reads of the Civil War in terms of sick and wounded. Medical officers of the sixties repeated the experience of a British medical officer in the Burmese War who advised his commander how to avoid scurvy and was told: "Medical opinions are very good when called for."⁴ A Union surgeon at Bull Run reported extreme difficulty in inducing field officers to listen to complaints of disease resulting from foul tents into which fresh air was "seldom if ever"⁵ admitted. Because ambulances were on the wrong side of the road, this also at Bull Run, twelve thousand troops had to pass before some of the wounded could be taken to the emergency hospital.⁶ Wounded men arriving from the field were thrust into freight cars where they lay on the bare floor without food for a day; numbers died on the road.⁷ One of the officers refused hospital admittance to wounded soldiers not of his regiment.⁸ Medical supplies were thrown away for want of

⁴ Joseph K. Barnes, ed., *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, second issue, 1875), Pt. 1, Vol. I, Append., 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Append., 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Append., 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Append., 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Append., 3.

transportation,⁹ injured men were exposed to heavy rain,¹⁰ gangrene resulted from minor wounds.¹¹

Romance and glory suggest at least the memory of a name. This implies an identified grave, but after making calculations based upon the official medical history issued by the surgeon general, the student would have to inform dear Blanche, or perhaps Mr. Ripley, that if the surgeon general's figures are right the unknown dead for the Civil War exceeded the number killed in battle! In round numbers there were about 110,000 Union deaths from battle, but the surgeon general reported that in November, 1870, there were 315,555 soldier graves, of which only 172,109 had been identified by name,¹² leaving over 143,000 unidentified graves. The number of soldiers known in the adjutant general's records to have died during the war is much greater than the number identified as to burial or reburial. It must be remembered that the soldier regularly carried no means of identification, that graves of men buried by comrades were marked by hasty devices, that Confederates appropriated Union arms and clothing, that teamsters, refugees, camp followers, or even fugitive slaves might have been buried with soldiers, and that the number reported as killed in action was inaccurate.¹³ Yet after making all these allowances, the vast number of the nameless leaves the inquiring mind unsatisfied. It is no more satisfactory to realize that about half the Union army became human waste in one form or another, as dead, disabled, deserted, or imprisoned.¹⁴

⁹ *Ibid.*, Append., 99.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Append., 146.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Append., 137.

¹² *Ibid.*, Intro., xxxiii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Intro., xxxiv, xxxvi; Charles G. Souder, Medical Corps, U. S. Army, to the author, November 17, 1939.

¹⁴ Of 360,000 Union deaths (round numbers), 110,000 resulted from battle, over 224,500 from disease, and nearly 25,000 from miscellaneous causes including suicide. United States Adjutant General's letter to the author, November 3, 1939. Suicides are mentioned by J. J. Woodward who writes the introduction to Barnes, *Medical and Surgical History*, Pt. 1, Vol. I, xxxvii. Woodward also (*loc. cit.*, intro., xlii), states that there were 285,545 men discharged from the Union army for disability. The adjutant general mentions 223,535 discharged for "physical disability" (letter

“Jeb” Stuart may have worn gold spurs, but the common soldier was more familiar with fleas. Sashes may have adorned generals but privates were often in rags. It was reported that one of the army surgeons boarded for an entire winter on Sanitary Commission stores.¹⁵ Camps were dirty, sanitation was faulty, cooking was shiftless. Reporting on one of the hospitals, an inspector referred to a leaky roof, broken glass, dirty stairs, insufficient sanitary facilities, and unclean disgusting beds.¹⁶ The soldier who was brutally struck by a sentry of his own company or who contracted malaria would hardly think of his experience as a thing of romance. Without exposing all the euphemisms that obscure the truth of this subject, it may be noted that the great majority of Union deaths were from causes medically regarded as preventable, leaving aside the cynical assumption that war itself is not preventable. Pneumonia, typhus, cholera, miasmatic fever, and the like hardly find their way into the pages of war romance, but they wrought more havoc than bayonets and guns. Where there was danger of infection the rule-of-thumb principle of the Civil War surgeon was to amputate,¹⁷ and from operating tables, such as they were, at Gettysburg, arms and legs were carried away in wagon loads. Marching was hatefully wearisome, desertion was rampant, corruption was rife. Individual injustices of the war

to author, November 3, 1939). Union prisoners numbered nearly 195,000 and Union deserters, not counting draft dodgers, may be conservatively estimated at about 200,000. James G. Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1937), 439, 432; Fred A. Shannon, *Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Cleveland, 1928), II, 179 n. It thus appears that over a million were among the dead, disabled, deserted, or imprisoned. A careful statistician has stated: “It is doubtful if there were 2,000,000 individuals actually in [Union] service during the [Civil] war.” William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-65* (Albany, 1889), 527.

¹⁵ Lewis H. Steiner, “Account of the Field Relief Corps of the U. S. Sanitary Commission of the Army of the Potomac,” *Sanitary Commission, Pamphlet No. 72* (New York, 1863), 6.

¹⁶ H. W. Bellows, “Notes of a Preliminary Sanitary Survey of the Forces of the United States in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys near Midsummer, 1861,” *Sanitary Commission, Pamphlet No. 26* (Washington, 1861), 15.

¹⁷ “In army practice, attempts to save a limb which might be perfectly successful in civil life, cannot be made . . . Conservative surgery is here an error; in order to save life, the limb must be sacrificed.” Frederick L. Olmsted, “Report of a Committee of the Associate Medical Members of the Sanitary Commission on the Subject of Amputations,” *Sanitary Commission F* (Washington, 1861), 5.

were shocking. Some generals got credit that was undeserved, others were broken by false report or slandered by an investigating committee of Congress. The men who languished in prison were several times more numerous than those stopped by bullets. That there was heroism in the war is not doubted, but to thousands the war was as romantic as prison rats and as gallant as typhoid or syphilis.

One does not often speak or read of the war in reality, of its blood and filth, of mutilated flesh, and other revolting things.¹⁸ This restraint is necessary, but it ought to be recognized that the war is not presented when one writes of debates in Congress, of flanking movements, of retreats and advances, of cavalry and infantry, of divisions doing this and brigades doing that. In the sense of full realism war cannot be discussed. The human mind will not stand for it. For the very word "war" the realist would have to substitute some such term as "organized murder" or "human slaughterhouse." In drama as distinguished from melodrama murder often occurs offstage. In most historical accounts, especially military narratives, the war is offstage in that its stench and hideousness do not appear.

With all the recent revisionist studies it is difficult to achieve a full realization of how Lincoln's generation stumbled into a ghastly war, how it blundered during four years of indecisive slaughter, and how the triumph of the Union was spoiled by the manner in which the victory was used. In the hateful results of the war over long decades one finds partisanship at its worst. To see the period as it was is to witness uninspired spectacles of prejudice, error, intolerance, and selfish grasping. The Union army was inefficiently raised, poorly administered, and often badly commanded. In government there was deadlock, cross purpose, and extravagance. One can say that Lincoln was honest, but not that the country was free from corruption during the Lincoln administration. There was cotton plundering, army-contract graft, and speculative greed. Where Lincoln was at his best, where he was

¹⁸ In postwar reminiscence the Union soldier might hold forth on the subject of the war as a purifying force and a builder of character where the same individual during the war recorded his feeling of disgust with what was around him, of degradation, and of the tearing down of character.

moderate, temperate, and far-seeing, he did not carry his party with him. Even those matters dissociated from the war, such as homesteading and railroad extension, came to be marred by exploitation and crooked finance. The period of the Civil War and the era of Jim Fisk and Jay Gould were one and the same generation.

If it was a "needless war," a "repressible conflict," as scholars now believe, then indeed was the generation misled in its unctuous fury. To suppose that the Union could not have been continued or slavery outmoded without the war and without the corrupt concomitants of the war, is hardly an enlightened assumption. If one questions the term "blundering generation," let him inquire how many measures of the time he would wish copied or repeated if the period were to be approached with a clean slate and to be lived again. Most of the measures are held up as things to be avoided. Of course it is not suggested that the generation of the sixties had any copyright on blundering. It is not that democracy was at fault. After all, civil war has not become chronic on these shores, as it has in some nations where politics of force is the rule. One can at least say that the Civil War was exceptional; that may be the best thing that can be said about it. A fuller measure of democracy would probably have prevented the war or at least have mitigated its abuses. To overlook many decades of American democracy and take the Civil War period as its test, would be to give an unfair appraisal. Nor does this probing of blunders involve lack of respect for the human beings of that generation. As individuals we love and admire them, these men and women who look at us from the tin-types and Brady photographs of the sixties, though we may have "malice toward some." The distortions and errors of the time were rather a matter of mass thinking, of social solidification, and of politics.

In the present vogue of psychiatry, individual mental processes and behavior have been elaborately studied. Psychiatry for a nation, however, is still in embryo, though it is much the fashion to have discussions of mass behaviorism, public opinion, pressure groups, thought patterns, and propaganda. Scholars in the field of history tend more and more to speak in

terms of culture; this often is represented as a matter of cultural conflict, as of German against Slav, of Japanese against Chinese, and the like. Such concepts were given overemphasis at the meeting of the American Historical Association last December. Historians are doing their age a disservice if these factors of culture are carried over, as they often are, whether by historians or others, into justifications or "explanations" of war. The note of caution here should be a note of honest inquiry. It may be seriously doubted whether war rises from fundamental motives of culture or economics so much as from the lack of cultural restraint or economic inhibition upon militaristic megalomania. Modern wars do not relieve population pressure. Whether wars are need for economic outlets or for obtaining raw materials is highly doubtful. International trade brings all that. Those who create war throttle the very flow of trade that would promote economic objectives. Where the economy of a nation hinges upon an export market, it may happen that plotters of war in that nation will stupidly kill that market by devices of economic autarchy and then claim that they have to go to war to have trade outlets. It is the same with incoming goods. Of such is the economic argument for war. War makers do not open up economic benefit so much as they stifle it. Their relation to culture is no better than their relation to economy.

There is the word astrology for bogus astronomy and alchemy for false chemistry. Ought there not to be some such word for the economic alchemists of this world? Perhaps it exists in the word autarchy. Is it not in the category of bogus economics, or *ersatz* economics, that one should put those who study war as a matter of trade, supply, resources, needs, and production? As for the Civil War the stretch and span of conscious economic motive was much smaller than the areas or classes of war involvement. Economic diversity offered as much motive for union, in order to have a well rounded nation, as for the kind of economic conflict suggested by secession. One fault of writers who associate war-making with economic advantage is false or defective economics; another is the historical fault. It is surprising how seldom the economic explanation of war has made its case historically, *i.e.* in terms of adequate historical evidence bearing upon

those points and those minds where actually the plunge into war occurred. One hears war treated as a matter of culture, but cultural and racial consciousness are as strong in Scandinavia or the Netherlands or Switzerland as in militarist-ridden countries. To make conquest a matter of culture is poor history. It may be the vanquished whose culture survives. Culture is not easily transplanted if force be the method. When war comes by the violence of a few in control and by the stifling of economic and cultural processes, it ill becomes the scholar to add his piping to the cacophonous blare of militaristic propaganda.

War causation tends to be "explained" in terms of great forces. Something elemental is supposed to be at work, be it nationalism, race conflict, or quest for economic advantage. With these forces predicated, the move toward war is alleged to be understandable, to be explained, and therefore to be in some sense reasonable. Thought runs in biological channels and nations are conceived as organisms. Such thought is not confined to philosophers; it is the commonest of mental patterns. A cartoonist habitually draws a nation as a person. In this manner of thinking Germany does so and so; John Bull takes this or that course, and so on. When thought takes so homely a form it is hardly called a philosophical concept; for that purpose the very same thing would appear under a Greek derivative or Freudian label. However labeled, it may be questioned whether the concept is any better than a poor figure of speech, a defective metaphor which is misleading because it has a degree of truth.

Ruritania — to be no more specific — does so and so in the sense that it has a government, the government acts for the nation, and for political purposes there is no other way in which the country can act. The doubtful part is to infer that there is one directing mind for Ruritania which is the distillation of all the millions of minds. Where government has a bogus quality such an inference is more doubtful than if government has a well grounded or established quality. Given certain conditions of forced leadership and suppressed thought, the oneness of executive action in a nation may in fact represent nothing at all in terms of consolidated will and intent distilled from the whole mass. What passes for mass thought these days is not so much

distilled as it is translated from golden plates handed down on some ideological Hill of Cumorah and read through the magic of authoritarian Urim and Thummim. The terrifying fact is that such bogus thought can be manufactured; it can be produced wholesale and distributed at top speed; it can control a nation; it is the shabby mental *ersatz* of an abnormal period.

War-making is too much dignified if it is told in terms of broad national urges, of great German motives, or of compelling Russian ambitions. When nations stumble into war, or when peoples rub their eyes and find they have been dragged into war, there is at some point a psychopathic case. Omit the element of abnormality, or of bogus leadership, or inordinate ambition for conquest, and diagnosis fails. In the modern scene it fails also if one omits manipulation, dummies, bogeys, false fronts, provocative agents, made-up incidents, frustration of elemental impulses, negation of culture, propaganda that is false in intent, criminal usurpation, and terrorist violence. These are reflections on the present bedeviled age, but their pertinence to the subject at hand is seen in the fact that scholarly discussions in explanation of war on the economic or cultural basis frequently include the Civil War as a supposedly convincing example. The writer doubts seriously whether a consensus of scholars who have competently studied the Civil War would accept either the cultural motive or the economic basis as the effective cause.

If one were to explain how this or that group or individual got into the Civil War, he could rely on no one formula. He would have to make up a series of elements or situations of which the following are only a few that might be mentioned: the despairing plunge, the unmotivated drift, the intruding dilemma, the blasted hope, the self-fulfilling prediction, the push-over, the twisted argument, the frustrated leader, the advocate of rule or ruin, and the reform-your-neighbor prophet. Robert Toombs said he would resist Stephen A. Douglas though he could see "nothing but . . . defeat in the future"¹⁹; there is your despairing plunge. Young Henry Watterson, a Tennessee antislavery

¹⁹ Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, in *American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1911* (Washington, 1913), II, 469.

Unionist who fought for the Confederacy, is an example of the unmotivated drift. To many an individual the problem was not to fight with the side whose policies he approved of, but to be associated with the right set. Such an individual motive could not by a process of multiplication become in any reasonable sense a large-group motive. Yet it would be understandable for the individual. Usually in war time individuals have no choice of side, though in the American Civil War they sometimes did, especially on the border. Even where such choice was possible, the going to war by the individual in the sixties was due less to any broad "cause" or motive than to the fact that war existed, so that fighting was the thing to do. The obtaining of soldiers is not a matter of genuine persuasion as to issues. War participation is not a proof of war attitude.

The intruding dilemma was found in the great border and the great upper South where one of two ugly courses had to be chosen, though neither choice made sense in terms of objectives and interests in those broad regions.²⁰ The self-fulfilling prediction is recognized in the case of those who, having said that war must come, worked powerfully to make it come. The blasted hope, *i.e.* the wish for adjustment instead of butchery, was the experience of most of the people, especially in the border and upper South. The frustrated leader is seen in the Unionist who came to support secession, or in such northerners as Thurlow Weed and William H. Seward who sought compromise and then supported war. The plea that "better terms" could be had out of the Union, which implied a short secession gesture though uttered by determined secessionists, was the crafty argument for secession to be used in addressing Unionists. This might be dubbed the twisted argument. The push-over is seen in the whole strategy of secession leaders by which anti-secession states and Union-loving men were to be dragged in by the accelerated march of events.

These are things which belong as much to the "explanation" of the Civil War as any broad economic or cultural or elemental factor. It should be remembered how few of the active promoters

²⁰ "They say Virginia 'has no grievance.'" Entry of May 9, 1861, Mary B. Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York, 1906), 50.

of secession became leaders of the Confederacy; their place in the drama was in the first act, in the starting of trouble. Nor should sectional preference cause one to forget how large a contribution to Union disaster, and how little to success, was given by northern radicals during the war. Clear thinking would require a distinction between causing the war and getting into the war. Discussion which overlooks this becomes foggy indeed. It was small minorities that caused the war; then the regions and sections got into it. No one seems to have thought of letting the minorities fight it out. Yet writers who descant upon the causation of the war write grandly of vast sections, as if the fact of a section being dragged into the slaughter was the same as the interests of that section being consciously operative in its causation. Here lies one of the chief fallacies of them all.

In writing of human nature in politics Graham Wallas has shown the potent effect of irrational attitudes.²¹ He might have found many a Civil War example. None of the "explanations" of the war make sense, if fully analyzed. The war has been "explained" by the choice of a Republican president, by grievances, by sectional economics, by the cultural wish for southern independence, by slavery, or by events at Sumter. But these explanations crack when carefully examined. The election of Lincoln fell so far short of swinging southern sentiment against the Union that secessionists were still unwilling to trust their case to an all-southern convention or to cooperation among southern states. In every election from 1840 to 1852 Lincoln voted for the same candidate for whom many thousands of southerners voted. Lincoln deplored the demise of the Whig party and would have been only too glad to have voted in 1856 for another Harrison, another Taylor, or another Fillmore. Alexander Stephens stated that secessionists did not desire redress of grievances and would obstruct such redress. Prophets of sectional economics left many a southerner unconvinced; it is doubtful how far their arguments extended beyond the sizzling pages of *DeBow's Review* and the agenda of southern commercial congresses. The tariff was a potential future annoyance rather than an acute grievance in 1860. What existed then was largely a southern tariff law. Prac-

²¹ Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1909, 1st ed.), *passim*.

tically all tariffs are one-sided. Sectional tariffs in other periods have existed without producing war. Southern independence on broad cultural lines is probably more of a modern thesis than a contemporary motive of sufficient force to have carried the South out of the Union on any cooperative, all-southern basis.

It was no part of the Republican program to smash slavery in the South, nor did the territorial aspect of slavery mean much politically beyond agitation. Southerners cared little about actually taking slaves into existing territories; Republicans cared so little in the opposite sense that they avoided the prohibition of slavery in those territorial laws that were passed with Republican votes in February and March, 1861.²² Things said of "the South" often failed to apply to southerners, or of "the North" to northerners. Thwarted "Southern rights" were more often a sublimation than a definite entity. "The North" in the militant pre-war sense was largely an abstraction. The Sumter affair was not a cause, but an incident resulting from pre-existing governmental deadlock; Sumter requires explanation, and that explanation carries one back into all the other alleged factors. In contemporary southern comments on Lincoln's course at Sumter one finds not harmony but a jangling of discordant voices. Virginia resented Lincoln's action at Sumter for a reason opposite to that of South Carolina; Virginia's resentment was in the anti-secessionist sense. By no means did all the North agree with Lincoln's course as to Sumter. Had Lincoln evacuated Sumter without an expedition, he would have been supported by five and a half of seven cabinet members, Chase taking a halfway stand and Blair alone taking a positive stand for an expedition.²³ What Lincoln refused as to Sumter was what the United States government had permitted in general as to forts and arsenals in the South. Stronger action than at Sumter was taken by Lincoln at Pickens without southern fireworks. There is no North-versus-

²² These matters are treated by the writer in a paper entitled "The Civil War Restudied," to be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Southern History*.

²³ The writer has treated Lincoln's relation to the Sumter question in "When War Came in 1861," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly* (Springfield, Ill.), I, March, 1940, pp. 3-42. (Cabinet opinion on Sumter is here treated as of March 15, 1861; two weeks later there was a somewhat different cabinet alignment.)

South pattern that covers the subject of the forts. Nor is the war itself to be glibly explained in rational North-versus-South terms.

Let one take all the factors — the Sumter maneuver, the election of Lincoln, abolitionism, slavery in Kansas, cultural and economic differences — and it will be seen that only by a kind of false display could any of these issues, or all of them together, be said to have caused the war if one omits the elements of emotional unreason and overbold leadership. If one word or phrase were selected to account for the war, that word would not be slavery, or state-rights, or diverse civilizations. It would have to be such a word as fanaticism (on both sides), or misunderstanding, or perhaps politics. To Graham Wallas misunderstanding and politics are the same thing.

The fundamental or the elemental is often no better than a philosophical will o' the wisp. Why do adventitious things, or glaringly abnormal things, have to be elementally or cosmically accounted for? If, without proving his point, the historian makes war a thing of "inevitable" economic conflict, or cultural expression, or *Lebensraum*,²⁴ his generalizations are caught up by others, for it would seem that those historians who do the most generalizing, if they combine effective writing with it, are the ones who are most often quoted. The historian's pronouncements are taken as the statement of laws whether he means them so or not; he is quoted by sociologists, psychologists, behaviorists, misbehaviorists, propagandists, and what not; he becomes a contributor to those "dynamic" masses of ideas, or ideologies, which are among the sorriest plagues of the present age. As to wars, the ones that have not happened are perhaps best to study. Much could be said about such wars. As much could be said in favor of them as of actual wars. Cultural and economic difficulties in wars that have not occurred are highly significant. The notion that you must have war when you have cultural variation,

²⁴ *Lebensraum* as a war motive is meaningless unless one links it with the following factors: the demand of an aggressive nation to own and rule where its nationals live, repudiation of the idea that Dutch can live with Swiss except under Dutch domination, denial of *lebensraum* to the dispossessed people even in their own country, and the ideological justification of such denial on the ground that the intruding race with the bigger guns is superior by nature and has superior rights.

or economic competition, or sectional difference is an unhistorical misconception which it is stupid in historians to promote. Yet some of the misinterpretations of the Civil War have tended to promote it.

What was the mind of America in Lincoln's day? It was human, which means it was partly simian! It was occidental. It was New World. It was American, though one would have to be a Stephen Benét to state what that means.²⁵ It had somewhat of a sense of humor, though not enough. It was southern, or Yankee, or midwestern, or otherwise sectional. It was the mind of the McGuffey reader, by which a world of ready-made ideas is suggested. It was Victorian; it had inhibitions which today appear as droll as its unrepressed whiskers. It was less mechanized than today, being of the horse-and-buggy age. It was soul-searching. It was Christian and it was chiefly Protestant; yet the one most numerous faith was Catholic. Religiously it was fundamentalist. It was not profoundly philosophical and took with resentment the impact of Darwinism. Though polyglot it was far from cosmopolitan. The soapbox flavor or the backwoods tang was characteristic of its humorists. It was partly conditioned by racial backgrounds, such as the Dutch, German, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, or Scandinavian. It differed in the degrees of its Americanization; there was a staggering at variant distances from immigrant ancestors. Often the recent immigrant, such as the German or Scandinavian, took American democracy with more simple faith than the seasoned American. When disillusion came to such, it came hard.

The mind of the time was many things socially, being of the four hundred if one considers the De Peysters and Van Courtlands, or Boston Brahmin, or mountaineer, or of the numerous small farmer group, or of the unvocal laboring class. If one were to have searched for class consciousness in this age, it would have been found less among underprivileged masses than among the aristocrats, the planters, the capitalists; it was they who were indeed class-conscious. Such a matter as the southern gen-

²⁵ Benét did it in the invocation of *John Brown's Body*. Of American historians, Turner has perhaps come as near it as any.

tleman's conventionalized code of honor, including the *code duello*, was a bulwark of exclusiveness and a deliberate social barrier.²⁶

As to its war attitude, the mind of Lincoln's day was in part a mind during war, in part pro-war, in part anti-war, in part merely at war. Where it was pro-war it was not necessarily militaristic. Where it was German it was usually not Prussian, being spiritually closer to Weimar or Frankfort-on-Main. What is meant here are minds that were more or less genuine; this would rule out the politician whose mind was usually a synthetic affair made up for the vote-getting occasion. The mind of the time was often the product of intra-American migration. Thus it was Virginia or Kentucky in Illinois, Tennessee in Missouri, Vermont in Indiana, Massachusetts or upstate New York in Ohio. Rural areas had contributed more to these migrations than cities; not much relief of urban congestion had come by way of the westward movement. Perhaps predominantly the mind of America was rural. Yet hardly at all was it a peasant mind, much less proletarian. Never would its educated people have called themselves the intelligentsia. To refer to its middle class as bourgeois would be to use a non-American concept. The middle class did not function as a set social type or bloc.

It would be of interest to examine this mind in segments, but they would have to be complex segments. There would be the American-Victorian-New York-élite mind, the midwest-German-farmer mind, the Irish-Tammany-Eastside mind, the immigrant-labor mind, the old American frontier mind, and so on. Quite generally it was three things: Victorian, restless, and habituated to politician-like thinking. The puritanical Victorianism of the age combined with financial imperatives when one of Jay Cooke's cashiers committed the astounding indiscretion of driving a four-in-hand in Central Park on a Sunday afternoon. Cooke warned him that if that were known "amongst financial People" it would bring "great discredit to the Bank." "Credit," he admonished, "is a tender plant." Its delicate growth would be

²⁶ Charles S. Sydnor, "The Southerner and the Laws," presidential address before the Southern Historical Association, Lexington, Kentucky, November 3, 1939, *Journal of Southern History* (University, Louisiana), VI, 1940, pp. 3-23.

affected by "such a stupid display as a four-in-hand."²⁷ Business men who did not walk the straight and narrow were "under suspicion." Wall Street was an uplifting factor. Sabbath observance had its Bradstreet rating.²⁸ Yet it may have been the appearance of evil that was detrimental, for corruption was rampant and social disapproval by no means always attached to methods of questionable financial dealing. Graft and special privilege were respectable. Many a fortune of Civil War origin belonged to the ill-gotten class. Defrauding the government did not make one a social pariah.

In spite of much nobility of sentiment, the Civil War mind seems a sorry *melange* of party bile, crisis melodrama, inflated eloquence, unreason, religious fury, self-righteousness, unctuous self-deception, and hate. Bad party feeling was evident when Seward appeared in the Senate on January 9, 1860, "& not a man from the democracy save Douglas . . . came to greet him." "D—n their impudence," was the comment of William P. Fessenden.²⁹ Yet this was more than a year before the war opened. It was a time of crisis psychosis. Men felt they were living in great days. The generation had its self-consciousness of mission and destiny. Even the private soldier filled his letters with exalted talk. At the beginning of the war a Massachusetts soldier, telling of a rail journey from Boston to New York, wrote: "Refreshments were lavished upon us . . . cannon sent their boom over hill and dale and bells peeled [*sic*] their tocsin of warning . . . that our train was approaching bearing a Regiment of brave hearts to the defence of our country's capitol [*sic*]." Passing the "Constitution" he wrote: "May they [the colors] ever float over that notable ship . . . as she rides proudly upon the waters of the Union." This proudly riding epistle was but a soldier's letter to his brother.³⁰ Similar attitudes were charac-

²⁷ Henrietta M. Larson, *Jay Cooke, Private Banker* (Cambridge, 1936), 189.

²⁸ It would now be called that; in Civil War days it was the R. G. Dun rating.

²⁹ William P. Fessenden to Hamilton Fish, Washington, January 10, 1860, Hamilton Fish MSS. (Library of Congress).

³⁰ Lt. H. N. Holbrook, 5th Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, to "Dear Brother James," Washington, D. C., April 28, 1861. (For the use of this manuscript letter the writer is indebted to its owner, H. E. Pratt, executive secretary, Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois.)

teristic of the South; Mrs. Chesnut referred to "the high-flown style which of late seems to have gotten into the very air."³¹

What the war did to the mind of Ralph Waldo Emerson deserves careful study, though here it can be only hinted. To the Emerson of the sixties New England was the custodian of sense and elegance, Boston superiority was axiomatic, the South was boorish as well as wicked, and John Brown, well-known in Concord, was a martyr. There are "crises which demand nations," he thought, and a generation might well perish to insure a better life for generations that follow.³² "What a healthy tone exists!" he wrote in May, 1861.³³ To Emerson not merely *the war* but *war* was an elemental, purifying force. Ridiculing the sentimentalist, demanding that the North must conquer as a matter of culture, he wrote grandly of a strong wind, of "one energetic mind" where there had been "incapacity to move," of war as a searcher of character. War to Emerson was a "dynamometer," taking the fop in the street, the beau at the ball, and lifting them up by something "in the air."³⁴ "A civil war," he naively wrote, "sweeps away all the false issues."³⁵ "This revolution," he said, "is the work of no man, but the effervescence of Nature."³⁶ Reaching almost Nietzschean ecstasy, he burred: "War is a realist, shatters everything flimsy and shifty, sets aside all false issues . . . breaks through all that is not real." "On with the war" might have been his slogan. "Let it search," he said, "let it grind, let it overturn, and . . . when it finds no more fuel, it burns out."³⁷

To illustrate the benefit of war he looked for a simile and found it in the cholera! On this theme he wrote: "We watch its course [that of the war] as we did the cholera, which . . . took only the susceptible, set its seal on every putrid spot . . . followed

³¹ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, 3.

³² Ralph L. Rusk, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, 1939), V, 332.

³³ Edward W. Emerson and Waldo E. Forbes, eds., *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston, 1909), IX, 325.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 411, 429.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, IX, 459.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, IX, 572.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 461, 462.

the limestone, and left the granite.”³⁸ What to David Starr Jordan was an annihilator of the finest and of potential descendants of those best fit to reproduce,³⁹ was to Emerson a beneficial cosmic force finding its origin in the motion of the planets. Norman Angell’s great illusion counted its mental victims among those who passed for philosophers.

When philosophers turned war mongers it was not to be expected that pacifists would have a hearing. The broad cause of peace was one of the casualties of war. In its antebellum background the peace crusade in America was a small affair of humanitarian groups with variant attitudes. It embraced men of intelligent idealism, but its efforts never bore fruit as did other crusades such as that of Dorothea Dix for the neglected insane or of Horace Mann for public elementary education. The Peace Society, launched with the impetus of Christian evangelism by William Ladd in 1828, and promoted by Elihu Burritt and other choice spirits, was thirty-three years old when the guns spoke at Sumter. In those years the society had not been idle. It had made use of the familiar techniques of agitation: lectures, local agents, local chapters, tracts, prize essays, magazines, books, national congresses, and petitions to the seat of government. A vigorous literature was produced, world peace congresses were held, arguments against war were marshalled, arbitration among nations urged, and disarmament advocated. Diverse elements were enlisted, such as Quakers, insurance men, free-traders, and merchants.⁴⁰

Pacifism of the early nineteenth century differed from that of the twentieth chiefly in this, that it was economically and socially conservative. Peace agitation was a matter of Christian evangelism and of social stability. It drew more from the Gospel than from fundamental philosophy. Its swing was to the right rather than the left. It did not march with socialism. It contained sectional trouble-makers in its ranks. Christian and conservative as it was, it often met opposition or at least non-cooperation from ordained ministers. Taking a stand against war was difficult and

³⁸ *Ibid.*, IX, 462.

³⁹ David S. Jordan and Harvey E. Jordan, *War's Aftermath: A Preliminary Study of the Eugenics of War* (Boston, 1914).

⁴⁰ Arthur C. F. Beales, *The History of Peace* (New York, 1931), 53 and *passim*.

complex. Questions arose touching the duty of fighting a defensive war or concerning the right of revolution. To favor peace in the sense of having governments avoid the outbreak of war was very different from avoiding individual participation once war had broken out. Organized peace men were chiefly northerners, rather northeasterners, and the movement was interlocked with collateral movements, especially antislavery. Peace advocacy might or might not mean non-resistance. Not all peace men could accept Garrison's formula of doing nothing to preserve the Union against armed secession.

When war came and as the struggle dragged on, demands for peace were regarded as a kind of defeatism, of surrender to forces which northern idealists considered destructive and evil. Peace became a matter of politics, of anti-Lincoln agitation, of what was called Copperhead disloyalty. Forces that stood outwardly for Christianity denounced it the loudest. Though praising Seward's peace efforts before Sumter, the Peace Society formulated its war-time position after Sumter as follows: "*Peace is always loyal. . . . We cannot . . . tolerate rebellion. . . . The cause of Peace was never meant to meet such a crisis as is now upon us.*"⁴¹ The society was a negligible thing; indeed one could read many tomes of American history without seeing it mentioned. It did not associate itself with opposition to the war powers, with anti-Lincoln demands for civil rights, with Vallandigham partisanship, nor with obstruction of the draft. It never made enough of a stir to become notorious. It did not arouse the horrendous and vindictive ire of any Dies committee. Many of its members preferred war to the continuance of slavery; others preferred war to disunion; still others deemed human slaughter not too high a price for ascendancy of a favorite party.

Denunciation of war easily became denunciation of rebellion; this readily passed over into a demand to put down rebellion. The cause of peace as a crusade found a new orientation when war actually existed, for non-resistance could not stop the torrent. It was the dilemma of the pacifist. When peace men face an existing war begun by what they consider an aggressor, their

⁴¹ *Advocate of Peace* (Boston and Washington), May-June, 1861, p. 258.

attachment to peace becomes outraged indignation against those who, in their opinion, have broken the peace. Such a feeling is consistent with the motive of stopping the war maker. It is only the cynic who would laugh at the discomfiture of the pacifist when once war exists and when the choice of peace is no longer open. The self-contradiction belongs to those who would put the label of war monger upon peace-time efforts to implement international cooperation and to buttress war prevention. The inconsistency is in misapplying the term "peace bloc" to those isolationist groups which have worked to frustrate international security by way of peaceful organization among nations.

For the Civil War generation the problem of the advocate of peace was only in a limited sense the problem of the conscientious objector. Objectors in the Lincoln period were chiefly associated with established anti-war creeds of religious groups. General objectors on other than religious grounds were not much in evidence. In this the Civil War presented a contrast to the World War, wherein refusal to fight was associated not only with specific Quaker-like groups but with broad liberal attitudes. In both wars the mass effect of organized religion was the opposite of pacifist. In each war administrative authorities of the United States respected the idealism of the objector and gave him the alternative of noncombatant service. In the World War more objectors were relieved than imprisoned, though the imprisoned received the most attention. Imprisonment of objectors as such was not a Civil War practice.

If the pacifist had a dilemma, so did the government. The sincere and serene Christianity of the Quakers could not but command respect, and those who stood their ground were, as a rule, honorably excused from fighting. In the Civil War this leniency was at first an administrative adjustment in a situation where the objector might have expected severe treatment; late in the war it was a matter of statutory amendment to the conscription act. As originally passed the Conscription Act of 1863 did not even exempt ministers. For the objector to stand his ground in early Civil War days meant defiance of the government; the government was demanding a service which the objector refused; leniency was an afterthought. Non-resistance was a

Quaker tenet, but here the Quakers, or rather the strictest of them, would have to resist, as did Cyrus Pringle of Vermont, unless their government would make a concession which in such cases it did make. No government can be completely unbending. Government is, after all, an art, perhaps a compromise. If the objector remained obdurate, either the government had to withdraw somewhat from the principle of compulsory military service or a man would be punished for being a Christian. The government took an attitude toward Quakers which it could not take toward all, if conscription were its principle. The Quaker came through the dilemma with less compromise than the government.⁴²

It is not of record that Lincoln's Cabinet contained a "minister of national enlightenment and propaganda"; yet propaganda itself was not lacking.⁴³ In the public "enlightenment" of that time there was boasting, there was rumor, there were atrocity tales, and there was falsehood. Atrocity stories were found not only in newspapers but in congressional reports. There were circumstantial accounts of Confederates bayoneting wounded captives, kicking heads about like footballs, insulting women, and engaging in gruesome tortures. William B. Hesseltine has shown that anti-southern horror tales were not without governmental inspiration in the North and that the secretary of war, the surgeon general, and the committee on the conduct of the war took pains to spread tales of the sufferings of northern prisoners in the South.⁴⁴ Motives were various: tales might be spread to carry forward the abolitionist's denunciation of southern cruelty, to satisfy the moral sense by besmirching the foe, or to discourage surrender into southern hands. When the backfire came and these atrocity stories led to questions as to why prisoners were not exchanged, it became necessary to invent the tale

⁴² Edward N. Wright, *Conscientious Objectors in the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1931); Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London, 1921), II, 728-753; Rufus M. Jones, ed., *The Record of a Quaker Conscience: Cyrus Pringle's Diary* (New York, 1918); Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 416-419.

⁴³ G. Winston Smith, *Generative Forces of Union Propaganda: A Study in Civil War Pressure Groups* (MS. doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1939).

⁴⁴ William B. Hesseltine, "The Propaganda Literature of Confederate Prisons," *Journal of Southern History*, I, February, 1935, pp. 56-66.

that exchange had been stopped by a vicious South intent upon destroying the lives of prisoners. Even the humanitarian motive promoted atrocity tales, and the report of the Sanitary Commission on this subject in no way fell short of governmental accounts.

Lincoln's attitude on such matters was expressed in a speech delivered at a Sanitary Fair in Baltimore in 1864. Referring to the rumored massacre of colored prisoners at Fort Pillow, Lincoln carefully avoided pointing up the reputed atrocity, declared that the event was not known to have occurred, and promised an investigation. He also promised retribution if needed, but, as in the case of similar threats by the Confederacy, the motive was humanitarian. The threat of retaliation was intended to make actual retaliation unnecessary, as well as to satisfy that type of vindictiveness at the North which was strangely bound up with humanitarianism. On this point Lincoln reached the height of caution when he said: "It will be a matter of grave consideration in what exact course to apply the retribution."⁴⁵ What seemed to worry Lincoln was not a vicious South, but the need to satisfy his own northern public, including the humanitarily vindictive public. For the latter he gave a threat of retribution which in fact he never carried out, and probably never intended to.

In spite of its lack of modern techniques such as radio and the movies, Civil War propaganda found many devices. There were drawings in *Harper's*, *Leslie's*, and *Vanity Fair*, though not daily cartoons. There were popular songs such as "Father Abraham" which gave the chief a nickname and personified the cause in a benevolent President. There was recruiting propaganda by poster and otherwise, and there was partisanly patriotic propaganda in appeals for soldier votes. Generals of the political variety made flourishing speeches. The Loyal Publication Society sent out its material by the bushel, including stereotypes to local editors, tracts, broadsides, pamphlets, and in one case a forged speech attributed to Alexander H. Stephens,

⁴⁵ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., *Abraham Lincoln, Complete Works* (New York, 1920), 2 vol. ed., II, 514. (In later citations of the *Works* the reference is to this edition.)

whose alleged language was startlingly similar to that of Helper's *Impending Crisis*.⁴⁶

The word "propaganda" is an inexact expression which eludes definition. Every public appeal to support a cause could be loosely called propaganda. An advertisement might be propaganda in this broad sense, so also an editorial, a parade, a novel, a Sanitary Fair, a request for funds, a Thanksgiving proclamation, an anecdote, an envelope, a letter-head, a postage stamp, a dollar bill, a legislative preamble, a sermon, a petition, a sewing circle, or a school primer. One might use propaganda in christening a baby, naming a street, or addressing the Almighty. Motives in reaching the public were mixed. Propaganda in Lincoln's day was more often complex than simple, hybrid oftener than thoroughbred; it had one purpose grafted upon another. Publicity for the national cause was universal, but this broad appeal was often linked with an ulterior purpose which was in fact the main interest of the promoting agency. Thus a party rally would masquerade as a Union mass meeting, an appeal for peace in England might be an effort to withhold ironclads from the Confederacy, a volunteer fire brigade would be a unit of Tammany Hall, and the anniversary at Baltimore in 1862 of the anti-Union riot of April, 1861, was a boost for the newly elected mayor and council which had become Unionist. When Jay Cooke urged people to buy bonds he did not hesitate to blend self-interest with patriotism as he stressed the advantages of tax-free seven per cents. Even the name "Union" applied to the Republican party in Civil War days was an example of this tendency. Among themselves Republican leaders understood each other perfectly and continued to refer to their party as Republican, while for public consumption it was called "Union."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 638-639. See also, Frank Freidel, "The Loyal Publication Society: A Pro-Union Propaganda Agency," *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXVI, 359-376.

⁴⁷ Published tickets often carried the name "Union" or "National Union" party, but a printed circular in Massachusetts urging the formation "of a Union Club . . . in every town" is headed: "Headquarters Republican State Committee . . . Boston, Sep. 26, 1864." Supporting Lincoln and Johnson, this circular said "We should be put in . . . correspondence with working Republicans of every town in the State." Andrew MSS. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston), XXVIII, no. 90.

Much could be said of party propoganda, but this was not peculiar to war time; party agitation is always with us. That the national cause was appropriated for a party purpose was seen in the Union League. It is unnecessary to comment on the league at large, with its expensive club buildings, its social impressiveness, its exploitation of the American propensity for joining, its masses of war literature, and its showy efforts toward recruiting and soldier relief; but there is need for further study of the league's campaign activities, especially the procedures of its local chapters. The minute-book of a local league in the nineteenth ward of New York City belongs to the type of sources that are seldom dug up.⁴⁸ The minutes here recorded are generally quite sterile as they creep along with routine matters till the approach of election time. Indeed it was not until September 19, 1864, that the nineteenth-ward leaguers "heartily approved" the early June nomination of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson at Baltimore. It was in October and the first days of November, 1864, that this local league suddenly came alive, sending loyal newspapers to soldiers, passing sizzling anti-Democratic resolutions, publishing campaign documents, and appointing poll-watchers to swing into action at sunrise on the eighth of November. Just after the election the minutes report "no quorum," and from that time this patriotic organization sank back into utter inactivity. Repeatedly there was the "no quorum" record; in February, 1865, it was voted to adopt measures to increase interest in the meetings. On April 3, 1865, the minutes flicker out altogether. Similar accounts with different terms, including the names of Tammany and the Knights of the Golden Circle, would illuminate the history of the Democratic party.

Official propoganda took many forms, including governmentally inspired foreign missions of prominent Americans. Thurlow Weed promoted the Union cause in the British press, Archbishop John Hughes sought contact with Catholics in Europe, Bishop McIlwaine of the Episcopal Church made his appeal to the British clergy. In addition, the irrepressible Robert J. Walker appealed to British financial groups in opposition to southern bond

⁴⁸ MS. (New York Public Library).

sales, while John M. Forbes and William H. Aspinwall labored to halt naval building for the Confederacy in Britain.

President Lincoln, who once owned a newspaper, by no means neglected publicity. Naturally he addressed the people in occasional speeches, in his two inaugurals, his proclamations, and his messages to Congress. Beyond this there was the use of patronage for newspapers, an obscure subject yet to be explored, and there was the case of J. W. Forney whose Philadelphia *Chronicle* and Washington *Chronicle* were known as Lincoln organs. In March, 1862, the President asked Henry J. Raymond for an article in the *Times*.⁴⁹ So much of the writing on Lincoln has been of the sentimentally stereotyped variety that people have overlooked Lincoln's trenchant comments on his own times, on wartime profits,⁵⁰ on corruption, and on the manner in which every "foul bird" and "every dirty reptile" came forth in war time.⁵¹ It is safe to say that Lincoln saw the war more clearly and faced it more squarely than Emerson. He faced it with an amazing lack of hatred and rancor.

The Civil War generation, not alone military and political events, but life and *mores*, social conditions and thought-patterns that accompanied the war as well as non-war aspects of the age, will receive further attention by inquisitive historians. In Arthur C. Cole's pages in the Fox-Schlesinger series one finds many a cue for further investigation and many a product of mature study.⁵² Beyond the boundaries of even the newer books lie disappearing and forgotten stories. Where the stories are recoverable the present age of historiography, as shown in Cole's book, is more capable of accomplishing the recovery than previous ages. History has its vogues and its movements. Just as Americans beginning about 1935 executed something like an about-face in their interpretation of the World War, including American participation in it and attitudes preceding it, so the retelling of the Civil War is a matter of changed and changing viewpoints. In the present troubled age it may be of more than

⁴⁹ Nicolay and Hay, *Works*, II, 132.

⁵⁰ "The . . . question of profit controls all." *Ibid.*, 358.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁵² Arthur C. Cole, *The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850-1865*, Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon R. Fox, *A History of American Life* (New York, 1934), VII.

academic interest to reexamine the human beings of that war generation with less thought of the "splendor of battle flags" and with more of the sophisticated and unsentimental searchlight of reality.⁵³

⁵³ The author wishes to give acknowledgment to his students in the Harvard summer session of 1939, especially to Paul Driscoll on the "last romance," to Elizabeth Mohr on peace, and to Frederick S. Allis Jr. on Emerson.