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The Inner Civil War

NORTHERN INTELLECTUALS
AND THE CRISIS OF THE UNION



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affair of instincts," he told his lecture audience; "we did not know we had them; we valued ourselves as cool calculators; we were very fine with our learning and culture, with our science that was of no country, and our religion of peace;—and now a sentiment mightier than logic, wide as light, strong as gravity, reaches into the college, the bank, the farm-house, and the church. It is the day of the populace; they are wiser than their teachers. . . . I will never again speak lightly of a crowd."² Emerson, who had always been an admirer of "noble passions" but had heretofore considered them the prerogative of isolated genius, had now lost his contempt for the masses and for crowds of all kinds and seemed willing to accept collective feeling as the equivalent of individual intuition. The war spirit was inspiring because there seemed to be nothing formal or institutional about it; it was "a sentiment mightier than logic" which was reaching into dead institutions and bringing forth live men.

If the opening of the war had apparently converted Emerson to the Whitmanic faith that divine human nature could be expressed by mass democracy, it had made Whitman himself more optimistic than ever about the capabilities of the people en masse. Up to this time, Whitman had never really found an answer to the question of what would hold together the unorganized populace, if one dispensed, as he desired, with all institutions; but the spirit of 1861 suggested that the ideological fervor of a people at war for the democratic idea could be the cohesive force; and Whitman celebrated this fervor in his early war poems.

From the beginning Whitman, like President Lincoln, regarded the slavery question as secondary. "The negro was not the chief thing," he recalled in later years; "the chief thing was to stick together."³ Yet, even though he was not an abolitionist, his Unionism (again like Lincoln's) derived in no essential way from the rights-of-authority school. It was based squarely on the idea of an American mission—the belief that the advance of democracy in the world depended on the preservation of the American nation. Whitman and Lincoln were almost alone among the philosophers of Unionism in giving a strong democratic meaning to the conflict.⁴

One way in which the war would realize the promise of Ameri-

can democracy, according to Whitman, was by raising men's sights from material interests. Whitman, who before the war had described his disgust with American materialism, as reflected in "the shallowness and miserable selfism of these crowds of men, with all their minds so blank of high humanity and aspiration," had come to recognize that the great danger of democracy was the opening it gave for the wrong kind of individualism—the pursuit of personal advantage.⁵ As a result, he was quick to hail the new patriotic spirit as an antidote to materialism.

Long, too long, O land,
 Traveling roads all even and peaceful, you learn'd from joys and
 prosperity only;
 But now, ah now, to learn from crisis of anguish—advancing, grappling
 with direst fate, and recoiling not;
 And now to conceive and show to the world, what your children
 en-masse really are;
 (For who except myself has yet conceived what your children en-masse
 really are?)⁶

In addition to being tested by adversity, Americans were also being saved from an excessive attachment to institutions. In "Beat! Beat! Drums!" Whitman rejoiced in the manner of Emerson at the way the war spirit would go "Into the solemn church and scatter the congregation" and "Into the school where the scholar was studying." It would not even leave "the bridegroom quiet with his bride." In another poem, he expressed genuine pleasure at the disruption of ordinary institutional life that preceded the creation of a mass army. Describing the "torrents of men" going to war as representing "DEMOCRACY" breaking forth with thunder and lightning, Whitman indicated that his hunger for "primal energies," for "Nature's dauntlessness" was finally satisfied. "I am glutted," he wrote;

I have witness'd the true lightning—I have witness'd my cities electric;
 I have lived to behold man burst forth, and warlike America rise.⁷

Since Whitman's "DEMOCRACY" was an irrational, quasi-natural force, or a collective emotion, he could easily lead himself to think that all war patriotism was enthusiasm for liberty,

equality, and fraternity. For him, as for Emerson, all large passions seemed to come from the cosmic spirit.

Other believers in a cosmic spirit, however, were not satisfied with patriotic or even ideological enthusiasm as the expression of the divine energy. They hoped that the spirit of 1861 could be deepened and transformed into an explicitly religious feeling, a burning millennial faith.

One such millennialist was Henry James, Sr., a Swedenborgian philosopher, who had often sounded like Emerson. In a lecture of 1849, James had proclaimed that "society affords no succor to the divine life in man,"—"there exists no tie either natural or social, as society is now constituted, which does not tend to slavery, which does not cheat man's soul of its fair proportions." But he had rejected Emersonian individualism as an end in itself. Existing society, he felt, should be replaced by a communal order based on love—what he called the reign of "divine-natural humanity."⁸ In this aspiration, James was in complete agreement with "fraternity" transcendentalists like Parker and Conway. In the Fourth of July oration he gave in Newport in 1861, James described the war as a great step in the progress of mankind toward "divine-natural humanity." The American idea of liberty, for which he believed the North was fighting, was not simply liberty under a constitution, it was that transcendental liberty "which is identical with the God-made constitution of the human mind itself, and which consists in the inalienable rights of every man to believe according to the unbridled inspiration of his own heart, and to act according to the unperturbed dictates of his own understanding."⁹

Unlike Whitman, and more emphatically than Emerson, however, James made his national fulfillment dependent upon a conscious repudiation of slavery. Without this change of heart, there was no value in patriotic or Unionist fervor. He spoke for the abolitionists in considering it essential that the war be turned into an antislavery crusade, that it be fought for universal and religious rather than national and political concerns. With such a righteous aim, American society would, in James' Swedenborgian terms, pass "from appearance to reality, from passing shadow to deathless substance." For it was "the hour of our endless rise into all

terms with her emotions. Miss Wormeley, the daughter of an American-born admiral in the British Navy, was living at the beginning of the war in the fashionable society of Newport. A highly cultivated woman with an advanced taste in literature—she would be notable in the postwar period as a translator of nineteenth century French classics—she served during the war as a nurse on a hospital ship of the United States Sanitary Commission, which operated during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. Here, as in all Sanitary Commission work, the goal was cool, impersonal efficiency. As Miss Wormeley wrote in one of her letters: ". . . we are here with health, strength, and *head*. To think or speak of the things we see would be fatal. No one must come here who cannot put away all feelings. Do all you can and be a machine—that's the way to act; the only way."²⁶ Clara Barton would have found it neither possible nor desirable to act like a machine; but under the usual confused and bloody circumstances, it was easy to find a pragmatic justification for coolness of heart and head.

One wonders, however, about the effect of such self-control on the conventions of sensibility. The war taught De Forest to have less sympathy with the poor; it gave Holmes a contempt for the common life; it taught Katherine Wormeley to act and think like a machine. These attitudes seemed more useful in most war situations than the somewhat sentimental humanitarianism of Ingersoll or Louisa May Alcott. A process of natural selection was occurring which was giving more relevance to impersonal efficiency than to pity or compassion. At the same time, since there were clear limitations to what could actually be accomplished for the relief of the wounded and dying, a stoical and fatalistic sense of the inevitability of large-scale suffering was also being inculcated. Implicit in both developments was a challenge to those antebellum humanitarians who believed that sympathy was the noblest of emotions and that all suffering for which human beings could be held responsible was unacceptable and called for immediate relief.

III

The most celebrated encounter with the suffering of the war was that of Walt Whitman. Like Clara Barton, Whitman was a

believer in the practical power of compassion; but his case was more complex. With the role of compassionate friend of the wounded and dying, he tried to combine the role of a flaming patriot. The difficulties—both personal and aesthetic—which he encountered provide the most dramatic illustration of how the ante-bellum sensibility confronted the horrors of the Civil War.

During the first year and one-half of the war, Whitman remained in Brooklyn, following his usual occupations as poet, journalist, and *flâneur* of the New York streets, although his routine now included an occasional visit to one of the local hospitals which were filling up with sick and wounded soldiers. But in December 1862, after being notified that his brother George had been wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg, Whitman headed for the front lines. Arriving in the vicinity of Falmouth, Virginia, the author of "Beat! Beat! Drums!" first encountered the reality of war in the form of an immense heap of amputated arms and legs. Although George's wound turned out to be so slight that he was already back on active duty, Walt hung around for eight or nine days, both fascinated and appalled by the sights and sounds of an army in the field. He spent most of his time touring the field hospitals and talking to the wounded, and when he left Falmouth for Washington on December 28, 1862, he was placed in charge of a trainload of wounded men. In Washington, he managed to get a part-time job in the office of the Army paymaster, but his real reason for remaining in the capital was to follow his new vocation of sympathetic visitor to the sick and wounded.²⁷

During the next three years, Whitman, according to his own accounting, made six hundred visits to the hospitals, comforting between eighty and one hundred thousand dying or convalescing soldiers. Besides cheering talk, he provided cool drinks, fruit, preserves, tobacco, articles of clothing, small sums of money, and wrote letters for the patients. Whitman's benevolent activities are usually explained either as a manifestation of saintliness or as an outlet for homosexuality.²⁸ Both of these explanations lose sight of the fact that Whitman was, before everything else, a poet. Moreover, he was the kind of poet who has to "live" his poetry before he can write it. He was capable, therefore, of adopting a way of living to test a voice or personality he hoped to express in

verse. Earlier in his career, he had suddenly doffed his middle-class apparel and appeared as a New York rowdy, because this was his way of accepting the fierce beauty that lay behind the ugliness of the New York streets. Now he sought a *persona* which would give him access to the deepest emotions of the war.

As a role player, Whitman was acutely conscious of his appearance when he entered the hospitals. "I fancy the reason I am able to do some good in the hospitals, . . ." he wrote in a letter of 1863, "is that I am so large and well—indeed like a great wild buffalo, with much hair—many of the soldiers are from the west, and far north—and they take to a man that has not the bleached shiny & shaved cut of the cities and the east."²⁹ As a living symbol, therefore, he could represent to the boys the America that was temporarily in hiding, the buoyant and healthy place of *Leaves of Grass*. His chief literary motive in entering the hospitals, however, was not to embody the poetry he had already written, but to lay a groundwork for poetry that was to come. By being "the wound dresser," he could represent the humanity and comradeship which he hoped the war would inspire.

Being a wound dresser also put him in a position to be a witness to the most intense drama the war had to offer. He made this clear in March 1863, when he wrote candidly to two friends about why he spent so much time with the wounded: "these thousands, and tens and twenties of thousands of American young men, badly wounded, all sorts of wounds, operated on, pallid with diarrhea, languishing, dying with fever, pneumonia, &c open a new world somehow to me, giving closer insights, new things, exploring deeper mines than any yet, showing our humanity, (I sometimes put myself in fancy in the cot, with typhoid, or under the knife), tried by terrible fearfulest tests, probed deepest, the living soul's, the body's tragedies, bursting the petty bonds of art. To these, what are your dramas and poems, even the oldest and tearfulest?"³⁰ Other comments reveal the same enjoyment of an elemental experience. As a poet thirsting for authentic tragedy, Whitman was admittedly "fascinated" by the suffering in the hospitals and proud that he was able "to feel the reality" of the war "more than some" because he was "in the midst of its saddest results so much." As he summed it up after the war: "Those three years I consider the

greatest privilege and satisfaction"; for despite the agony, they had "brought out . . . undream'd of depths of emotion," and given him his "most fervent views of the true *ensemble* and extent of the States."³¹

As he systematically probed the symbolic possibilities of the hospital experience, Whitman concluded that the hospital was an adequate symbol of the war itself and thus the best vantage point from which to capture the essence of the war. As he wrote to his brother in February 1863: "America seems to me now, though only in her youth, but brought *already here*, feeble, bandaged and bloody *in hospital*." When in November he proposed a war book to publisher James Redpath, he was conscious of exploiting his experiences. "It should be got out *immediately*," he wrote, ". . . an edition, elegantly bound, might be pushed off for books for presents &c for the holidays. . . . It would be very appropriate. I think it a book that would please women. I should expect it to be very popular with the trade." One almost has the impression of Whitman proposing a sentimental gift book on the prewar model to be fabricated somehow out of gangrene and diarrhea, although of course he made it clear that his work would contain a strong democratic message.³²

With all his ambitions, however, Whitman was unable, then or later, to make significant literary use of his experiences with the wounded. It is true that some of his journal entries of the time, probably only slightly altered, with a few additional paragraphs on the war, were to find their way into *Specimen Days*, published in 1882 and 1883; but, as he confessed in that work, "The real war will never get in the books."³³ His proposed book of prose exclusively about the war was never written, and his poetry deals only in a marginal way with his hospital experiences. Yet his very failure to represent in his art what he considered the most profound experience of his life may provide the key to his importance as a witness of the Civil War.

As for "the real war," it was a horrible thing, and Whitman knew it. He remembered it as "the seething hell and the black infernal background of countless minor scenes and interiors."³⁴ These minor scenes of hell often caused his ebullient optimism to fail. As he wrote his mother on one occasion in 1863: "One's

heart grows sick of war after all, when you see what it really is—every once in a while I feel so horrified & disgusted—it seems to me like a great slaughter-house & the men mutually butchering each other . . .”; and again the following year: “I sometimes think over the sights I myself have seen, the arrival of the wounded after a battle, & scenes on the field too, & I can hardly believe my own recollection—what an awful thing war is—Mother, it seems not men but a lot of devils & butchers butchering each other.” In his journal for May 12, 1863, Whitman described the field after Chancellorsville as “butchers’ shambles” and recorded “the groans and screams—the odor of blood” in what he termed “that slaughterhouse.” It was well, he continued, that mothers and sisters “cannot conceive, and never conceiv’d these things.” The sickening scenes of pain and mutilation which were then described presumably would not have been included in the book he was planning for the feminine market.³⁵

However intense these periodic expressions of the horror of the war may have been, they did not shape Whitman’s view of the war in general, for they alternate in his letters and memorandums with expressions of a strident patriotism which flinches before no sacrifice for the national honor. One letter of 1863, for example, conveyed his fear that if the South were successful, the United States would become a third-rate power at the mercy of England and France; and Whitman would see the nation “spend her last drop of blood, and last dollar, rather than submit to such humiliation.”³⁶ These contradictory reactions can be seen as the conflict between the democratic imperialist, who identifies the future of the world with American nationalism, and the democratic humanitarian, who feels acutely the suffering and death of ordinary men and finds it hard to consent to organized “butchery.”

In the war poetry, Whitman played up his exuberant democratic nationalism, deliberately suppressing the other side—his real sense of the war as meaningless suffering, a nightmare of pain and terror. The manuscript version of the poem which was to appear in *Drum Taps* as “The Veteran’s Vision” and in later editions of *Leaves of Grass* as “The Artilleryman’s Vision” contains vivid descriptions of the carnage: “Some of the dead, how soon they turn black in the face and swollen”—“there is no hell

more damned than this hell of war." The published version, however, leaves out everything of this nature, conveying the excitement and enthusiasm of battle without its attendant horrors.³⁷ In only one poem, "The Wound Dresser," does Whitman dwell on physical suffering and mutilation, but this poem is largely descriptive, giving no hint of emotions other than gentle compassion; there is none of the shock and disgust that he revealed privately.

Why did Whitman distort his own sense of the war? Why did he fail to convey adequately in his published works "the real war" that he knew well? It is possible that raw descriptions of the hospital life and battlefield carnage were too jarring and sensational to be suitable material for poetry. Yet Whitman could have expressed his sense of meaningless butchery in some more subtle way had he chosen to do so. (One thinks of Stephen Crane's bitterly ironic war poems, which in form owed a great deal to Whitman.) His decision to suppress and censor some of his reactions may have been based in part on his understanding of what the sensibilities of the time would stand. He could write poignantly of the death of individual soldiers in poems like "Come Up From the Fields Father" and "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," because here he did not have to depart excessively from the conventional idea of death as expressed in the "graveyard poetry" or sentimental fiction of the period. In these cases there was someone to mourn, and the loving memory of the living made death more palatable. Yet Whitman was not a hack writer who toadied to the conventions of his time—his understanding of sexuality had led to frank and vivid poems that shocked his contemporaries—and he knew in a profound way that individual soldiers were not usually mourned on the spot, as in "Vigil Strange." He could give no formal expression to his sense of the war as an anonymous "slaughterhouse," not only because his readers could not assimilate such an insight, but because, ultimately, he could not accept it himself. As a believer in progress, the natural goodness of man in a democratic society, and the beneficence of the universe, Whitman had no place in his world-view for organized "butchery."

Living day after day with so much death, Whitman soon found

it difficult to react properly and even began to fear that he was growing callous. After "so much horrors . . . such suffering and mutilations," the death of individuals seemed to have little effect on him. His apparent callousness, he managed to explain, was most likely a product of his sensitivity to suffering, because death was often "so welcome & such a relief."³⁸

It was this sense of death as a merciful release that led to the final resolution of Whitman's conflict. By the end of the war, he had, by a pantheistic glorification of death, persuaded himself that the horrors were unreal, that there was a substantial beauty and peace beneath the appearance of ugliness and butchery. In his late war poems, he emphasized increasingly that death was a return to the Oversoul, and mass death, the entrance to collective immortality.³⁹ As he turned away from the particulars of death to the general and abstract, he crippled his ability to express immediate impressions of the war, but his struggle led him to an intensity of expression culminating in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," a work which gains much of its power from its hard-won vision of the reconciliation of man and nature through death.

Philosophically, however, simple pantheism was not sufficient to satisfy Whitman. The war experience transformed and complicated his theory of the universe. The author of "Song of Myself" (1855) might have been described either as a pantheist or as an idealist of the traditional kind, believing that matter was the expression or incarnation of an unchanging spiritual reality, but the author of "Chanting the Square Deific" (1865) wrote in Hegelian terms of a "general soul" which reveals itself through the struggle of opposites. Severe judgments on humanity, symbolized by the God of wrath, and evil itself, represented by Satan, are as much a part of the progressive divine plan as the compassionate Christ figure. "Chanting the Square Deific" is Whitman's final word on the Civil War; all the contradictions which the war had laid bare—the love and the hate, the butchery and the heroism, the cruelty and compassion—could be understood as part of a spiritual dialectic.⁴⁰

Whitman's spiritual struggle reveals in a unique and personal way the challenge that was presented by the suffering of the war

to the American mind and sensibility. His solution took an unusual form; but his Hegelianism, in the final analysis, represented one avenue of consent to the pain and death of the moment on the theory that it contributed to a cosmic whole—another was the more conventional Divine Providence of the abolitionists. Whitman, one can even say, was indirectly sanctioning the tough-mindedness of patrician officers like Holmes and De Forest, who as good soldiers had played their role in the cosmic drama. But the great readiness of some to consent to the horrors of war would have been distasteful to the compassionate Whitman. In his case, acquiescence had been purchased at a cost which a Norton, a Holmes, or a De Forest would never have understood.

*The Sanitary Elite:**The Organized Response to Suffering*

FOR A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE, THE GORY BATTLE ACCOUNTS and long casualty lists of 1862 led to no profound speculation on the meaning of suffering but simply to a strong desire to bring relief and comfort to the wounded. Already at hand as an apparent outlet for this flood of sympathy was the United States Sanitary Commission, the largest, most powerful, and most highly organized philanthropic activity that had ever been seen in America.

The commission had come into being in the early months of the conflict as an outgrowth of the Women's Central Association of Relief for the Sick and Wounded of the Army, founded in New York City in April 1861. Not knowing exactly how to proceed, the women of the Central Association had turned for advice to a group of prominent men, who in turn had decided that nothing could be accomplished without official approval and a satisfactory working relationship with the military authorities. In May, a delegation was sent to Washington to request recognition not only for a semiofficial relief organization but for a voluntary group with much more comprehensive functions—a "Commission of Inquiry and Advice in respect of the Sanitary Interests of the United States Forces." A month later, President Lincoln approved the scheme, and the commission undertook a variety of activities

which, in addition to coordination of relief, included sanitary inspection of camps; provision for nurses, hospitals, and ambulance service—to supplement the Regular Army effort along these lines; and the gathering of vital statistics and other scientific data. Before the spring of 1862, however, the commission was hampered in its operations by the resistance of the Army Medical Bureau, which distrusted interlopers in its domain. In order to gain what it considered its proper authority, the commission was forced to go into politics. In April, it pushed through Congress a reorganization of the Medical Bureau and wrested from the War Department the appointment of a man favorable to the commission as Surgeon General of the Army.¹

From this time to the end of the war, the commission's position was secure, and it won increasing public favor. Eventually its work became part of the Northern Civil War legend—a particularly valuable part because it seemed to show that amidst all the brutality of war the North had exhibited a humane and philanthropic spirit.

Basing their accounts on the undeniable fact that the commission did some excellent work, historians have contributed to this legend by describing the whole Sanitary effort as a kindly beacon, standing out against the dark background of war. An inquiry into the philosophy and attitudes of the Sanitary leadership, however, suggests that this view will have to be modified. The commission did provide an outlet for Northern benevolence—especially the longing of Northern women to relieve the suffering of the soldiers; but the motives of the elite that ruled the organization were more complicated than those of women who rolled bandages and packaged medicine.

It is significant, first of all, that the commission on the whole was staffed not by a cross section of the American public but by members of the highest social class. As a volume on the philanthropy of the war noted in 1864: “. . . men brought up in luxury, with all the advantages of high and generous culture and foreign travel, but who, ennuyed by life without an object, had been almost ready to regard existence as a burden, have found in the work of alleviating the sufferings of the soldier their true vocation, and have given it their best energies. . . .”² An account

option in the case. The popular affections and sympathies will force themselves into the administration of the army and other affairs. . . ."²¹ The problem was "how shall this rising tide of popular sympathy, expressed in the form of sanitary supplies, and offers of personal service and advice, be rendered least hurtful to the army system . . . ?" This was where the Sanitary Commission came in. It conceived of itself less as a benevolent enterprise than as a barrier between the irresponsible benevolence of the people and the army. The greatest danger came not from the possibility that the soldiers would suffer from lack of care and supplies, but, as Bellows put it on another occasion, from the probable "rush of philanthropic men and women to the hospitals and to the field."²² The desire of people at home to bring comfort and relief to the soldiers was regarded by the conservatives on the commission in much the way they had regarded the reform impulse before the war. If not limited and controlled, it would be a danger to established institutions. In this case, the institution to be protected was the army, and behind it, the state which it was defending.

Bellows went on to justify the commission's rule that all supplies, not only medicines, had to be distributed by medical personnel, that no "outside parties" were to be allowed to give direct comfort to the soldiers. "The discipline of the hospitals, with the authority of the officers, medical and otherwise, was to be carefully upheld."²³ According to the doctrines of the commission, allowing "good Samaritans" the freedom of the hospitals would undermine military rule. If the commission had had its way, Walt Whitman would never have been allowed among the wounded.

In its effort to discourage "good Samaritanism" in all its forms, the commission adopted the much criticized policy of using paid agents rather than volunteers for its relief work. This decision was based on a conviction that the work was "altogether too full of toil, drudgery, and repulsive reality, to be upheld by any mere sentimental pity or sympathy for the poor soldier."²⁴ The idea that compassion could accomplish nothing was a profound challenge to prevailing beliefs. Walt Whitman, a volunteer who believed intensely in the power of love and pity, expressed a fairly common opinion when he railed at the Sanitary agents as "hirelings." "As to the Sanitary Commissions & the like," Whitman wrote to his

mother in June 1863, "I am sick of them all & would not accept any of their berths—you ought to see the way the men as they lie helpless in bed turn away their faces from the sight of the Agents, Chaplains &c (*hirelings* as Elias Hicks would call them—they seem to me always a set of foxes & wolves)—they get well paid & are always incompetent & disagreeable—" ²⁵ Whitman, as a thoroughgoing anti-institutionalist, believed that the spontaneous spirit of benevolence could not survive formal organization and the professionalization of service. To him the most important role to be performed by hospital visitors was to convey "the fullest spirit of human sympathy and boundless love"—"the magnetic flood of sympathy and friendship, that does, in its way, more good than all the medicine in the world." ²⁶ This could not be accomplished by a large, impersonal organization staffed by professional workers.

The Sanitary view of volunteerism not only raised the hackles of solitary Samaritans like Walt Whitman, it also led to a bitter controversy with the Christian Commission, another organization which, in addition to performing its primary task of distributing religious tracts, engaged in a limited way in military relief. The Christian Commission, with its evangelical religious basis, placed a premium on the devotion, piety, and zeal of its volunteer workers. Their system, "the Christians" proudly proclaimed, was not one which depended on paid agents, but the "system adopted eighteen hundred years ago by our Lord." Since their delegates were "at work in the apostolic spirit, for the apostolic pay," they shared Whitman's contempt for the Sanitary "hirelings" and made much of the fact that their delegates gave supplies, whenever possible, directly to the men in the hospitals and not, like the Sanitary, only to the doctors to distribute as they saw fit. They were also like Whitman in thinking of their role as primarily a spiritual one which demanded personal contact. They sought to "enhance the value of both gifts and services by kind words to the soldier as a *man*, not a machine." ²⁷ The Sanitary Commissioners were contemptuous of the Christians because of their "sentimentality" and amateurish lack of emphasis on rules, systems, or organization. Stillé spoke for all of them when he charged that the Christians went about their work with absolutely no regard for "ideas of

fitness, practical usefulness, efficiency, or of anything else essential to the success of the object in view."²⁸

What the Sanitary Commission had demonstrated in employing paid agents was that it put greater trust in the professional than in the zealous volunteer. The same point was made by Olmsted when he argued that the commissioners had a right to dictate to the local branches because of their expert knowledge of army regulations and sanitary science, and by Bellows when he contended that only a few men could understand the commission's "scientific basis" and its "profound regard for politico-economic principles . . . on which a humane work must proceed."²⁹ This belief in the need for an expert to act as intermediary between irrational popular benevolence and the suffering to be relieved was the great contribution of the Sanitary Commission to American philanthropic ideas. But their work was important in a broader sense; for they were contributing to a general assault on the long-standing American belief in volunteerism. Sanitary professionalism paralleled the gradual application of Regular Army methods of discipline to the volunteer regiments—a reform for which the commissioners themselves actively lobbied.³⁰

At times, the commissioners were not content with their role as expert administrators of a philanthropic empire, but saw themselves as bidding for even greater power and responsibility. In September 1861, Bellows described the role of the commission in a revealing letter. The commissioners, he wrote, have "acted not merely as a Board of military health, but as a kind of Cabinet & Council of War—boldly seizing anomalous power, advising the Government, & seeking to influence the men, military and otherwise who command the position."³¹ This comment explains the interest of the commission in general questions of military organization and suggests ambitions far beyond their authorized responsibilities.

When he was particularly upset by the conduct of the war, Bellows even thought in terms of a nonpolitical group, very much like the commission, seizing national power from the politicians. In a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, written in the dark days after Bull Run, he described the "melancholy decay of leadership—the lack of competent statesmen and officers—the paucity of ad-

III

The divine right theory of loyalty was more than the key to a conservative theory of the state; it was also the basis of a generalized "doctrine of institutions," such as the one proposed by Bellows before the war. This much was clear from Bushnell's claim that "loyalty" meant not only unqualified allegiance to the federal government but to all established institutions, especially the church and the family. The war gave impetus and direction to this kind of thinking and made it fashionable to condemn anti-institutional individualism in all its forms. The editors of *Harper's*, for example, now blasted away continually at the anti-institutional "doctrinaires." In January 1862, the inconsistency of the Garrisonian abolitionists, with their "charming doctrine of the power of just ideas to make their own way," was cited in the light of abolitionist support of the war with its inevitable "armies, navies, and fortresses." The military experience, it was claimed, brought "discipline," and discipline suggested an acceptance of "government as a divine institution under all its forms, domestic, civil and religious."³⁸

A year later, in January 1863, *Harper's* editorialized on "Institutions and Men" and used the war as an occasion to defend institutions against "the individualism, the idealism, emotionalism, and revolutions that are sometimes arrayed against them." The time was deemed ripe for denying categorically the Emersonian notion that the isolated man has an importance apart from his participation in the organic life of the community, and much was made of the fact that "individuals are almost powerless unless they can come together under the auspices of institutions." The article concluded with the assertion that "the whole history of individualism, whether of the emotional or mystical school, strengthens our faith in institutions, and makes us less and less inclined to think ideas, feeling or impulses, a sufficient guide to a community." The meaning of the Civil War was summed up in the description of the Northerners as "loyal champions of institutions."³⁹

If the wartime "loyalty" of 1863 and 1864 implied a vindica-

tion of "the doctrine of institutions," where did this leave Walt Whitman and his belief that the patriotic feeling of the American people was an anti-institutional force and a fulfillment rather than a repudiation of the prewar faith in the ability of "ideas, feeling or impulses" to guide the community? As the war dragged on, Whitman grew increasingly uneasy. He became uncertain about the value of mere "patriotism" and deeply concerned about the "discipline" which seemed to be teaching subordination to hierarchical organizations to an American citizenry which had once believed so strongly in a full measure of freedom and equality. By 1863, in fact, Whitman was fully aware that the schooling of the nation in military discipline was one result of the conflict that would never fit into his view of the war as a saturnalia of democracy. He made this clear when he tried to interest a publisher in a book of sketches which would promulgate the idea that "our national military system needs shifting, revolutionizing & made ready to tally with democracy, the people—The officers should almost invariably rise from the ranks—there is an absolute want of democratic spirit in the present system & officers—it is the feudal spirit exclusively—nearly the entire capacity, keenness & courage of our army are in the ranks."⁴⁰ It was no more appropriate for the democratic army to be led by an officer caste than for the democratic electorate to be managed by a class of professional politicians. For Whitman, a citizen army should be held together by a spirit of comradeship, not by subordination and discipline.

Comradeship became for Whitman not only the core spirit of the democratic army, but the ideal basis of society itself. He came to feel that conventional patriotic feeling and Unionism expressed in political terms were not profound and spiritual enough to be the true foundations of democracy. Showing that he may have been aware of some of the uses to which patriotism and Unionism were being put, Whitman asserted, in an 1864 draft introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, that American democracy would have to undergo many trials and suffer many failures before it "put into practice the idea of the sovereignty, license, sacredness of the individual." For Whitman, the organic community was desirable, but it had to come as the product of an inward

urge, not an external force. It could only be "the idea of Love" that "fuses and combines the whole."⁴¹ His war poem, "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice," which some critics have read as a sublimation of homosexuality,⁴² contended that male comradeship, "the love of lovers" shall "solve the problems of freedom yet," and that real union can be achieved only by strengthening the bonds of "affection." If this was the poem of a man gaining release from a forbidden impulse by transmuting it and universalizing it, it can also be seen as a quixotic answer to Whitman's intellectual problem—the still unanswered question of how to give a genuine sense of community to an individualistic, egalitarian democracy. If the members of such a society were to avoid external authority and at the same time be held together by something more cohesive than self-interest, there would presumably have to be some awakening of the social instincts, some growth of "love" or "comradeship."

Whatever general value Whitman's reflections may have, they tell us little about the impact of the war. Although he was uncomfortable in the "loyal" North of 1863 and 1864, he never fully faced up to the fact that the war was not going his way. He resorted to a belief that the comradeship of the soldiers was a more fundamental experience than the undemocratic discipline of armies and, according to his habit, substituted an ideal America for the one that was forming under his gaze.

The conservative idea of American nationality and patriotism did not originate in the Civil War. In a sense, Hamilton defended it in his debate with Jefferson by arguing that America should be judged by the traditional standards of national power, not as the embodiment of an Enlightenment theory of government. A sound financial system, manufacturing, and national defense were deemed more important than the protection of liberties or the practice of democracy. In a later period, men like Rufus Choate and Daniel Webster were, when the exigencies of practical politics permitted, conservatives in this sense; but the passage of time permitted them to do what had been denied to Hamilton: They could emphasize an American past and a national tradition, at the expense of the view that America was a promise for the

(New York, 1955), Chapter IV; and Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), Chapter VI.

5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Nature, Lectures, and Addresses*, The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I (Boston and New York, 1903), pp. 102-103, 107.

6. See Stephen F. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia, 1953), *passim*.

7. Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Nature, etc.*, p. 100.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

9. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, pp. 29-33.

10. Emerson, *Nature, etc.*, pp. 349, 353-354.

11. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers" (1844), *Essays, Second Series*, Works, III, 253, 255, 260-261.

12. Theodore Parker, Letter to the Members of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, April 19, 1859, entitled, "Theodore Parker's Experience as a Minister," in John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker* (New York, 1864), II, 454-455.

13. Theodore Parker, "Emerson," *American Scholar* (Boston, 1907), p. 98. This review was originally published in the *Massachusetts Review* (March 1850), under the title, "The Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson."

14. Mary E. Burtis, *Moncure Conway* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1952), pp. 3-12; Moncure Conway, *Autobiography, Memories, and Experiences* (Boston and New York, 1904), I, 91.

15. Burtis, *Conway*, pp. 32-38; Conway, *Autobiography*, I, 192, 127.

16. My interpretation of Garrison and his followers derives largely from Elkins, *Slavery*, Chapter IV, and from John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1963).

17. Wendell Phillips, *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters, First Series*, pp. 98-153, especially pp. 152-153; Phillips' theory of agitation is well described in Irving Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical* (Boston, 1961), and in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), Chapter VI.

18. Phillips, *Speeches, etc., First Series*, pp. 243-244, 318.

19. Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman* (New York, 1955), pp. 73-74, 83-88; Walt Whitman, "The Eighteenth Presidency," in *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts*, ed. Clifton Joseph Furness (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 104.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 62.

25. John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1963), pp. 403-404.

CHAPTER FIVE. THE SPIRIT OF '61

1. *New York Times*, April 15, 1861, *Erie Weekly Gazette*, May 2, 1861, in *Northern Editorials on Secession*, ed. Howard C. Perkins (New York and London, 1942), II, 735, 756.

2. Quoted from an unpublished lecture of Emerson, given soon after Fort Sumter, in James E. Cabot, *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston and New York, 1887), II, 600.

3. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York, 1906-1914), I, 13.

4. See Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York, 1946), pp. 161-165.

5. *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts*, ed. Clifton Joseph Furness (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 57.

6. Walt Whitman, "Long, Too Long, O Land," *Drum Taps* (New York, 1865), p. 45.

7. "Rise Oh Days From Your Fathomless Depths," *Drum Taps*, pp. 35-37.

8. F. O. Matthiessen, *The James Family* (New York, 1947), pp. 12-13, 50, 55.

9. Henry James, Sr., *The Social Significance of Our Institutions, an Oration Delivered at Newport, R.I., July 4, 1861* (Boston, 1861), p. 27.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

11. Letter of Norton to A. H. Clough, May 27, 1861, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe (Boston and New York, 1913), I, 234.

12. Charles Eliot Norton, *The Soldier of the Good Cause* (Boston, 1861), pp. 5-6, 12-13. Pamphlet in the Harvard University Library.

13. Henry W. Bellows, *Duty and Interest Identical in the Present Crisis, Sermon of April 14, 1861* (New York, 1861), p. 16. Sermon in the Harvard University Library.

14. Henry W. Bellows, *The State and the Nation—Sacred to Christian Citizens, Sermon of April 21, 1861* (New York, 1861), pp. 6, 7. Sermon in the Harvard University Library.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

16. *The Works of Orestes Brownson*, ed. Henry F. Brownson (Detroit, 1882-1887), XVII, 121, 139.

15. Quoted in Eva Ingersoll, Introduction to *The Letters of Robert Ingersoll* (New York, 1951), p. 32.

16. Letter of Robert Ingersoll to Ebon Clark Ingersoll, 1862, *Letters of Robert Ingersoll* (New York, 1951), pp. 119-120.

17. Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (New York, 1962), p. 67.

18. Holmes to his mother, Dec. 12, 1862, *Touched with Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, ed. Mark De Wolfe Howe (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), p. 78; Mark De Wolfe Howe, *Justice Holmes: The Shaping Years 1841-1870* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), Chapter III, *passim*.

19. There is a good account of De Forest's literary career in Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York, 1962), pp. 669-742; the war sketches have been published in book form as *A Volunteer's Adventures* (New Haven, 1946).

20. Letter of De Forest to his brother, Nov. 27, 1863, De Forest Papers, Yale University Library.

21. Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*, ed. Bessie Z. Jones (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 30, 50 (originally published in 1863).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

23. Ishbel Ross, *Angel of the Battlefield: The Life of Clara Barton* (New York, 1956), p. 142.

24. Letter of Clara Barton to her sister Fannie, Jan. 9, 1862, quoted in William E. Barton, *The Life of Clara Barton, Founder of the American Red Cross* (New York and Boston, 1922), I, 42.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183; Ross, *Angel of the Battlefield*, p. 33.

26. Katherine Prescott Wormeley, *The Other Side of War* (Boston, 1888), p. 102.

27. Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman* (New York, 1955), pp. 270-287.

28. For a version of the sainthood theory, see Oscar Cargill's introduction to *The Wound Dresser* (New York, 1949); the sublimated homosexuality thesis is ably presented in Roger Asselineau, *The Evolution of Walt Whitman* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 171-174.

29. Walt Whitman to his mother, April 15, 1863, in *Correspondence*, ed. Edwin H. Miller (New York, 1961), I, 89.

30. Walt Whitman to Nathaniel Bloom and John F. S. Gray, March 19, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 213; Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York, 1954), II, 74.

32. *Correspondence*, I, 75, 171-172.
33. *Poetry and Prose*, II, 76.
34. *Loc. cit.*
35. Whitman to his mother, July 7, 1863, and March 22, 1864, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 114, 204; *Poetry and Prose*, II, p. 30.
36. Whitman to Thomas P. Sawyer, April 21, 1863, *Correspondence*, I, p. 92.
37. The manuscript version has been published in *Walt Whitman and the Civil War: A Collection of Original Articles and Manuscripts*, ed. Charles I. Glicksberg (Philadelphia, 1933), pp. 121-123. Drastically altered, it was included in *Drum Taps* (New York, 1865), pp. 55-56.
38. Whitman to his mother, August 23, 1863, *Correspondence*, I, 138.
39. Some examples in *Drum Taps* are "Camps of Green," "Hymn of Dead Soldiers," and "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing, I Heard the Mother of All."
40. An Hegelian interpretation of the Civil War, along the lines suggested by Whitman, was worked out after the Civil War by William T. Harris and Denton J. Snider; see Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York, 1946), pp. 177-184.

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3. *Hospital Transports: A Memoir* (Boston, 1863), Introduction, p. ix.
4. Henry W. Bellows, *The Valley of Decision, a Discourse of Sept. 26, 1861, All Souls Church* (New York, 1861), pp. 22-23.
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6. *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York, 1952), III, 272.
7. Stillé, *Sanitary Commission*, pp. 76-77. On Olmsted see Broadus Mitchell, *Frederick Law Olmsted, A Critic of the Old South* (Baltimore, 1924); *Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903*, ed. F. L. Olmsted and T. Kimball (New York, 1922-1928), 2 vols.

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9. Charles J. Stillé, *A Memoir of Horace Binney, Jr.* (Philadelphia, 1870), p. 9. Pamphlet in the Harvard University Library.

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13. Bellows to Cyrus A. Bartol, April 12, 1861, and Aug. 9, 1861, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

14. Bellows to his sister and brother-in-law, March 7, 1862, and Bellows to Bartol, April 5, 1862, Bellows Papers.

15. Strong, *Diary*, III, 274-275.

16. *Statement of the Object and Methods*, Sanitary Document No. 69, pp. 55-56.

17. *A Report to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Sanitary Commission, December 1861*, U.S. Sanitary Commission Document No. 40 (Washington, 1861), pp. 98-107.

18. Strong, *Diary*, III, pp. 253, 278; *A Record of Certain Resolutions of the Sanitary Commission*, U.S. Sanitary Commission Document No. 21 (n.d., n.p.), p. 5.

19. Stillé, *Sanitary Commission*, p. 246.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

21. Henry W. Bellows, "The Sanitary Commission," *North American Review*, XCVIII (January 1864), p. 179.

22. Henry W. Bellows, *Speech at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, Feb. 24, 1863* (Philadelphia, 1863), p. 20.

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26. "Hospital Visits," reprinted from *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1864, in *The Wound Dresser*, ed. Richard M. Bucke (New York, 1897), pp. 33, 44.

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37. Bushnell, "Divine Right," p. 296.

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40. Walt Whitman, *Correspondence*, ed. Edwin H. Miller (New York, 1961), I, 171.

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5. See *Memorial: RGS* (Cambridge, Mass., 1864), a privately printed volume of tributes to Shaw, which included thirteen poems and a large number of letters and newspaper and magazine reports. Copy in the Harvard University Library.

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9. H. W. Beecher to Mrs. Shaw, Sept. 6, 1863, *ibid.*, p. 152.

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