THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
AND
ITS REFLECTION IN LITERATURE

By
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> « A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half — slave and half — free. » (1)

These words of the 16th President of the United States of America exploded the already deteriorating situation created by the secession movement. In fact there were much more deep-rooted and fundamental causes behind the outbreak of the « Secession War » or the « War of the Rebellion » or the « Civil War » as I prefer to call it here, than putting the whole blame on Abraham Lincoln's opposition to slavery. Lincoln's paramount object was, when he took office, to save the Union and not either « to save or destroy slavery ». (2) No doubt the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation by the President was an act of boldness which gave a high moral tone to the cause of the North and hindered the Confederacy from establishing itself in the South. But Abraham

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(1) — Abraham Lincoln's speech delivered at the Republican Party's National Convention before taking office as a President of the U.S.A. in March 1861 (Quoted from the Oxford Companion History, Oxford, 1966).

(2) — Lincoln, Abraham (1809 — 85) : Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862 (Quoted from 'The Literature of America', Vol. I, McGraw-Hill Book Company 1971, p. 1119.

Lincoln made it clear on many occasions that « Union, not abolition of slavery », was the aim of his government.

The United States of America was at that time like a boiling pot which invenitably had to overflow the edge. The differences between the North and the South were so deep and irreconcilable that any attempt to reach a compromise (3) was futile. The Civil War broke out in April 1861 and ended in April 1865. Abraham Lincoln was the leader of the North which got worldwide support and was also supported by different sections of British society especially some of the working class; whereas almost all the upper classes took the side of the plantation owners in the South. The free industrial and commercial North with all its democratic traditions, inevitably came into conflict with the South, with its large plantations, staple crops and institution of slavery, in which the blacks constituted the main labouring force working under appalling and inhuman conditions. The struggle of the South was considered by its allies abroad as a struggle for freedom and as constituting a legitimate desire for secession from the Union. Many proposals were made to the British Government on different occasions arguing the recognition of the Confederacy established in the South, but the British Government preferred to wait for the outcome of the war before committing itself to the cause of the South.

I think that any student of history would undoubtedly admit that one of the main reasons behind the conflict was an economic one. The Civil War was a struggle between the concept of agrarian democracy and that of industrial and capitalist democracy, and the result of the Northern victory was the triumphant emergence of industrialism and capitalism. The South had developed on agrarian lines; growing cotton and tobacco and entirely dependent on the labour of the blacks. Both North and South wanted to extend and

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(3) — « The underlying causes became more pronounced after the Missouri Compromise (1820) .... Clay, Webster, Calhoun, and others attempted solutions, but after the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas - Nebraska Bill, each side became more radical. » Oxford Companion to American Literature, Oxford University Press, New York 1965, p. 158.

enforce their way of life on the other parts of the country; particularly on the Western part which had not been fully explored then and promised huge wealth. And here, in my opinion, lay the reason behind the conflict and not the existence or freedom of the blacks who had been there since 1619 ! If we argue the case to the contrary, we have to raise the question : why did not the war break out before 1861 ?

The continuous competition and struggle between the North and the South, in their attempt to impose their economic systems on the largest possible area if not the whole of the country, led to bloody clashes among the settlers of those areas such as the incident of 'bleeding Kansas' and the rebellion in 1859 of John Brown who marched from the State of Virginia to free the slaves in the South. Eleven States, which had slaves, joined the movement of secession in the South before the outbreak of the war; the first of these was South Carolina followed by North Carolina ,Georgia, Texas, Lousiana, Missisippi, Albama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida and Virginia, whereas the western part of the latter kept its allegiance to the Union. All these slave holding states formed the Confederacy of the South. The Civil War gave a strong push to industry and helped destroy the agrarian way of life in the Old South. No doubt industrialization brought great material and technical advances for the people all over the United States but it was also to bring many great difficulties in the form of economic depression and other socio-economic conflicts as well as ruthless and powerful men of money. But unfortunately it failed to make blacks equal to the whites though it succeeded in freeing them from the evils of slavery.

No doubt many events took place before the outbreak of the war which paved the way to the war and found their reflection in American literature. The Civil War did not only attempt to free the slaves and consequently usher in far reaching economic changes but it also affected the spiritual and cultural life of the nation. The national feeling became both intensified and strained by the war. Historical writing and oratory reached new heights during those years of great troubles in the middle of the 19th.

century. But a great deal of literature which was not so close to domestic issues remained aloof and the effects of the war were not apparent. Many writers were in a way forced (4) to express their sentiments towards the question of slavery as it became difficult for them to keep silent about this national tragedy. Originally, it was not the comfortable classes, North or South, who showed pity towards the slaves or took an active part in the Abolishionists' movement. The early abolitionists were humble people who took the matter much more seriously than others, inspired by religious and democratic convinctions. But many people, especially the intellectuals became gradually absorbed in the antislavery campaign. Many writers responded to the emotional impact of the Civil War. A great many of the generals wrote memoirs as did numberless plainer soldiers and others who participated in the war. (5) From

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(4) — « For some of our major writers, like Whitman and Melville, the Civil War figures not so much in political terms — though both detested slavery — but as a collective tragedy, the first major event in the history of the nation that he described as tragic. Melville was struck by the sheer terribleness of the war, the way it became impersonal and mechanical, a kind of machine created for devouring the young. Whitman was struck by the vulnerability and innocence of the young soldiers he visited in hospitals, as he was also by the shattering of the American dream that we were a pacific nation unstained by the guilts and crimes of Europe. » The Literature of America, Vol. I, p. 1102.

— Ralph Waldo **Emerson** (1803 - 1882) also wrote some poems about the Civil War such as « The Death of Slavery », and « Beston Hymn ».

— William Cullen **Bryant** (1794 - 1878) also wrote few poems about slavery among them are : « Not Yet », and « Our Country's Call ».

— Henry David **Thoreau** (1817 - 1863) also contributed to the antislavery campaign, not withstanding his extreme individualism, he became active during the 1850's in the crusade against slavery.

— James Russell **Lowell** (1819 — 1891) also tackled this theme in his poems « The Biglow Papers, Second Series »; among them were « The Washers of the Shroud », and « Memoriae Positum »; written about his friend Robert G. shaw who fell in the fighting.

(5) — Frederick **Douglass** (1817 ? — 1895) :

« Narrative of the Life of Frederick Doglass, an American Slave » 1845.

« Life and Times of Frederick Doglass », 1892.

the outbreak of the hostilities the war began to generate a great many varieties of literature. The war continued to be a favourite theme for poets, (6) though it became later on more a subject for fiction. (7)

The Condition of American Literature before the Civil War

The declaration of Independence of the United States on July 4th. 1776 was followed by a cultural and literary independence from Europe during the succeeding century. The works of Thomas Paine (1737 - 1809) and those of Benjamine Franklin (1706 - 1790) showed the path that American literature had chosen in selecting themes and topics from American life and not from abroad. The American War of Independence occupied a big space in the literary life of the nation; the Indians also became an attractive subject. Philip Frenau (1752 - 1832) was an outstanding poet of the War of Independence in whose poem « The Indian Burying Ground »,

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William Tecumseh **Sherman** (1820 — 1891) :
« Memoirs », II vols. 1875.

Ulysser S. **Grant** (1822 — 1885) : « Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant », 1885.

Mary Boykin **Chestnut** (1823 ? — 1886) : was considered the diarist of the Confederacy. She wrote :
« A Diary from Dixie », 1904, 1949.

John William **De Forest** (1826 — 1906) :
— « The Battle of Cedar Greek » (letters).
— « Letters Written from Port Hudson ».
— « A Volunteer's Adventurer » (letters).
— « Miss Ravenal's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty », 1867 (novel).

(6) — « In the beginning poetry ranged from popular songs such as 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' and 'Tramp, Tramp, Tramp' of the Union and 'Maryland, My Maryland' of the Confederacy to serious works like H.H. Brownell's 'Lyrics of a Day' (1864) and 'War Lyrics' (1866). Oxford Companion to English Literature, p. 159.

(7) — « Apparantly, it was hard to use the experience of fratricide for imaginative literary purposes immediately after men had lived through it, and by far the best writing about the Civil War in the years directly following it is not fictional in character. »
The Literature of America, Vol. I, p. 1102.

1788, (8) we find no trace of racial hatred and prejudice similar to what had been written against the blacks for the past three centuries and has been written, in fact, down to our present day. The gradual deepening of the sense of Independence in the United States had tremendously helped the flowering of American literature and its moving away from the puritan past.

The conditions in the North of the United States were conducive to the emergence of such philosophers and writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864) and Henry Thoreau (1817 - 1862), whereas the slave holdering States in the South depended heavily on England's literary heritage without succeeding in bringing forth any change or innovation in thought or method. Therefore national consciousness and literary independence and innovation in the North succeeded in creating a new American identity long before the South.

The outbreak of the Civil War did not come out of the blue, in so far as the antislavery campaign is concerned, but was preceeded by attempts on the part of the abolitionists that go back to 1831 when they established a magazine called « The Liberator ». Antislavery ideas entered literature during the decade succeeding the above mentioned date as was shown in Thoreau's articles and attitudes, (9) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poems « Poems on Slavery », 1842; and Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel « Uncle Tom's Cabin », 1852. On the other hand we do not find in the literature of the South any mention of the evils of slavery; but on the contrary we come across attempts to prolong and strengthen its hold on the blacks. This, I think, leads us to the conclusion that literature in the United States had witnessed a deep and profound split; the

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(8) — The full text of the poem is attached at the end (from The Literature of America, p. 313).

(9) — « He spoke eloquently at an Abolitionist convenion in 1854. When John Brown, the antislavery leader, organized an armed uprising at Harpers Ferry in 1859, Thoreau spoke on his behalf. After Brown's death, the Concord selectmen refused to approve a service for him; Thoreau went to the town hall and rang the bell himself. »
Ibid., p. 739.

literature of the North and that of the South became almost estranged from each other. All these factors contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War.

The Condition of American Literature in the South.

The 1830's are considered the beginning of literature of the plantation South as an expression of far reaching changes in the economy of this part of the United States. The new era ushered in by the Industrial Revolution helped to open big markets in England and the North for the products of the South; and accordingly gave fresh momentum to the expansion and development of the plantation economy. It also encouraged the South to expand its plantation system to the South-western parts of the United States and ultimately helped to revive the declining institution of slavery there. All these changes survived only for three decades — for they came to an end with the outbreak of the Civil War.

No doubt the literature of this society lacked time to reach fruition. It failed to develop beyond the stage of critical discussion. In addition to that the writers of the South faced many obstacles and hampering influences; the most outstanding of all was the absence of literary centres due to the absence of cities in the sense known to the North. The kind of plantation economy that was dominant in the South consitituted an obstacle in the way of establishing cities. No doubt such cities would have produced publishing houses, libraries, magazines; all of which are essential to the development of literature in any country. Thus the colonial nature of the Southern economy added a psychological handicap to other ones imposed on the writers and intellectuals of the South; keeping in mind the fact that no section of the United States had been able to develop enough self — confidence before 1820 to free itself from intellectual and literary dependence on foreign countries and especially Britain.

But these conditions of dependence continued longer in the South than in other parts of the United States. Furthermore, the nature of the plantation economy of the South helped to exclude a very big number of people, including the slaves, from the ranks

of potential readers of books and magazines. To this we can add the meager education offered even to the white population in the South kept a large number of them illiterate. The aristocracy of the South, which was highly cultivated, preferred the English classics and had an archaic taste; meanwhile withholding its encouragement to beginners and uncertain writers.

The literature of the South is characterized in general by a rigidly set goal, that of defending slavery, or the plantation society, against any outside attack. Almost all writers were ardent defenders of slavery — or the cause of the confederacy during the Civil War as was the case in Henry Timrod's poetry — and no important one among them rebelled against this rigid code.

Poetry in the Union and the Confederacy During the Civil War.

The war left deeper marks on American poetry than did the War of Independence. The social and economic differences between the North and the South had also found their way into the poetry of the period. The democracy and individual freedom that existed in the North had contributed to creating a poetry representative of all sections of society as well as making it one of individualistic character. The poets of the South, many of whom were descendants of the landed aristocracy, considered poetry only as an amusing skill for their leisure time; a fact which ultimately led to imposing restrictions on the form and subject matter of their poetry. In addition, they excluded the problem of slavery from poetry.

The poets of the North can be divided into two groups : one is the Abolishionists which is small in number and more radical in attitude. It includes such writers as John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). The second group, which is bigger in number, includes moderate personalities whose main concern was to reestablish and safeguard the Union. This group considered Lincoln's Proclamation on the 1st. of January 1863 concerning the abolishing of slavery as the end of the road and a fullfilment, despite the fact that the Proclamation did not change many of the conditions under which the slaves lived. The vagueness involved in the attitude of these writers towards the problem of slavery ultimately damaged the antislavery

cause during the period of Reconstruction that succeeded the end of the Civil War. Nevertheless, this attitude was a reflection of a popular sentiment as many Northners had gone to the war primarily to save the Union and defeat the successionists rather than to free the slaves. Even the poets of the South held up the banner of freedom which meant to them the freedom of each State to decide for itself without the mandate of the others.

The poetry of the South depended mainly on romantic and sentimental characterization reflecting the life of the Southeners and its closeness to nature. It also echoed the influence of the English romantics during the early 19th — century. Romanticism and sentimentalism unmistakably appealed to their ideas of a heroic past with its decaying code of chivalry.

As for the North, the very way of life of the Northners was different from the South; hence their achievements were reached without any direct exploitation or dependence on the labour of the slaves. This difference in the way of life and world outlook between the North and the South made literary experssion in the former less affected by romantic trends; whereas we find the influence of religion is stronger. The outstanding characteristics of poetry of both the South and the North led ultimately to a fundamental difference in choosing literary characters. In the poetry of the South we find characters representative of the upper classes; whereas religion plays a minor part giving way to a kind of nostalgia towards the old past (Romans and Crusaders) and showing a clear identification with the history of Europe. At the same time nature plays an important role in the poetry of the South especially in elegiac poems that mourn the death of a great leader. The literary technique applied in such poems is a simple one aiming at a comparison between the deceased leader and heroes from the Crusades and other previous ages. The poetry that dealt with the events of war was mainly restricted to praising military leaders; a fact which led to widening the gap between poetry and those events. And at the same time poetry was endeavouring to reflect the hope and faith of the Southeners in a quick victory, their forces were suffering defeat on the battle field.

The realistic depiction of the Civil War and its events in the poetry of the North is due to the nature of the prevailing socio-economic system. Three writers (10) from the North expressed their grief in three poems about the fate of the warship « Cumberland » sunk by the South. The characters in the war poems written by Northern writers belong to diverse social sections of society, but most of them were officers and soldiers who had executed heroic deeds. The North did not have prominent military leaders at the outbreak of the Civil War, because those who were in the army were Southerners and left for their States in the South. And when the war produced such military leaders as William T. Sherman (1820 - 1891) and Ulysses S. Grant, Admiral Farragut and General Sheridan who determined the outcome of the war, we find many poems written in their praise. Poets from the South also praised their military leaders despite the latter's defeat on the battle field, such as those poems written on General Lee.

The poetry of the North expressed, immediately after the end of the Civil War, a desire for reconciliation motivated and inspired by deeply rooted religious convictions. But the poetry of the South did not express any such desire until thirty years after the war. No doubt the very contradictory nature of the economic and social development in the North and the South played an important role in determining the form and content of poetry in both. Individualism was the outstanding feature of poetry in the North, whereas the poetry of the South depended heavily on old and classical poetical conventions.

Poets from the North

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807 - 1892) was one of the leading abolitionists and a Quaker. He is remembered for three kinds of poetry : his antislavery poems, his New England ballads and idyls,

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(10) — Boker, H. George : On Board the Cumberland.
(Longfellow, H. Wadsworth : The Cumberland (the full text of this poem is attached at the end).
Melville, Herman : The Cumberland (the full text of the poem is attached at the end).

and his personal and religious lyrics. Slavery was for him the principal evil and because of his religious beliefs he rejected slavery. At the same time he was against resorting to violence in freeing the slaves; hence his objection to John Brown's movement which adopted force as a means of attaining its objectives. But this did not by any means make him stand against the ambitious goals of the movement. (11) Whittier had no first hand experience of the Civil War though he wrote some poems about it in two collections : 'Poems Written During the Progress of the Abolition Question', 1838; and « In War Time and Other Poems', 1964. His poem 'Voices of Freedom', 1846; showed clearly his antislavery attitude.

The poetry of Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892) rendered first hand experience of the Civil War owing to his work as a male nurse during the war. He was an ardent supporter of the war against the successionists at the beginning, but later on he became very depressed by the sight of the dead and injured and his fervour for the war abated. His collection of lyrics entitled « Drum-Taps » registered his impressions of the Civil War and the horror it brought with it; though the early lyrics show enthusiasm. The outbreak of the war nourished Whitman's patriotism in support of the Union's cause; hence his patriotism was deeply-rooted in the poet's national consciousness. In « Drum-Taps » we witness a flowering of Whitman the lyric humanist who identified himself with the rank and file of the soldiers with whom he became very closely acquainted and intimate as a volunteer male nurse. From a political point of view Whitman's world outlook was not that of the abolitionist and the left-wing, as in earlier and later periods of his life, but was more akin to the moderate position of the pro-Union forces. The following poem « Beat ! Beat ! Drums ! » was Whitman's battle cry to the North :

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(11) — « He (J.G. Whittier) threw himself into the antislavery crusade, editing a number of Abolitionist journals, writing poems and pamphlets on behalf of the slaves, and risking his life before enraged mobs. » The Literature of America, Vol. I, p. 646.

Beat ! Beat ! Drums (11)

Through the windows — through doors — burst like a ruthless force,

Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;

Leave not the bridegroom quiet — no happiness must he have now with his bride,

Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,

and his poem « Eighteen Sixty-One » also reflected his enthusiasm for the war :

ARM'D year - year of the struggle,

No dainty rhymer or sentimental love verses for you terrible year.

Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,

But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on your shoulder,

With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at your side,

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The following lines express different feelings towards the Civil War after Whitman's experience of its bloody aspect :

An old man bending I come among new faces, (12)

Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,

Come tell us old man, as from young man and maidens

that love me,

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(11) — Whitman wrote this poem after the rout of the Union troops in the Battle of Bull Run in July, 1861, when the forces of the Southern slave States fired on Ford Sumter on April 12, 1861.

(12) — These are excerpts from Whitman's poem « The Wound-Dresser ».

Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,

But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,

To sit by the wounded and sooth them, or silently watch the dead;)

Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,

Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave ? the other was equally brave;)

The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,

Hard the breathing rattles, quite plazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,

(Come sweet death ! be persuaded O beautiful death !

In mercy come quickly.)

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For my evening is dead, a man divine as myself is dead, (13)

I look where he lies white — faced and still in the coffin — I draw near,

Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Whitman was a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln and this was a fundamental characteristic of the poet who wrote his poem « HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY » (14) soon after the assassination of Lincoln. (15) All his poems written in memory of Lincoln were included in his « Sequel to Drum-Taps ». The sequel included his greatest and most remembered poem dedicated to Lincoln

(13) — These are excerpts from Whitman's poem « Reconciliation ».
(14) — The full text of this poem is attached at the end.
(15) — Abraham Lincoln was shot by an assassin, 14 April 1865

« When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd » :

WHEN LILACS last in the dooryard bloom'd,

And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,

I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring. (16)

In this great poem Whitman employs three themes : the historical fact (star), his own sense of personal loss (lilac), and the poet's triumphant comment on death (bird). (17) Another memorable poem in this collection which has attained great popularity is « O Captain ! My Captain ! »

But O heart ! heart ! heart !
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.
O Captain ! my Captain ! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up — for you the flag is flung — for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths — for you the shores a — crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

The poem tells of a ship, representative of the Union, coming safely into port, with « the people all exulting », while the poet sadly walks the deck on which lies his Captain, « fallen cold dead »

Herman Melville (1819 - 1891) was not a first hand reporter of the events of the Civil War as was the case with Whitman, because he did not participate in it. His poems are divided into three groups : the first dates to the pre-war period which did not

(16) — The full text of this poem is attached at the end.
(17) — Emory Holloway's note.

contain any calls for arms or war fervour; the second, which is larger, describes the war and the progress of Union troops. He depicted the Civil War allegorically according to his general world outlook (Weltanschauung), namely a war between good and evil; the third, which is more important than the other two, called for tolerance and reconciliation. This attitude no doubt was partly due to his religious background. In fact Melville attacked all the poets of the Civil War in defence of his call for reconciliation with the South, and he even praised heroes from the South « perish their cause ! but mark the men. » He even found excuses for the white slave-owners in conformity with his ideas of reconciliation. But Melville, despite all the aforesaid, stood firmly on the side of those who deplored slavery. His poems « Misgivings » (18), 1860; and « The Conflict of Convictions » (19), 1860 - 61; show his apprehensions for the welfare of his country (20). The ability of nature and time to reconcile antagonism is shown in his well known poem « Shiloh », (21), 1862. « The House-Top » (22), 1863; expresses the feeling and fear that out of chaos there can come only tyranny and repression and consequently a denial of a fundamental article of the « Republic's faith » : that « man is naturally good/and — more — is Nature's Roman ». The national exultation that emerged at the end of the war is expressed in his poem « A Canticle ». (23).

The West remained almost excluded from any serious involvement in the events of the Civil War owing to the little and nascent development of those parts of the United States. Francis Brete

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(18) — The full text of the poem is attached at the end.
(19) — Ibid.,
(20) — The « Supplement » appended to Melville's volume of poems on the Civil War published in 1866 under the title « Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War », was concluded with these words : « Let us pray that the great historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity; and may fulfilment verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity. »
Chase, Richard (ed.) : Herman Melville, Selected Tales and Poems, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1965.
(21) — The full text of the poem is attached at the end.
(22) — Ibid.,
(23) — Ibid.,

Harte (1836 - 1902) was a poet from the West who had immigrated from New England a long time before and settled there. His poetry reflects the new environment and Western dialect and was dedicated to the cause of the Union during the national conflict. But Harte, like the majority of the Civil War poets, also called for safeguarding the Union and Reconciliation. His desire for reconciliation was not religiously motivated as was the case with some New England writers, but from his passion towards his beloved as well as nationalistic feelings. There is no evidence in Harte's poetry of any clearly defined attitude towards slavery.

Poets from the South

The poetry of Henry Timrod (1828 - 67) (24) shared the characteristics of the poetry of the South in that it used romantic and sentimental trappings, borrowed from classical antiquity and Christianity and represented a decaying code of chivalry. Timrod was called the « laureate of the Confederacy » for his volume of « Poems » published in 1860 in which he celebrated the cause of the South. The most memorable of his poems is « Ode », 1867; written on the graves of the Confederate dead. This elegy, recited at a commemoration service dedicated to the « martyr of the fallen cause », declares that, though nothing honours their defeat as valient soldiers, their fame nevertheless is blown,

> And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
> The shaft is in the stone. (25)

But Timrod's heart vibrated differently to the call of the war :

> At last, we are
> A nation among nations; and the world
> shall soon behold in many a distant port
> Another flag unfurled !

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(24) — Simms, William Gilmore (1806 — 70) was a contemporary of Henry Timrod and was known for his poems : « War Poetry of the South », 1866.

(25) — Oxford Companion to American Literature, p. 614.

Now, come what may, whose favor need we court ?
And, under God, whose thunder need we fear ? (26)

The Civil War and the Poets of the Second Generation.

The poets of the second generation, who were born during and after the Civil War, dealt also with this theme showing much more sympathy towards both the North and the South than their predecessors. But they stood outspokenly on the side of the Union. And as the events of the Civil War had partially faded in the memory of this generation of poets, the memory of Abraham Lincoln became more alive in their works and occupied much more space than hitherto. The other outstanding aspect of this period was the emergence of a group of black poets who tackled the same theme. The black poets approached this theme by endeavouring to portray the condition of the blacks and the hopes that were not fulfilled by the Civil War. They considered the Civil War as the beginning of the struggle for achieving complete freedom from the remaining fetters of slavery. Therefore they were contemplating the present and envisaging a better future rather than looking back at past events. In fact the black writers paid much more attention to the First World War than to the Civil War.

Stephen Vincent Benét (1898 - 1943) wrote a narrative poem in eight books about the Civil War, 'John Brown's Body', 1928; in which he not only dealt with John Brown's rebellion and slavery but with the Civil War as a whole and the termination of the Southern dream of creating a patriarchal aristocratic nation. Benét also predicted the dawning of capitalism and the plight suffered by the blacks who fled from the slavery of the South to a ruthless and new exploitation, a new type of slavery existing in the factories of the North and their struggle for existence under these inhuman and alienating conditions.

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(26) — The Literature of America, Vol. I, p. 1155.

Novels On The Civil War

The novel, unlike poetry, did not respond immediately to the events of the Civil War (27). The bulk of works of fiction written about the war appeared at the beginning of the 20th-century (28). Those works of fiction by writers from the North published during the period preceeding the First World War did not show any feeling of hatred (29). The writers of fiction from the South joined others from different parts of the Union in calling for reconciliation and showed respect for the leaders of the North. Most of the novels taking the Civil War as their background shared one characteristic in common : the rebirth of the Old South to a new life and the disowning of all past shortcomings. The other characteristics of the novel, are romantic trappings as well as diverse characters chosen from aristocratic families of the South, all presented in melodrama-

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(27) — « The terribleness of the first « modern » war in history — the first war in which slaughter carried through on a large-scale. scientific basis — war not quickly captured by winters of fiction. » The Literature of America, Vol. I, p. 1102.

(28) — « After the Civil War the development of realistic fiction was carried on chiefly by writers associated with the North and West, like William Dean Howells, and by the few Southerners who along with George W. Cable found a congenial refuge in the North. » Literary History of the United States, p. 129.

(29) — The novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 - 1896) had a greater and more extensive effect on the people than those of any other novelists. In her antislavery novels : 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', 1852; 'Dred : A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp', 1856, she refrained from attacks on the South but placed the emphasis on the evils of slavery, the separation of negro families by sale and brutality accompanied the pursuit and recapture of fugitive blacks. Her second novel was complementary to the first, in that she tried to depict the effects of slavery on the slaveholders.
There were a number of other novelists who took the Civil War as a theme for their works :
Morford, Henry : The Days of Shoddy, 1863.
Trowbridge, J.T. : Cudjo's Cave, 1864.
Cooke, J.E. : Hammer and Rapier, 1871.
Cable, W. : Dr. Sevier, 1885.
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tic plots. An example of one of those novels is Stark Young's (1881 - 1963) 'So Red the Rose', 1934; which depicted the war through characters of two lovers, one who is waiting while the other is at the battle front; the relationship between them that comes to a happy end is the predominant feature of the book.

A number of other novelists were engaged in examining and deeply probing the psychological effects of the Civil War on people in general, but they also fell under the spell of the romantic and sentimental image attached to the Old South which furnished the background of their minds as well as the limitations of the settings of such works and the writers' local patriotism (30). Hence the lack of any serious attempt at a critical study of the war and its social and economic impact on the people and the country as well (31). They called for Reconciliation and displayed « incipient nationalism » (32). Ellen Glasgow (1874 - 1945), like some other novelists, tried in her novel 'The Battle-Ground', 1902; to adopt a more realistic approach to the Civil War, influenced by the new trends of realism in American literature; especially in her depiction of battles and the impact of war on soldiers as well as her ironical treatment of the Southern aristocracy and the social structure of the Old South. Neverthless romantic, sentimental and melodramatic features are still clearly traceable.

The novel 'The Red Badge of Courage : An Episode of the American Civil War', 1895, written by Stephen Crane (1871 - 1900); is a great realistic study of the reactions of a soldier who had no previous war experience but became « trapped in its fury and

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(30) — « The prevailing mood of Southern fiction for a full generation was nostalgic and sentimental, a turning back to what had been. »
Literary History of the United States, p. 160.

(31) — « The most persistent efforts to embody in fictional form a review of the breakdown of the slaveholder's empire and the chaos that followed were made by Tourgée : 'Hot Ploughshars', 1883; 'Figr Thistler', 1879; 'A Royal Gentleman', 1881; 'A Fool's Errand', 1879; 'Bricks Without Straw', 1886; »
Literary history of the United States, p. 163.

(32) — Churchill, Winston (1871 — 1947) : The Crisis, 1901; set in St. Louis, deals with society and politics before and during the Civil War.

turmoil ». Crane's treatment of the theme of war, which was not « history made into fiction », was successful in opening out new prospects for the novel dealing with war.

The period following the First World War also witnessed the publication of a number of novels dealing with the same subject but with a different approach (33). Such writers like James Boyd (1888 - 1944), in his historical novel 'Marching On', 1927; and Hervey William Allen (1889 - 1949), in his novel 'Action at Aquila' 1938; tried to depict the social distinctions within the ranks of the army in the South; between the aristocratic leaders and the poor soldiers; meanwhile shifting emphasis from the portrayal of the conventional hero of the Old South to that of the common man. On the other hand they also attempted a new assessment of the Civil War as a whole. In her long romantic novel, 'Gone with the Wind', 1936; Margaret Mitchell (1900 - 1949) denounced the plantation aristocracy of the Old South, telling her story from the point of view of the middle class characters. At the same time she avoided any critical treatment of the theme of slavery despite her depiction of the destruction caused by plantation life similar to what Stark Young had done in his novel 'So Red the Rose'.

As for the drama, we could hardly find any play dealing with the theme of the Civil War. The puritanism of the North and absence of real cultural centres in the South seriously impeded the development of American drama until the 20th-century.

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(33) — Sinclair, Upton : Manassas, 1923 (dealing with the first battle of Bull Run).
Scott, Evelyn : The Wave, 1929.
Kontor, Mackinlay : Long Remember, 1934 (about the battle of Gettysburg).
Faulkner, William : The Unvanquishable, 1938.
Pennell, Joseph : The History of Rome Hanks, 1944.
Williams, Ben Amer : House Divided, 1947.
Warren, Robert Penn : Band of Angels, 1955.

POEMS OF PHILIP FRENEAU

POEMS OF PHILIP FRENEAU

THE INDIAN BURYING GROUND

In spite of all the learned have said,
I still my old opinion keep,
The posture, that we give the lead,
Points out the soul's eternal sleep.

Not so the ancients of these lands —
The Indian, when from life released,
Again is seated with his friends,
And shares again the joyous feast.

His imaged birds, and painted bowl,
And venison, for a journey dressed.
Bespeak the nature of the soul,
ACTIVITY, that knows no rest.

His bow, for action ready bent,
And arrows, with a head of stone,
Can only mean that life is spent,
And not the old ideas gone.

Thou, stranger, that shalt come this way,
No fraud upon the dead commit —
Observe the swelling turf, and say,
They do not lie, but here they sit.

Here still a lofty rock remains,
On which the curious eye may trace,

(Now wasted, half, by wearing rains)
The fancies of a ruder race.

Here still an aged elm aspires,
Beneath whose far-projecting shade,
(And which the shepherd still admires)
The children of the forest played !

There oft a restless Indian queen,
(Pale Shebah, with her braided hair)
And many a barbarous form is seen
To chide the man that lingers there.

By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,
In habit for the chase arrayed,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer, a shade !

And long shall timorous fancy see
The painted chief, and pointed spear,
And Reason's self shall bow the knee
To shadows and delusions here.

POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

THE CUMBERLAND

At anchor in Hampton Roads we lay,
  On board of the Cumberland, sloop-of-war;
And at times from the fortress across the bay
  The alarum of drums swept past,
Or a bugle blast
  From the camp on the shore.

Then far away to the south uprose
  A little feather of snow-white smoke,
And we knew that the iron ship of our foes
  Was steadily steering its course
To try the force
  Of our ribs of oak.

Down upon us heavily runs,
  Silent and sullen, the floating fort;
Then comes a puff of smoke from her guns,
  And leaps the terrible death,
With fiery breath,
  From each open port.

We are not idle, but send her straight
  Defiance back in a full broad-side !
As hail rebounds from a roof of slate,
  Rebounds our heavier hail

From each iron scale
  Of the monster's hide.

'Strike your flag !' the rebel cries,
  In his arrogant old plantation strain,
'Never !' our gallant Morris replies;
  'It is better to sink than to yield !'
And the whole air pealed
  With the cheers of our men.

POEMS OF WALT WHITMAN

HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY

(May 4, 1865)

Hush'd be the camps to-day,
And soldiers let us drape our war-worn weapons,
And each with musing soul retire to celebrate,
Our dear commander's death.

No more for him life's stormy conflicts,
Nor victory, nor defeat — no more time's dark events,
Charging like ceaseless clouds accross the sky.

But sing poet in our name,
Sing of the love we bore him — because you — dweller in camps,
know it truly.

As they invault the coffin there,
Sing — as they close the doors of earth upon him — one verse,
For the heavy hearts of soldiers.

POEMS OF WALT WHITMAN

MEMORIES OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D

1

When Lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night;
I mourn'd and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star !
O shades of night — O moody, tearful night !
O great star disappear'd — O the black murk that hides the star !
O cruel hands that hold me powerless — O helpless soul of me !
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the whitewash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicately, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle — and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rick green,
A spring with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.
Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.
Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray debris,
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards.
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the dark great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads,

With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs — where amid these you journey,
With the tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of violet.

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and sacred death.
All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with early roses and lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

8

O western orb sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all looked on,)
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not what kept me from sleep,)
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,

As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear you notes, I hear you call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved ?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone ?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love ?
Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern Sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls ?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love ?
Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the prolific,
In the distance the flowing gaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,

With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky,
and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of
chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen
homeward returning.

12

Lo, body and soul — this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying
tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light,
Ohio's shores flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.
Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,
The gentle soft-born measureless light,
The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,
The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the
bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
Sing on dearest brother, warble your ready song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.
O liquid and free and tender !
O wild and loose to my soul — O wondrous singer !
You only I hear — yet the star holds me, (but I will soon depart).
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring,
and the farmers preparing their crops,

In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds and the storms,)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labour,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbing throbb'd, and the cities pent — lo, then and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.
Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadow cedars and ghostly pines so still.
And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.
From deep recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.
And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenly arriving, arriving,

In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Praised be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love — but praise ! praise ! praise !
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome ?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliverness,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.

15

To the tally of my soul,

Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.
Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.
While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.
And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,
And carried hither and you through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.
I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffr'd not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the vision, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird, and the tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying everaltering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,

I leave thee there in the dooryard, blooming, returning with spring.
I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing
with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full
of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep,
for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands — and this
for his sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

MISGIVINGS

(1860)

When ocean-clouds over inland hills
  Sweep storming in late autumn brown,
And horror the sodden valley fills,
  And the spire falls crashing in the town,
I muse upon my country's ills —
The tempest bursting from the waste of Time
  On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime.
Nature's dark side is heeded now —
  (Ah ! optimist-cheer disheartened flow) —
A child may read the moody brow
  Of yon black mountain lone.
With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
  And storms are formed behind the storm we feel :
The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.

POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

THE CONFLICT OF CONVICTIONS

(1860 - 1861)

On starry heights
  A bugle wails the long recall;
Derision stirs the deep abyss,
  Heaven's ominous silence over all.
Return, return, O eager Hope,
  And face man's latter fall.
Events, they make the dreamers quail;
  Satan's old age is strong and hale,
A disciplined captain, gray in skill,
  And Raphael a white enthusiast still;
Dashed aims, at which Christ's martyrs pale,
  Shall Mammon's slaves fulfill ?

(Dismantle the fort,
Cut down the fleet —
Battle no more shall be !
While the fields for fight in aeons to come
Congeal beneath the sea.)

The terrors of truth and dart of death
  To faith alike are vain;
Though comets gone, a thousand years,
  Return again,

Patient she stands — she can no more —
And waits, nor heeds she waxes hoar.

(At a stony gate,
A statue of stone,
Weed overgrown, —
Long 'twill wait !)

But God his former mind retains,
Confirms his old decree;
The generations are inured to pains,
And strong Necessity
Surges, and Heaps Time's strand with wrecks.
The people spread like a weedy grass,
The thing they will they bring to pass,
And prosper to the apoplex.
The rout it herds around the heart,
The ghost is yielded in the gloom;
Kings wag their heads — Now save thyself
Who wouldst rebuild the world in bloom.

(Tide mark
And top of the ages' strife,
Verged where they called the world to come,
The last advance of life —
Ha ha, the rust on the Iron Dome !)

Nay, but revere the hid event;
In the cloud a sword is girded on,
I mark a twinkling in the tent
Of Michael the warrior one.
Senior wisdom suits not now,
The light is on the youthful brow.

(Ay, in caves the miners see :
His forehead bears, a blinking light;
Darkness so he feebly braves,
A meagre wight !)

But He who rules is old — is old;
Ah ! faith is warm, but heaven with age is cold.

(Ho ho, ho, ho,
The cloistered doubt
Of olden times
Is blurted out !)

The Ancient of Days forever is young,
Forever the scheme of Nature thrives;
I know a wind in purpose strong —
It spins against the way it drives
What if the gulfs their slimed foundations bare ?
So deep must the stones be hurled
Whereon the throes of ages rear
The final empire and the happier world.

(The poor old Past,
The future's slave,
She drudged through apin and crime
To bring about the blissful Prime,
Then — perished. There's a gravel !)

Power unanointed may come —
Dominion (unsough by the free)
And the Iron Dome,
Stronger for stress and strain,
Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;
But the Founders' dream shall flee.
Age after age shall be
As age after age has been,
(From man's changeless heart their way they win);
And death be busy with all who strive —
Death, with silent negative.

YEA AND NAY —
EACH HATH HIS SAY;
BUT GOD HE KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY.
NONE WAS BY

WHEN HE SPREAD THE SKY;
WISDOM IS VAIN, AND PROPHESY.

Note : The gloomy lull of the early part of the winter of 1860 — 1861, seeming big with final disaster to our institutions, affected some minds that believed them to constitute one of the great hopes of mankind, much as the eclipse that came over the promise of the first French Revolution affected kindred natures, throwing them for the time into doubts and misgivings universal.

POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

SHILOH

A Requiem

(April, 1862)

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low,
Over the field in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh —
Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
Around the church of Shiloh —

No painted plume — a sober hue,
His beauty is his power;
That eager calm of gaze intent
Foresees the Sybil's hour.

Austere, he crowns the swaying perch,
Flapped by the angry flag;
The hurricane from the battery sings,
But his claw has known the crag.

Amid the scream of shells, his scream
Runs shrilling; and the glare

Of eyes that brave the blinding sun
The volleyed flame can bear.

The pride of quenchless strength is his —
Strength which, though chained avails;
The very rebel looks and thrills —
The anchored Emblem hails.

Though scarred in many a furious frav.
No deadly hurt he knew;
Well may we think his years are charmed —
The Eagle of the Blue.

POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

THE HOUSE-TOP

A Night Piece

(July, 1863)

No sleep. The sultriness pervades the air
And binds the brain — a dense oppression, such
As tawny tigers feel in matted shades,
Vexing their blood and making apt for ravage.
Beneath the stars the roofy desert spreads
Vacant as Libya. All is hushed near by.
Yet fitfully from far breaks a mixed surf
Of muffled sound, the Atheist roar of riot.
Yonder, where parting Sirius set in drought,
Balefully glares red Arson — there — and there,
The Town is taken by its rats — ship-rats
And rats of the wharves. All civil charms
And priestly speels which late held hearts in awe —
Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,
And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature,
Hail to the low dull rumble, dull and dead,
And ponderous drag that shakes the wall.
Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll
Of black artillery; he comes, though late;

In code corroborating Calvin's creed
  And cynnic tyrannies of honest kings;
He comes, nor parlies; and the Town, redeemed,
  Gives thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heeds
The grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied,
  Which holds that Man is naturally good,
And more — is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged.

Note : « I dare not write the horrible and inconceivable atrocities committed, » says Froissart, in alluding to the remarkable sedition in France during his time. The like may be hinted of some proceedings of the draft-rioters.

A CANTICLE :

Significant of the national exaltation of enthusiasm at the close of the War

O the precipice Titanic
  Of the congregated Fall,
And the angle oceanic
  Where the deepening thunders call —
And the Gorge so grim,
  And the firmamental rim !
Multitudinously thronging
  The waters all converge,
Then they sweep adown in sloping
  Solidity of surge.

The Nation, in her impulse
  Mysterious as the Tide,
In emotion like an ocean
  Moves in power, not in pride;
And is deep in her devotion
  As Humanity is wide.

Thou Lord of Hosts victorious,
  The confluence Thou has twined;
By a wondrous way and glorious
  A passage Thou dost find —
A passage Thou dost find :

Hosanna to the Lord of hosts;
The host of human kind.

Stable in in its baselessness
When calm is in the air,
The Iris half in tracelessness
Hovers faintly fair.
Fitfully assailing it
A wind from Heaven blows,
Shivering and paling it
To blankness of the snows;
While, incessant in renewal,
The Arch rekindled grows
Till again the gem and jewel
Whirl in blinding overthrows —
Till, prevailing and transcending,
Lo, the Glory perfect there,
And the contest finds an ending,
For repose is in the air.

But the Foamy Deep unsounded,
And the dim and dizzy ledge,
And the booming roar rebounded,
And the Gull that skims the edge !
The Giant of the Pool
Heaves his forehead white as wool —
Toward the Iris ever climbing
From the Cataracts that call —
Irremovable vast arras
Draping all the Wall.

The Generations pouring
From times of endless date,
In their going, in their flowing
Ever form the Steadfast State;
And Humanity is growing
Toward the fullness of her fate.

Thou Lord of hosts victorious,
  Fulfull the end designed;
By a wondrous way and glorious
  A passage Thou dost find —
A passage Thou dost find :
  Hosanna to the Lord of hosts,
The hosts of human kind.

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