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Four Transcendental Soldiers: Did Combat Experience Kill Emersonian Idealism in W. B. Greene, C. A. Dana, T. W. Higginson, and J. K. Hosmer?

Michael West

Discussions of the Transcendentalists and their contribution to American Romanticism often treat the Civil War as marking the end of an era. How could Romanticism survive the photographic realism with which Matthew Brady portrayed the industrial carnage of that bloodiest of all American wars, World Wars I and II not excepted? Did not the deaths of so many promising young men make the promises of Transcendentalism seem hollow and naive in the aftermath, turning idealists into pragmatists? Had not the movement always been pacifistic at the core?

Indeed, many Transcendentalists had condemned the Mexican War. In opposing it Emerson and Thoreau were seconded by movement figures like Orestes Brownson and Theodore Parker. But opposition to that particular war did not produce Transcendental pacifists as committed as the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Revered by many in Transcendental circles like George Ripley, William Ellery Channing had founded a burgeoning Peace Society of Massachusetts in his study in 1815, deplored the War of 1812, and championed the right and even duty of conscientious objectors to oppose particular unjust wars to the point of martyrdom. But Garrison found the Peace Society too moderate and broke from it to found the much more radical New England Non-Resistance Society. By contrast the American Peace Society's opposition to the Mexican war was "mild and innocuous."[1] Channing, whose grandfather had signed the Declaration of Independence, "could never bring himself to join the ranks of absolute pacifists," and the publications sponsored by his Society struck the historically sophisticated Brownson as twaddle not worth reading.[2] With his conversion to Catholicism Brownson embraced the standard Catholic doctrine of just war. During the Civil War this quondam Transcendental gadfly ran as a Republican for Congress

1 Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 273.

2 Jack Mendelsohn, *Channing: The Reluctant Radical* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971), 124.

and criticized Lincoln for not prosecuting it vigorously enough; one son died in the Union army with his blessing. In 1838 Theodore Parker's sermon "Peace" had proclaimed that civilization was making war morally obsolete, but his aversion from war was "hardly urgent or radical."[3] By 1854 peace might be dispensable, he told the mob crowding Faneuil Hall and clamoring for the forcible release of the imprisoned fugitive slave Anthony Burns. "I love peace," he proclaimed. "But there is a means, and there is an end; Liberty is the end, and sometimes peace is not the means towards it."[4] Dying a few months before the outbreak of hostilities in 1860, he foresaw bloodshed as a grim necessity, and his extravagant heroicization of John Brown leaves no doubt that like Brownson and Ripley (indeed, like Garrison, too, for that matter, who sent a son to the Union ranks) this quintessentially militant Transcendental reformer would have supported the Civil War when it came.

Walden famously scoffs at the Mexican War, to be sure, but Thoreau's ridicule of the Concord militia merely accents his serio-comic readiness to leave his Homeric battle with weeds in his bean-field and serve as a Minuteman should any just cause call him from farming. Heroism was a constant preoccupation, and his aggressively military character led neighborhood boys to dub him "Trainer Thoreau." Idolizing John Brown, with the outbreak of the Civil War he became an ardent Union partisan, exulting in the bloodshed of Bull Run as heralding the moral regeneration of the nation. Emerson's objection to the Mexican War was likewise ambiguous, for believing that the weaker country was naturally destined to come under the sway of the United States, he found the bloodshed unnecessary. He famously celebrated the heroism of Concord's embattled farmers in the same spirit that his grandfather had preached to the Minutemen. "Ah, some times gunpowder smells good" was his response to the outbreak of the Civil War.[5] He evinced surprising bellicosity in such wartime lectures as "Fortune of the Republic," while most Unitarian clergy with Transcendental leanings managed to express their progressive Christianity through the vaguely Calvinistic doctrine of a holy war atoning for sin.[6] But these were mostly armchair or pulpit warriors. Could Transcendental idealism survive firsthand experience with the brutal reality of Civil War combat?

3 Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 166.

4 Quoted in Brenda Wineapple, *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 82.

5 Quoted in William A. Huggard, "Emerson's Philosophy of War and Peace," *Philological Quarterly* 22 (1943): 373.

6 On Emerson's and other Transcendentalists' support for the Civil War see especially Len Gougeon, "'Fortune of the Republic': Emerson, Lincoln, and Transcendental Warfare," in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 45 (1999): 258-324; and Robert Albrecht, "The Theological Response of the Transcendentalists to the Civil War," *New England Quarterly* 38 (March 1965): 21-34.

More easily than one might suppose, this paper will argue by looking at the reactions of the four younger Transcendentalists who saw combat: William Batchelder Greene (1819–78), Charles Anderson Dana (1819–97), Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911), and James Kendall Hosmer (1834–1927). (As a recruiting officer George L. Stearns also rendered important service in uniform, but never at the front lines, so he is not considered here.) "It was more than a love of 'causes' that was being shed," argued George M. Frederickson in his study of the war's impact on the younger generation, "it was the whole Emersonian style of intellectuality," while in his comprehensive study of postwar pragmatism Louis Menand treats the war experience as the catalyst for most subsequent intellectual transformation though only one of his four central pragmatist thinkers actually saw military service.[7] "Americans had not just lost their dead," argues Drew Faust, "they had lost their own lives as they understood them before the war."[8] The postwar careers of our four soldiering disciples of Emerson suggest that such sweeping theses need qualification, for Emersonian idealism was flexible enough to accommodate the need for armed conflict as the arbiter of right in some situations.

William B. Greene, 1819–78

Greene is an intriguing example, for he was the only Transcendentalist educated at West Point. His uncle Colonel Charles Gordon Greene had combined soldiering with success as a Massachusetts newspaperman and politician, and other Greenes in Rhode Island branches of the family, like his father's Revolutionary namesake General Nathaniel Greene, had also gravitated to the army. Greene chose West Point in the youthful philosophic conviction that "we were all independent gods; and there was no right but strength, and no proof of right but success."[9] Though illness kept him from graduating there, after recovering he desired a commission and sought the endorsement of Daniel Webster, whose Batchelder genes and dark good looks he shared. Not knowing him, Webster at first declined to write a letter, whereupon Greene rose to his full six-foot height and asked, "Mr. Webster, do you think I am tall enough

7 *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper, 1965), 172. In arguing that "the Civil War discredited the beliefs and assumptions of the era that preceded it," which had not prepared the country for "the astonishing violence the war unleashed," the role of larger social forces like urbanization, industrialization, and immigration is slighted by Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), x. While combat was a formative experience for Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., the war does not seem to have been crucial in shaping the thought of Menand's other three major pragmatist innovators, C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, none of whom donned uniform.

8 *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 268.

9 *Remarks on the Science of History Followed by an A Priori Autobiography* (Boston: Crosby & Nichols, 1849), 13.

for a soldier? . . . Will you be kind enough to say that for me?" Impressed and amused by the young man's effrontery, Webster then "wrote me the best letter I ever had in my life."[10] He was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1839 and, putting his West Point training to use mapping fortifications, fought the Seminoles until disillusionment with a war he considered unjust coupled with malaria led to an honorable discharge in 1841. Lying sick on his pallet, he had a conversion experience that made him hurl his copy of Shelley's *Queen Mab* from his tent. No longer did he see himself as "a mortal god, and . . . the frequenters of churches as men" only (*Remarks*, 21). Rejoining the human race through sojourns in the Baptist seminary at Newton and Brook Farm, he gravitated to Harvard's Divinity School to study theology.

There, so far as his eminently cantankerous and dogmatic nature would allow, Greene became a friend of T. W. Higginson, who found him "strikingly handsome and mercilessly opinionated."[11] Meeting Emerson in 1841, Greene registered the seductive appeal of the Transcendental siren song with an essay in the *Dial* describing Beauty, Justice, and Peace as a tri-unity reposing in godhead, while striving to lash himself to the mast of his own unorthodox interpretation of Christianity in *The Doctrine of Life, with Some of Its Theological Applications* (Boston: Greene, 1843). Two articles in the *American Review* criticized Emerson from a perspective at times akin to Orestes Brownson's. After ordination in 1845 to the Unitarian pulpit in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, he revised them as *Transcendentalism*, one of the earliest studies of the movement, hailing and chastising Emerson as "the most profound metaphysician, after Jonathan Edwards, which this country has ever produced."[12] In the same year this lifelong states-rights Democrat, abolitionist, and feminist also published a small book titled *Equality*, which carried the Transcendental ark into battle for the cause of social reform, while a series of articles in Worcester newspapers collected as *Mutual Banking* (1850) began a lifelong crusade as an economic radical in the conviction that "*the man who denies the rights of capital, is a transcendentalist in political economy*."[13]

10 *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 1878 (clipping), Harvard University Archives (hereafter HUA), HUG 300 (Greene, W. B.).

11 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 106.

12 *Transcendentalism* (West Brookfield, Mass.: Cooke, 1849), 6. Any future bibliographer of Greene should consult the copy bound with six other pamphlets (some with ms. annotations) now in Harvard's Houghton Library, originally presented by Greene to the Boston Public Library at their request. In a presentation inscription dated April 17, 1869, he explains that "the evil angels, and they only, know the full extent of my transgressions in print. Fortunately articles of mine printed in such English as I could command, and other articles printed at my provocation in French and Italian, have been swept away by the ever encroaching waves of the sea of oblivion." His inscription then mentions several fugitive pamphlets not listed in the National Union Catalogue or WorldCat. (See figure 1.)

13 William B. Greene, *Equality* (West Brookfield, Mass.: Cooke, 1849), 60.

Author's Copy.

Paris, France, 1854

Not to be taken out of his Study.

Contents.

1. Transcendentalism.
2. A New Gnosis,
3. Letter to Rev. Eben Carpenter
4. Equality
5. Mutual Banking.
6. Refutation of Edwards on the Will
7. A priori Autobiography.

A letter to Rev. Dr. Fiske on the Incarnation, & a tract on the Trinity, being in 8vo. form, are not bound up in this volume.

There also exist in print (though the author possesses no copy of them) (1.) Letter of Selectmen of Brookfield to Kossuth, (2) Speech delivered in Brookfield against the Fugitive Slave Law. (3) Speech delivered in Massachusetts Constitutional Convention advocating the right of women to vote

Figure 1: Manuscript "Table of Contents" supplied by William B. Greene for a selection of seven of his writings—some with extensive corrections in his hand—that he had bound in one volume. The author mentions two items not gathered here: "A letter to Rev. Dr. Fiske on the Incarnation, & a tract on the Trinity, being in 8vo. format, are not bound up in this volume." Greene goes on to list some of his fugitive pieces: "There also exist in print (though the author possesses no copy of them) (1.) Letter of Selectmen of Brookfield to Kossuth, (2) Speech delivered in Brookfield against the Fugitive Slave Law, (3) Speech delivered in Massachusetts Constitutional Convention advocating the right of women to vote." 19 cm. *61-1367-73. Gift of the Estate of G. B. Weston.

Marriage to a rich wife in 1851 enabled him to terminate his clerical labors in the Unitarian vineyard with a fiery sermon opposing the Fugitive Slave Law, and exercising the rights of capital thereafter allowed this individualist par excellence fully to indulge his manifold intellectual eccentricities, including attacking his own economic privilege. The outbreak of the Civil War called him back from Europe to the Union cause. Raising a substantial body of volunteers, he was commissioned colonel in the Fourteenth Regiment Massachusetts Infantry, afterwards the First Regiment Heavy Artillery, by Governor John Andrew. Posted to Washington with what amounted to a brigade in strength, Colonel Greene sometimes found his command left as the sole line of defense for the Capitol when General McClellan could be persuaded to take the field. That, of course, was not so often as President Lincoln wished, but Greene's regiment did see action in General John Pope's ill-starred Virginia campaign. That he had firsthand knowledge of the perils and hardships of army life is beyond question.

Greene also had firsthand experience with military disillusionment, culminating in his resignation in October 1862. In a manuscript notebook now in Harvard's Houghton Library, he described the circumstances immediately afterward in a narrative that veers between lofty bureaucratic self-justification and heroi-comic *opéra bouffe*. Coveting a colt belonging to a Confederate sympathizer near their Maryland camp, his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel C. Oliver, ordered two soldiers to seize it and ship it north. When the citizen complained, Greene, mindful of Lincoln's indulgent policy toward the border states, interrogated Oliver and witnesses, eliciting "testimony showing him to be a horse-thief, liar, and would-be forger."[14] Given the choice between a court-martial and resignation, the tearful Lt. Col. Oliver resigned under a cloud. When he sought a commission in another Massachusetts unit, Gov. Andrew declined to appoint him until he could be formally exonerated from the charges. Unfortunately for Greene, the lieutenant colonel's father was the redoubtable Henry Kemble Oliver, formerly general of the Massachusetts militia during the Mexican War, then successively manager of the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile mills, mayor of Lawrence, and now serving doughtily as Gov. Andrew's secretary of the treasury for Massachusetts. A military and political power to be reckoned with, the senior Oliver pressed for an ad hoc court procedure that might exonerate his son.

Under conflicting pressure from his colonel and his treasury secretary, Gov. Andrew was torn, and the ensuing bureaucratic battle in Washington's War Office threatened to entangle Greene in more violence than anything the Confederates had to that point offered.[15] Among the dubious officers with whom political commissions had saddled him the bright star was a young Lieutenant Andrew Washburn, whom Greene

14 William B. Greene, [Notebook], MS Am 2281, f. 2v.

15 See Greene's letter to Gov. John Andrew, July 20, 1862, in John A. Andrew Papers (microfilm), Massachusetts Historical Society, P344, roll 13 (May 18–July 31). Greene's pleas proved unavailing, and thereafter he cherished a bitter contempt for Gov. Andrew for yielding to political pressure as Greene saw it.

rapidly promoted to major over the heads of ten captains, thereby incurring their anger, because, as Greene put it, "he alone, among my available officers, understood the nature of the conic sections, and the signs, symbols and methods of algebraic investigation, and . . . consequently, he was the only available . . . staff officer of the Regiment to whom the theoretical Treatises on Artillery, and a large part of the Ordnance manual were not sealed books."[16]

Alas, Washburn had also testified against Lt. Col. Oliver, thereby incurring the enmity of the Oliver faction, which vigorously fomented discontent among Greene's disgruntled passed-over captains. Soon Washburn himself was accused of embezzlement, and Greene found himself the target of scurrilous dispatches to Massachusetts newspapers like the following from the *Lawrence Daily Journal* of May 24, 1862:

> Some acts of Col. Greene seem both unbecoming a gentleman, and improper in an officer. The assertion that he is partially insane at times, is quite commonly and confidently made. That may or may not be true, but, if not, he is certainly exceedingly injudicious—in some matters vitally affecting the peace and prosperity of his command. . . . His idiosyncrasies, or ill fortune, or something worse, have engendered dissension, inimical to the fame and interests of the gallant Fourteenth. (transcribed in [Notebook], f. 41v)

Washburn was eventually convicted of technical improprieties in keeping regimental accounts, but since there was no evidence he profited from these the military court recommended leniency. When the War Office (where Oliver influence was powerful) ignored the recommendation and cashiered his protégé, Greene felt compelled to resign in protest. "No useful military service can reasonably be expected from a man, who has lost all his military illusions," he explained to the War Office on Sept 21, 1862, in requesting an honorable discharge. "The poetry is washed out of my nature, I have become altogether prosaic" ([Notebook], f. 55r). According to the regimental surgeon, their regiment's low-lying encampment had reaggravated the jaundice and gastritis that had plagued Greene in the Florida campaign decades earlier.

Greene left the army feeling, apparently with some justification, that "I have been the victim of an unmerited, unmerciful, and unrelenting persecution, on the part of influential members of the Republican party in Massachusetts."[17] But his

16 Greene, [Notebook], f. 61v. As the author of theoretical treatises on calculus, Greene took the subject very seriously, and his manuscript notes on pp. 405-540 of his copy of the U. S. Army *Ordnance Manual* including ballistics formulas and equations may be consulted at the New-York Historical Society.

17 Greene, [Notebook], f. 50r. Feeling persecuted as a Democrat, Greene became involved in a newspaper dispute in May 1863 with his former commanding officer General James S. Wadsworth, who

military misfortunes did not really diminish his pride that "in a moment of mistaken enthusiasm, I came three thousand miles to offer my sword in defence of a cause, with which, notwithstanding what has occurred, I am, and always shall be, closely identified" ([Notebook], f. 55r). And though for the rest of his life he was known as Col. Greene, his subsequent career indeed suggests that his transcendental enthusiasms were hardly dampened. He reprinted his treatise *Transcendentalism* for the fifth time in *The Blazing Star; with an Appendix Treating of the Jewish Kabbala* (Boston: Williams, 1872), in which he attacked anti-Semitism and invoked the authority of "St. Paul, that great Kabbalist," as well as that of Jacob Behmen, to argue that five- and six-pointed stars were occult symbols attesting to the possibility of eventual human perfection and "the interlacing of the Divine triangle with the human triangle" (*Star*, 11, 16). In his view the central message of the Kabbala sounds rather Emersonian:

> Man is so related to the universe, and the universe is so related to man, that the two are aspects and conditions of each other. Neither can exist without the other. That Kabbalistic form of man which is also the form of the universe is nothing other than the adaptation of the universe to the existence of man, and of man to the existence of the universe. (52)

And the echoes of "Self-Reliance" are certainly Emersonian. "The fundamental right of a man is the right to be himself; and this right is his sovereignty," thus "no man can *rightfully* abdicate his sovereignty," Greene insists. "Society exists for the individual, and not the individual for society. Institutions are made for man and not man for institutions" (26). Neither Judaism nor Christianity has always asserted "the claims of the human *subject*" so forcefully, according to Greene, as have the Hamitic religious traditions stemming from Egypt, fundamentally emotional but unfortunately occulted in modern civilization—a provocative thesis in view of the widespread denigration of Negroes as the offspring of Ham (13).

In his volume *Mutual Banking: Showing the Radical Deficiencies of the Present Circulating Medium and the Advantages of a Free Currency* (Boston: New England Labor Reform League, 1869), Greene's zeal burned brighter than ever as he expanded upon the economic reforms he had first proposed two decades earlier: "As the best way to protest slavery was to destroy mastership, so we would remove the necessity for usury laws by abolishing despotic money" (iii). He was President of the League in

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had run unsuccessfully as the Republican candidate for governor of New York in 1862 and who had been involved in a notable controversy with Gen. McClellan, whom Greene admired and would support against Lincoln as the Democratic candidate for the presidency in 1864. See Greene's Report in *The Defenses of Washington: How General Wadsworth Took Care of the Capital* ([New York?], n.d.); bound clippings from the *New York World*; and *Colonel Greene's Speech Before the McClellan Club of Ward Eleven, Boston, October 28, 1864* ([Boston?], 1864), Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

1872, then later studied law for a year at Harvard. Such speculations finally flowered in his collection *Socialistic, Communistic, Mutualistic, and Financial Fragments* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1875), where he opposed socialism and communism to his own brand of "mutualism." Feminism, he argued, should pin its hopes neither on free love nor temperance crusades nor ownership of property, but rather on women's status as workers. "The present injustice done to the working women, in the matter of different wages as compared with men's wages, would soon be cured, if the politicians were made dependent on women's votes" (23).

If this confident proclamation rings naively today, he was perhaps more prescient in defending the right of qualified free Negroes to vote while cautioning that as a matter of states' rights the franchise lay beyond the immediate power of radical Republicans in Congress to regulate and that ultimately freed slaves and former masters would have to work out their destinies together in the South, a process that few abolitionists were well qualified to foster. His unheeded mutual banking proposals eventually bore some posthumous fruit in the chartering of Massachusetts credit unions. By the time he died in Europe in 1878, Greene had become "the ablest native American anarchist writer and theorist on finance," claims James J. Martin in his study of anarchist thought *Man Against the State*.[18] *Mutual Banking* was reprinted into the middle of the twentieth century here and abroad. That this Transcendental reformer wound up a gentlemanly Brahmin Bakunin suggests that Civil War experiences hardly altered his optimistic Emersonian individualism, which had always been tempered by a strong Christian social conscience. "The error of regarding . . . human history as a continuous *fall* from a supposed original state of perfection that never existed instead of . . . continuous progress from an original state of disintegration and chaotic disorder towards such a state of perfection as is attainable by man, is one very hard to shake off," Greene concluded. He maintained to the last that "the golden age of humanity is not behind us, in the past: it is before us, in the future" (*Fragments*, 202).

Charles A. Dana, 1819–1897

Whether this golden age of humanity was in fact the Gilded Age was a question all the younger Transcendentalists confronted. If Greene was resolute in declining to equate the two, perhaps none has been accused of subsequent cynicism more than Charles A. Dana, whose economic views came to diverge sharply from Greene's. They had not

18 *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827–1908* (Dekalb, Illinois: Adrian Allen, 1953), 134. But see Philip Gura, "Beyond Transcendentalism: The Radical Individualism of William B. Greene," in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 471-496, for the best account of how Greene's social radicalism was always grounded in an idiosyncratic Christianity with both orthodox Calvinist and Transcendental aspects.

always done so, for in 1849, while the articles that Greene would collect in *Mutual Banking* (1850) were appearing in Worcester newspapers, Dana published his own series of articles in the *New York Tribune* and *The Spirit of the Age* espousing the theories of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. As a leading member of Brook Farm the young Dana seemed fully committed to communitarian ideals and sympathetic to economic radicalism like Greene's. It was thus a sore embarrassment to him in 1896 when as the editor of the *New York Sun* and perhaps the nation's most influential journalist he was campaigning stridently against William Jennings Bryan's free silver policies—and lo! his articles were suddenly reprinted by the anarchist thinker Benjamin R. Tucker as *Proudhon and His "Bank of the People," Being a Defence of the Great French Anarchist, Showing the Evils of a Specie Currency, and that Interest on Capital Can and Ought to be Abolished by a System of Free and Mutual Banking; a Series of Newspaper Articles Written by Charles A. Dana* (New York: B.R. Tucker, 1896). Tucker highlighted the parallel between Bryan's fervent crusade and the Transcendental background of Dana's youthful ebullitions by including Proudhon's *Solution of the Social Problem* and Greene's banking articles. Dana had specifically praised Proudhon's intellectual flexibility: "He cared less about having what he said today in perfect harmony with what he said yesterday than that it should be the expression of his present thought. This sort of honesty he preserves still, and, when he changes his mind or gets a new idea, is never afraid to say so."[19] Alas, Dana's public was not so charitable to the redoubtable editor, and he was crucified not upon a cross of gold but amid a chorus of resounding guffaws. Dying shortly afterward, he had the misfortune of ending his distinguished career a national laughing stock for apparently reneging on the earlier radicalism that had made him champion the French social theorist who famously proclaimed, "Property is theft."

But was Dana truly a Transcendental renegade? And if so, what role did the Civil War play in that transformation? He was born in New Hampshire in 1819 to a ne'er-do-well father; his immediate ancestry was unprepossessing though nine generations of New England forebears had included a few soldiers and even a general. Distantly related to socially prominent branches of the Danas, he was keenly conscious of his own family's decline in social status. His father's business failures left him unable to support the family, so young Dana spent his childhood shuttling from relatives in Vermont, where as a nine-year-old farmboy he taught himself Latin from an uncle's old grammar, to store-clerking for another uncle in Buffalo, New York, where on his own he picked up four more languages, including Seneca. The youth's imagination was kindled by the patriots of the American Revolution and our early presidents, General Andrew Jackson being a particular hero. When Canada's Patriot War of 1837 excited considerable sympathy in nearby Buffalo, Dana joined the city militia and was briefly tempted by a military career. But marked scholarly ambition coupled with an interest

19 *Proudhon's Solution of the Social Problem: Including Commentary and Exposition by Charles A. Dana and William B. Greene*, ed. and intro. Henry Cohen (New York: Vanguard, 1927), 8.

in theology prevailed, so at twenty he was off to Harvard, where he initially ranked seventh in his class. When finances and illness compelled him to leave after two years, he turned to communitarianism from motives that were not purely idealistic, for he suffered from eyestrain, could no longer afford college tuition, and instead acquired shares in Brook Farm as a practical way of educating himself.[20] His pragmatic streak was always recognized and respected by his fellow Brook Farmers, who delegated to him major responsibility in conducting their business affairs. No Hawthorne or Miles Coverdale, he was in some ways the community's Thoreau trying to carry out the Emersonian program of their leader George Ripley. Thoreauvian certainly was the passion for language study as the key to philosophic insight that gave Dana the nickname of "the Professor" as Brook Farm's ablest tutor in foreign tongues.

When his Transcendental Utopia collapsed, unlike Ripley (or Alcott at Fruitlands), Dana was not thrown into despair but, taking a soulmate from the wreckage to wife, migrated to New York to accept Horace Greeley's invitation to become managing editor and a shareholder of the *Tribune*. Dana's staunchly Unionist sympathies, expressed in repeated editorials proclaiming "Forward to Richmond!" eventually alienated Greeley, who, more disposed to let the erring sisters go, decided to let Dana go too. But he landed on his feet like a cat, for his writing had impressed Lincoln and Stanton. In 1862 he became Stanton's deputy, rising ultimately to assistant secretary of war. Stanton sent him west to observe the commanders there, for disturbing rumors about Grant's drinking and other generals' failings were circulating, and the secretary felt he needed reliable telegraph reports of their capacities. "An excellent horseman and athlete entirely without timidity or fear," Dana impressed staff there like his future biographer Major (later General) James Wilson as "far and away the best educated and most widely informed man that any of us had . . . ever met."[21]

Often in peril, Dana was commissioned a major of volunteers so that if captured he might be exchanged. To ward off marauders he carried a sidearm; his orderly was

20 In *The Sun Shines for All: Journalism and Ideology in the Life of Charles A. Dana* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), Janet E. Steele calls attention to the puzzling fact that Dana, who had left Buffalo to attend Harvard with savings of only $200 and resigned from the college because unable to pay expenses there on the order of $300 per annum, was somehow able to acquire three of Brook Farm's twenty-four shares. As Steele says, "this poses a mystery" (13). How was the impecunious student able "to borrow $1,500 . . . to buy three of its shares," as asserted by Candace Stone, *Dana and the Sun* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1938), 4? An obituary clipping from the *New York Daily Tribune*, October 18, 1896 (HUA HUG 300 [Dana, C. A.]), says that he "borrowed from the college fund, the college taking an insurance upon his life and receiving payment twenty years later," but it is difficult to imagine the college authorizing such a large loan for a Transcendental speculation like three shares in Brook Farm. For his unaided acquisition of Latin see Charles A. Rosebault, *When Dana Was THE SUN: A Story of Personal Journalism* (New York: McBride, 1931), 8.

21 James Harrison Wilson, *The Life of Charles A. Dana* (New York: Harper, 1907), 203.

shot beside him. In the Vicksburg campaign he worked night and day beside other soldiers building bridges and laying corduroy roads of logs through mudflats. There were many "rapid marches and hard-fought battles, in all of which Dana participated" (*Life*, 223). In the intervals between them he astonished fellow officers by identifying anything they read from an anthology; "his extraordinary memory for the great passages of both prose and poetry of all countries struck [Wilson] . . . as phenomenal" (*Life*, 288). At Chickamauga "a ten-pound shell came crashing through our staff," Dana recalled. "Never in any battle I had witnessed was there such a discharge of armor and musketry."[22] He was swept bodily off the battlefield with the bulk of the Union army; later his horse fell upon him. He was present at Spottsylvania to hear wounded men groaning at Bloody Angle and see a leg rising crazily from the mud. By the close of the war he had amassed ample experience with the grisly realities of combat as recorded in anecdotes like this:

> We found a wounded man there, a tall and fine-looking man, a Confederate. He stood up suddenly and said: "Kill me! Will someone kill me? I am in such anguish that it will be mercy to do it—I have got to die—don't let me suffer!" We sent for a surgeon, who said it was hopeless. He had been shot through the head so that it cut off the optic nerve of both eyes. . . . Before morning he died. (*Recollections*, 55)

After supervising the prosecution of John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirators, Dana returned to civilian life. Buying the lethargic *New York Sun* in 1868 with the help of moneyed Republican backers, he made it into a beacon of stylish writing and truly independent journalism that also made him a rich man. Rival journals conceded that it was "as entertaining as a well-written novel."[23] The three most important assets for a journalist, he claimed, were a comprehensive knowledge of Shakespeare, the U. S. Constitution, and the Bible. With a relish for fun and a keen sense of the ridiculous, Dana "was the discoverer and exploiter of a score of grotesque characters. . . . The great public would never have heard of Abe Slupsky or Pod Dismuke had it not been for the Sun."[24] For years he mocked the *Philadelphia Ledger* by ironically lauding its publisher George W. Childs as the "mortuary poet" of all the clichéd obituary verses that appeared in that paper. With lifelong leanings as a states-rights Democrat, he first supported Grant, whose virtues he admired and whose failings he minimized in reports to Stanton and a campaign biography. But after failing to secure a lucrative appointment as customs collector for the port of New York, he denounced the corruption rife in Grant's

22 Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War* (New York: Appleton, 1909), 115.

23 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, January 25, 1907 (clipping), HUA HUG 300 (Dana, C. A.).

24 Unsigned obituary notice from an unidentified newspaper, October 18, 1896, HUA HUG 300 (Dana, C. A.).

administration, opposed his reelection, and strenuously protested the fraudulency of Rutherford Hayes's election.

New York's elite social clubs, which Dana did not join, never subscribed to the two-penny *Sun*; its readership was largely urban working-class Democrats. On assuming control the editor announced that it would be "an uncompromising advocate of the laboring masses" (Steele, 96). His impoverished boyhood made him sympathetic to downwardly mobile artisans in an increasingly industrial society, and he drew on his old Associationist articles in Brook Farm's *Harbinger* to suggest such remedies as workingmen's cooperatives. His cosmopolitan linguistic abilities attuned him to the cultural diversity of the polyglot immigrant multitudes flooding the metropolis. The paper supported striking bakers, bricklayers, and sewing machine factory workers; its own printshop was always union, and to protect the interests of its typesetters it refused at considerable cost to install linotype machines. The *Sun* attacked political corruption so aggressively that it estranged his Transcendental collaborator George Ripley. But he defended politicians as a class and was not cynical about government, refusing for this reason to join George W. Curtis in his postwar crusade for a merit Civil Service, thereby estranging another fellow former Brook Farmer turned journalist. Although a notable scholar himself, Dana coined the term "mugwump" for what he saw as the elitist moral pretensions of such reformist intellectuals in political affairs; but his warm obituaries for both men paid generous tribute to the Transcendental heritage he shared with them. Disgruntled Republican politicos like Hamilton Fish, savaged by the *Sun*, "were wrong when they charged that the editor . . . did not believe in anything. There was a consistency in Dana's ideology that connected his efforts on behalf of Fourierism with his championing of the metropolitan working class in the Gilded Age" (Steele, 117).

In the late 1880s after Pulitzer's *World* coopted much of his working-class audience, Dana's lifelong sympathy for the rights of labor was supplemented by growing concern for the rights of employers, for he came to regard powerful corporations as economically useful and deserving fair treatment. Thus he disapproved of railroad strikers, harshly criticized the Haymarket rioters, and showed a hostility to "Socialists" and "Anarchists" that had hardly characterized him when as an editor of Greeley's *Tribune* and the *American Cyclopedia* he had solicited and translated articles by Marx and Engels. Increasingly the *Sun* voiced the views of so-called "swallow-tail Democrats." Though able to collect Chinese porcelain on a forty-acre Long Island estate with an arboretum for nature study, he continued in some respects Brook Farm's tradition of plain living and high thinking. Desiring his reporters to know the Bible so well that they could place any Scriptural quotation in its proper book, his religious beliefs were idiosyncratic. After flirting with "a Goethean indifference to all religion" at Harvard, his Transcendental religious sensibility evolved eclectically (Rosebault, 13). "I was brought up a Calvinist, then I became a Unitarian, then a Swedenborgian," he proclaimed in later years. "Now I don't belong to any church. Many of my best friends

are Catholics. I believe in the religion of humanity. I believe in a divine providence and a divine destiny for all things."[25] To the end of his days his chief amusement remained language study. He could defend the usage of "scrimmage" for "skirmish" with an etymological disquisition. Familiar with all the major European languages including the Scandinavian dialects and Russian, he often went abroad during his last fifteen years to hone them, quizzing natives in the vernacular about their lives and quoting Dante in an audience with the pope. Whereas other Gilded Age moguls were fond of bibulous card parties, Dana most enjoyed gathering half-a-dozen friends to read such classics in the original as the *Divine Comedy*, the Sagas, the Nibelungenlied, and the plays of Ibsen.

Regarded as "the most brilliant . . . and independent journalist I have ever known," one New York editor was described as "cynical in disposition, regarding every institution . . . man . . . and party with . . . satirical disrespect" (Wilson, 485). But those words do not describe Dana—they are in fact Dana's description of his rival James Gordon Bennett of the pro-slavery *Herald*. Faulting Bennett for lacking idealism suggests that Dana himself stopped short of cynicism—and certainly of cynicism due to his wartime experiences, which he always regarded as providing the most exciting days of his life. Reflecting in 1886 on the Civil War, he was clear that for ending slavery it was "worth all that it cost, enormous as the cost was" (Wilson, 473). "Dana's wartime experiences had little impact on his intellectual development," his most recent biographer cogently argues. "The war did not change Dana's ideas; it changed his life" by giving him a taste of power and access to men with even more (Steele, 59).

And for all the embarrassment caused in 1896 by the raking up of his youthful Transcendental beliefs, Dana had never repudiated them. Indeed, the year earlier he had written a lengthy and not unsympathetic essay about Brook Farm, gently mocking its pacifism and vegetarianism but distinguishing its communitarianism from Marxism and socialism while pointing to George Bancroft as a kindred spirit whom Transcendental sympathies led to democratic activism. The notion of Dana as a cynical renegade from idealism is due to the polemical effectiveness of those reprinting his earlier writings in 1896 and to later scholars uncritically echoing them, like Vernon L. Parrington, who called the postwar Dana a "disillusioned intellectual" and described his success at the *Sun* as "a cynical commentary on the changing spirit of America from the days of Brook Farm to the days of Mark Hanna" (quoted in Steele, xiii). But as his most recent biographer emphasizes, judicious consideration of Dana's whole career simply will "not support the conventional view of his post-Civil War disillusion and cynicism" (Steele, xiii).

25 Ibid.

Thomas W. Higginson, 1823–1911

T. W. Higginson observed that Dana was held "the best all-around man at Brook Farm," but not "quite so zealous or unselfish for the faith" as others (*Yesterdays*, 84). If Higginson's wartime services as colonel of a Negro regiment lacked the impact and effectiveness of Dana's, no one could ever fault his zeal in Transcendental causes. His militancy may have owed something to the example of two ancestors. His adventurous maternal grandfather, Captain Thomas Storrow, celebrated in family lore as "the Grenadier," was a British officer who took advantage of his opportunity as a prisoner of war during the Revolution to marry an American heiress before being killed in a duel. Higginson's paternal grandfather, Steven Higginson, privateered during the Revolution to found the family fortunes before they were diminished by the Embargo of 1812, served as an officer in the suppression of Shay's Rebellion, and in 1798 functioned more or less as the unofficial secretary of the navy. "I can only make life worthy by becoming a revolutionist," his grandson early concluded.[26] "Intellectual as well as moral armor must be right for I know I shall have to sustain a warfare" (Tuttleton, 24). Tall and athletic, he had acquired much of his intellectual armory by entering Harvard at thirteen the year Thoreau graduated, ranking second in his own class on graduation in 1841. After unfocused dreams of cultivating peaches, much as Thoreau would hoe beans, had led him to visit Brook Farm, he gravitated with some misgivings to Harvard's Divinity School, where he found the liberal theology of Convers Francis self-contradictory and disappointingly wishy-washy. Emerson was by far his greatest influence; yet Higginson's adventurous and rebellious spirit chafed at what he regarded as the movement's insufficient sense of evil.

His theological and political combativeness soon got him fired from his first Unitarian pastorate in Newburyport when he ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a Free-Soiler in 1848, but in 1852 Higginson was called to a more congenial pulpit in Worcester, a hotbed of abolitionism. Storming the Boston courthouse with a battering ram at the head of a mob trying unsuccessfully to free the imprisoned fugitive slave Anthony Burns, he received a cutlass wound in 1854, but the fact that a guard was killed only made him long for "one occasion worth bursting the door for—an opportunity to get beyond this boy's play" (Tuttleton, 36). That opportunity presented itself in Kansas where he led a party of armed Free-Soilers so accustomed to danger that "the excitement had become a necessary stimulant to them, and during . . . partial peace they confessed that they missed something. Women complained that there wasn't much to talk about."[27] In Kansas his acquaintance with John Brown ripened, and he

26 Quoted in James W. Tuttleton, *Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Twayne, 1978), 36.

27 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Letters and Journals*, ed. Mary Thacher Higginson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 143.

became the only one of the "Secret Six" abolitionists implicated in abetting Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry who defiantly remained to face possible Federal prosecution.

Thus despite his mild misgivings as a Christian minister, the outbreak of the Civil War hardly challenged Higginson's militant Transcendental beliefs; rather it promised to fulfil them. Drilling volunteers in Worcester was initially exciting but grew boring, and when he was offered the colonelcy of a Negro regiment of freed slaves in coastal South Carolina, he leapt at the chance even though "the Department of the South had . . . been described as a 'military picnic'" (*Letters*, 203). Quite justly, it would seem, for a West Point lieutenant "came out on the boat . . . with me, and then threatened to quit the service because he could not bring with him a basket of champagne." Higginson found this "rather presumptuous" (*Letters*, 192), but in fact the military backwater around occupied Beaufort, where some officers brought their wives and a contingent of Northern evangelists including women were busy with good works for freed slaves, suited his temperament quite well.

Not that he wished to bring his invalid wife or evangelize; indeed, part of the appeal army service held for him seems to have been as an escape from ministerial and marital responsibilities. Rather well supplied by sea, relatively settled camp life offered him an adventurous masculine holiday where he could indulge romantic fantasies of knight-errantry while casting an innocently homoerotic eye over the splendid physiques of the black soldiers he commanded.[28] When not admiring their physical manhood, he found the role of head counselor and disciplinarian for a group of exuberant children congenial. A better drillmaster than field commander, he disliked the aggressive forays of one fellow officer who was "an unequalled guerilla but has no system" (*Letters*, 207). "I do not think I ever had quite so proud a day," he exulted on January 19, 1863, after "marching my whole regiment through Beaufort & back. They did march splendidly, as all admit." (Of course, as Bell Irvin Wiley notes, throughout the war self-interest made colonels more prone to exaggerate the merits of their regiments than were general officers.) Outperforming white troops at parade ground maneuvers looms if anything larger in his memoirs than matching their record in battle. "You know James Lowell says nothing is as good as Turtle Soup except mock turtle," he confided to his journal with wry self-knowledge, "& perhaps nothing is so stirring as real war except make believe war."[29]

To be sure, there were encounters with the enemy encamped across a bay, who occasionally violated the normal understanding that no shots were to be exchanged between pickets. There were maritime expeditions to capture Jacksonville, Florida,

28 See Christopher Looby, "'As Thoroughly Black as the Most Faithful Philanthropist Could Desire': Erotics and Race in Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment*," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997), 71-115.

29 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters*, ed. Christopher Looby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 88.

and Charleston, South Carolina (both failures), and the occasional foray up rivers to free and recruit slaves and seize Confederate goods, too unproductive to please his superiors. "At any time by going into the outskirts we can have a skirmish, which is nothing but fun," Higginson felt, "but when night closes in . . . there sometimes steals into my mind . . . that most sickening of all sensations the anxiety of a commander" (*Complete Journal*, 113). That very feeling, however, may actually have emboldened him personally, for as historians studying the reactions of Civil War soldiers to combat have noted, officers' "concern for their command allowed them less occasion to think of their own fears" than enlisted men had.[30] On the Jacksonville expedition his lieutenant colonel, otherwise worthless, received three minor flesh wounds, which Higginson and his major envied and wished evenly redistributed among the trio. "Nothing can ever exaggerate the fascination of war," Higginson felt. "I hardly ever hear the crash of a gun without recalling instantly the sharp shots that spilled down from the bluffs at us, along the St. Mary's" (*Complete Journal*, 102). The Charleston expedition, where his indecisive leadership proved disappointing, was partly redeemed when a fragment bruised him so severely that he requested a month's furlough to recover.[31] After his resignation, a wrecked ship beached at Newport would remind him of "that look of stately pleading helplessness I have seen in a dead soldier" (*Letters*, 247). "Somehow I never feel any impulse to fire a shot," he confessed, but "the death of a man does not seem to affect my sensibilities in the slightest degree; it does not *reach* me, when it happens though in advance I have a nervous desire to guard against it" (*Complete Journal*, 121). He concluded that courage in battle was easily achieved. "There are a thousand things that require far more daring; the reason being that the danger does not come home so vividly to the senses; there is the noise & the smoke, & then besides, no matter how loud the bullets may whiz, so long as you are not hit, they don't mean you, & after they do mean you, it's too late to be frightened" (*Complete Journal*, 95).

Partly for such reasons, death figures minimally in his memoir *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1870) although we learn that people standing near him were killed. On disembarking in the sea islands Higginson found himself in a tropically luxuriant landscape that never ceased to fascinate him. Its effect was disorienting. In *Nature* Emerson had remarked how a simple change of scenery like that afforded by a railroad

30 Joseph Allen Frank and George A. Reaves, "Emotional Responses to Combat," in *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*, ed. Michael Barton and Larry A. Logue (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 393.

31 Higginson's growing and justifiable sense of his military shortcomings as his tour of duty wore on, glossed over to some extent in *Army Life*, is forcefully emphasized by Anna Mary Wells, *Dear Preceptor: The Life and Times of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 175-184, and to a lesser extent by Tilden G. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 284-295. His Charleston fiasco is completely ignored by Howard N. Meyer, *Colonel of the Black Regiment: The Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Norton, 1967).

car's window could bolster idealism by making people seem "wholly detached from all relation to the observer, and seen as apparent, not substantial beings."[32] Now standing on the Carolina shore Higginson was experimenting at viewing the world upside down through his own legs as Emerson had proposed. Even when the terrain had grown familiar, nights brought back its novelty:

> The darker they were, the more clearly it was our duty to visit the pickets. The paths that had grown so familiar by day seemed a wholly new labyrinth by night; and every added shade of darkness seemed to shift and complicate them all anew, till at last man's skill grew utterly baffled, and the clew must be left to the instinct of the horse. Riding beneath the solemn starlight, or soft, gray mist, or densest blackness, the frogs croaking, the strange "chuchwill's widow" droning his ominous note above my head, the mocking-bird dreaming in music, the great Southern fireflies rising to the tree-tops, or hovering close to the ground like glow-worms, till the horse raised his hoofs to avoid them; through pine woods and cypress swamps, or past sullen brooks, [or] white tents, or the dimly seen huts of sleeping negroes; down to the glimmering shore, where black statues leaned against trees or stood alert in the pathways;—never, in all the days of my life, shall I forget the magic of those haunted nights.[33]

Higginson's experience here calls to mind Thoreau's experiences returning to his hut by darkness in *Walden*'s chapter "The Village" or floating about the pond at night fishing for cosmic harmonies—a not inappropriate comparison since Higginson was among the first and most ardent admirers of Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. He cultivated the author's acquaintance, found *Walden* "crammed with fine observation and thought . . . rising into sublimity," and was pleased to learn that Thoreau liked his 1862 essay "Snow" in the *Atlantic*; in 1864 he was startled to realize how closely his own nature-writing resembled Thoreau's.[34] But in this exotic locale "Nature seemed but a mirage, and not the close and intimate associate I had before known" (*Army Life*, 109).

Thus the entire book is suffused by a sense of dreamlike insubstantiality that threatens to submerge the details of army life, make them seem trivial on a cosmic scale. "Every grove in that blue distance appears enchanted ground," Higginson felt as he gazed at hostile lines on the opposite shore, "and yonder loitering gray-back leading

32 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 34.

33 *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, intro. Howard Mumford Jones (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1966), 106.

34 See Tuttleton, *Higginson*, 31; Higginson, *Letters*, 105 and 114; Looby, "Introduction," *Complete Journal*, 6.

his horse to water in the farthest distance, makes one thrill with a desire to hail him, to shoot at him, to capture him, to do anything to bridge this inexorable dumb space that lies between" (*Army Life*, 115). Are the Confederates men or wraiths? The root impulse here appears to be a desire to assure himself of the enemy's reality. In "Experience" Emerson had confessed that a Transcendental mindset sometimes left him groping for satisfying human contact. "Let us treat the men and women well," he had plaintively urged, "treat them as if they were real: perhaps they are" (Emerson, 479). Many episodes in Higginson's book suggest that he likewise had to struggle to convince himself that his Carolina experiences were not mild and benign hallucinations. "How like a dream it all seems," he exclaimed after finding himself in civilian life again. "That I was in it myself seems the dreamiest thing of all; I cannot put my hand upon it in the least, and if someone convinced me in five minutes some morning, that I never was there at all, . . . I should read my own letters and think they were someone's else."[35] Writing *Army Life* was an effort to lay hands on a dream.

Walden's portrayal of Thoreau's claims to be "not less but more heroic" (in Milton's phrase) is in many ways a running mock-heroic joke rising into explicit anti-military satire only occasionally as in the description of the Middlesex militia drilling while Thoreau hoes beans Homerically. For all Higginson's seriousness about his central military goals, his dominant mood in this campaign sometimes seems to have been amusement, and the few deaths recorded seem less vivid than delightful anecdotes like his colored troops' attack on a line of washing mistaken for enemy tents. Indeed, for all his praise for their competence and courage, it is their naive but exuberant outlook on life that most appeals to him. Their religious sensibility particularly enthralled him, to the point where he devotes a chapter to analyzing Negro spirituals. "Their philosophizing is often the highest form of mysticism," he concluded, so "they are all natural transcendentalists" (*Army Life*, 41). Higginson evidently wants us to believe that he simply exchanged the intelligentsia of Boston, Concord, and Worcester for a duskier set of liberal undogmatic believers. "I see the gradual change in them," he noted regretfully toward the end of his tour of duty, "as parents watch their children growing up and miss the droll speeches and the confiding ignorance of childhood. Sometimes it comes over me with a pang that they are growing more like white men,—less naïve and less grotesque" (*Army Life*, 183). Were his black transcendental mystics at risk of becoming stolid, rational Unitarians?

One of the most striking episodes in the book describes Higginson's growing desire to reconnoiter enemy lines on the opposite shore a mile away, "to cross the barrier of dusk, and see whether it were men or ghosts who hovered round those dying embers." It led him to take a midnight swim for that purpose, a mission that his lieutenant might have deemed as fanciful "as a brief personal reconnaissance to the planet Jupiter."

35 Quoted in Mary Thacher Higginson, *Thomas Wentworth Higginson: The Story of His Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 262.

Leaving his startled pickets behind on a pier where the channel narrowed to three hundred yards, he did "not remember . . . a greater sense of exhilaration than when I slipped noiselessly into the placid water, and struck out . . . for the opposite shore" where the Rebel pickets were stationed. That was their ground, he felt, "but the water was my ground, where I, too, had been at home from boyhood." Approaching the Rebel outpost, he began to wonder about his "unfortunate head." It "had always annoyed me . . .from a mere animal bigness, with no commensurate contents . . . and now I detested it more than ever." Fearing it might give him away by breaking water, he fantasized about discarding it like the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow or "Saint Somebody with his head tucked under his arm. Plotinus was less ashamed of his whole body than I of this inconsiderate and stupid appendage."

He got near enough to see and hear the Rebel sentinels moving dimly about at their post but, having ascertained their positions and hearing dogs bark, decided to swim back to his own outpost, which had receded into invisibility. With the stars to guide him he had at first no worries, but then he encountered rushes unlike anything near his outpost and realized that either the changing tide was sweeping him in the wrong direction toward mudflats or that, still worse, he had lost his bearings and was heading back to the Rebel shore.

> Either alternative was rather formidable. I can distinctly remember that for about one half-minute the whole vast universe appeared to swim in the same watery uncertainty in which I floated. I began to doubt everything, to distrust the stars, the line of low bushes for which I was wearily striving, the very land on which they grew, if such visionary things could be rooted anywhere.

His nightmarish sense of being lost left him feeling "as if one's own position were all right, but the place looked for had been preternaturally abolished out of the universe." Despite his normally rational temperament he "could at that moment see my way to a condition in which one might become insane in an instant. It was as if a fissure opened somewhere, and I saw my way into a mad-house; then it closed, and everything went on as before." He must keep his wits, he realized: "Imagination had no business here. That way madness lay." Then he recognized a light as coming from a house quite distant from the outpost he had been trying to regain, struck out with renewed determination, and managed to get ashore without being shot by the dutiful sentinel confronting his naked colonel emerging unexpectedly from the water (*Army Life*, 116-123).

This adventure is the first that Higginson mined from his Carolina experiences for publication, appearing in the *Atlantic* in 1864 as the essay "A Night in the Water" (*Atlantic Monthly* 14 [October 1864]: 393-399). A reader encountering it there might be tempted to read it as symbolically exploring the limits of Transcendental solipsism.

Slipping into the tranquil water leaving his sentinels looking like "black statues dream-like at their posts," Higginson has the exhilarating sense of "floating in some concave globe, some magic crystal of which I was the enchanted centre." His oceanic immersion seems to breed a Whitmanesque sense of merging with the cosmos, and his fantasies about discarding his head as useless suggest a temptation to renounce rationalism for visionary experience. What began as an effort to ascertain the reality of ghostlike enemy soldiers stops just short of that as Higginson decides that he cannot risk breaking out of the magic bubble that encloses him by actually contacting them.

But trying to regain the "phantom-line" of bushes on his own shore, he "found it difficult to keep my faith steady and my progress true." Indeed, he temporarily panics with the loss of his bearings on external reality. Feeling himself on the verge of slipping into madness, he saves himself from drowning only by resisting seductive fusion with an imagined universe and doggedly clinging to rationality as the only way to regain *terra firma*. "There was now no reason why I should not reach land," he gratefully realizes at last. "I could dismiss all fear." But the stolid sentinel who after receiving the password presents arms to his naked colonel seems amusingly over-literal and unreasonably reasonable in failing to grasp the inapplicability of this military ritual to a nocturnal encounter with an officer sans uniform. When Higginson's clothes are returned to him, he is surprised to find no sign of dawn "despite the uncounted periods that must have elapsed," but then looking at his watch realizes that "my night in the water had lasted precisely one hour." As Thoreau loses track of time sitting naked in his doorway after bathing in Walden, Higginson too seems to have flirted with mystical experience and emerged the sounder for it after returning to normal reality, for a few hours easy sleep find him waking next morning "in excellent condition."

Dorothy C. Broaddus interprets the episode as dramatizing "Higginson's crisis of faith in the Union cause in general, in the ability to endure his situation as commander of ex-slaves," and argues that although "beginning as a dream-like product of Higginson's desire," it "ends as a nightmare. Higginson's attempts to conclude it humorously fail."[36] But it seems implausible that Higginson felt radical ambivalence about the war or that he would have published such reflections as a separate essay in the *Atlantic* during wartime if he had, and Broaddus slights the effectiveness of his humorous conclusion in precluding any sense of lingering nightmare the next morning. Challenged by his own sentinel, the naked Higginson rises "at full length out of the shallow water, to show myself a man and a brother," wryly twisting the famous abolitionist emblem of a kneeling slave in manacles asking, "Am I not a man and a brother?" into a rationale for flaunting his sex.

36 Dorothy C. Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric: Writing High Culture in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 120-121. But see Caleb Crain, "The Monarch of Dreams," *The New Republic*, 224, no. 22 (May 28, 2001): 46, for the humorous touch in Higginson's mock-lofty sexual display.

Just after the resignation of his command for medical reasons, the world of books felt foreign, Higginson confessed; he dreamed of leading men in some large industrial enterprise like a mill or a railroad. He was drawn back to literature by the task of editing the *Harvard Memorial Biographies* in honor of alumni who gave their lives in the war. It took him about a year to solicit the requisite biographical sketches of ninety-five fallen alumni, and he wound up writing a dozen himself. Though some of his sketches are surprisingly frank in conceding their subjects' lack of pre-war achievement, their sacrificial deaths are invariably enveloped in a haze of idealism that seems perfectly sincere:

> Those of us whose fortunate lot it was to enlist in the army during that magic epoch of adventure which has just passed by, will never again find in life a day of such strange excitement as that when they first put on uniforms and went into camp. . . . The transformation seemed as perfect as if, by some suddenly revealed process, one had learned to swim in air, and were striking out for some new planet. The past was annihilated, the future was all. Now that dimly visioned future has itself become a portion of the past . . . and, after all that seeming metamorphosis, the survivors still find themselves with their feet upon the familiar earth, and pursue once more the quiet paths they left. The *auréole* is vanished from their lives, but it still lingers round the heads of the fallen. No time, no change, can restore them to the old ways, or take them from the enchanted sphere in which they henceforth dwell.[37]

Noteworthy is the way in which several metaphors from *Army Life*'s episode—swimming, striking out for a distant planet, regaining footing—are here applied to returning veterans and the fallen, with the suggestion that in failing to return to 'familiar earth" as Higginson did, the fallen, in their "enchanted sphere" transcending normalcy, can be envied. Far from doubting the value of his military experiences recorded in *Army Life*, upon rereading the book after its publication he was conscious of "a sort of despair at the comparative emptiness of all other life after that" (quoted in M. Higginson, 282).

As a sometime politician, editor, and reformer on many fronts from women's rights to state-socialized industry, Higginson resumed the activism that Transcendentalism had first kindled in him, though perhaps with less belligerence. If "before the war he never missed a good fight," one biographer has said with some exaggeration, "after it he never joined one."[38] He admitted that after the Civil War "compunction" dispelled his

37 *Harvard Memorial Biographies*, ed. T. W. Higginson, 2 vols. (Boston: Sever and Francis, 1866–67), 1:iii.

38 In his "Thomas Wentworth Higginson," in *The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Modern Language Association, 1984), 197, Howard N. Meyer rightly

desire to fish and collect insects, but here he was simply following the example of Thoreau, whose influence had always kept him from gunning for bird specimens (*Yesterdays*, 26). His voluminous postwar literary output attested to continuing Transcendental sympathies. Recognizing in 1903 that the Civil War and the new theories of evolution had thrown "all the so-called transcendental philosophy into temporary shade," he nonetheless labored manfully as a critic to highlight the contributions of the movement for what he foresaw as a revival of interest. In the history of American literature that he co-authored, Emerson remained for him "the controlling force if not the creator of modern American thought."[39] Consistently championing the then neglected Thoreau against those who like Lowell saw him as a pallid imitator of Emerson, he was rightly confident that history would do more justice to his genius. Although he viewed Bronson Alcott as largely fraudulent—perhaps justly?—Higginson's biography *Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1884), evincing particular rapport with her feminist strain of Transcendental activism, staunchly defended her, consolidating her reputation by uncovering valuable manuscript material.

Like Greene's and Dana's, his affiliation with the movement had always been hedged with reservations; if it attenuated, that is due more to his openness to novel influences than to infidelity to the old. The Civil War did little to challenge his core beliefs, for as he recognized, "it is part of my usual lucky star that this regiment has seen less of the joyless monotony of war—of its dirty and dreary stagnation—and also of the arduous life of marches—than is usually the case" (*Complete Journal*, 128). In 1863 while encamped in South Carolina he received a letter from his "scholar" Emily Dickinson. "War feels to me an oblique place," the poet told him, probably not realizing that her dear preceptor might have said much the same.[40]

James K. Hosmer, 1834–1927

Indeed, the end of his tour of duty in Beaufort gave Higginson leisure to consult other recently published Civil War memoirs, checking out the competition, so to speak, while expanding his own narrow experience of war vicariously. "I have read Hosmer's & Hepworth's books & think the former far superior," he wrote on January 20, 1864.

criticizes this formula as "too neat" but misattributes it to Edelstein whereas it was actually coined by Wells, 248. See Meyer, "Higginson," 202-203, for a judicious summary of Higginson's mature reflections on Transcendentalism stressing that despite later reservations about some figures and the movement as a whole, he remained loyal to its central commitments.

39 Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Henry Walcott Boynton, *A Reader's History of American Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 174, 168.

40 Emily Dickinson, *Letters*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:423.

"It is simple, modest, graphic, & gives the rarest of points of view, that of a cultivated man in the ranks" (*Complete Journal*, 184). Since James Kendall Hosmer's *The Color-Guard: Being a Corporal's Notes of Military Service in the Nineteenth Army Corps* (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Co., 1864) was published only that same year, Higginson procured his copy with remarkable alacrity. He was probably indebted for it to his brother Stephen in Deerfield, Massachusetts, whose pastor Hosmer had been prior to his enlistment. Higginson and Hosmer were akin in many ways, among them longevity. Indeed, although the latter is not listed in any of the reference works on Transcendentalism, there is good reason for regarding him too as a neglected minor disciple of "the Newness" with claims to be the last surviving Transcendentalist; so an ampler biographical sketch seems in order.

Born in Northfield, Massachusetts, on January 29, 1834, Hosmer was raised in Buffalo, N.Y., where his father, the Rev. Dr. George W. Hosmer, had been called to minister to the first Unitarian congregation established there. At Harvard the senior Hosmer had been a contemporary of Emerson's, and as Unitarian ministers they were to some extent associated as young men.[41] Lidian Emerson's family also knew the Rev. Hosmer well enough so that in 1835 her husband wrote to Northfield inquiring whether Lidian's nephew might board with him for a spell. George Hosmer had been born in Concord, and his family was related to the numerous Hosmers scattered throughout the vicinity, a clan that both Emerson and Thoreau regarded as typifying the local yeomanry. Young James Hosmer spent a year in Concord with an aunt. He heard rumors of a strange man who lived in a wigwam, set forest fires, and had a library of a thousand books no copy of which had ever been sold. Sent to the Thoreaus with a message one day, at the door he met this odd character, "with hair which looked as if it had been dressed with a pine cone." While Thoreau deliberated the message, Hosmer peeped curiously around him "hoping I might get a glimpse of that queer library of one book duplicated one thousand times." He was struck by "a certain slow hesitation and peculiar intonation which made me think of Emerson," in whose garden he often played with other children.[42] As a child he visited Brook Farm, for his father was an old

41 See *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume Seven, 1807–1844*, ed. Eleanor M. Tilton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 247-248, for evidence that George Hosmer and Emerson were intimate enough to contemplate reciprocal child-care arrangements.

42 James Kendall Hosmer, *The Last Leaf: Observations during Seventy-Five Years of Men and Events in America and Europe* (New York: Putnam, 1912), 235-236. Although Hosmer gives his extended year's residence in Concord as 1844, this anecdote cannot have taken place then, for Thoreau's *A Week* was not published until 1849. Either the date is wrong, the anecdote is apocryphal, or the seventy-eight-year-old Hosmer conflated it with details from later visits to Concord relatives. But we have no reason to doubt his expressed enthusiasm for Thoreau's pioneering Transcendental nature-writing, which led him to throw a stone on his cairn at Walden, "to be followed by still others in grateful admiration if the opportunity comes to me" (237).

friend of George Ripley. James Hosmer always treasured his glimpses of Hawthorne there and in Concord, for as a boy he devoured Hawthorne's children's stories. Through his father's duties as a trustee of Antioch College the boy also came under the spell of Horace Mann, of whom he retained "a vivid picture, his stately height dominating my inches, as I stood in his presence . . . every fibre charged with a magnetism which caused a throb in the bystander" (*Leaf*, 68).

At the age of seventeen Hosmer matriculated on probation at Harvard, boarding with his uncle the Rev. James A. Kendall. The good influences of that university-approved lodging sans tobacco and alcohol did not keep him from minor infractions. He was censured once for unexcused absences, and on December 20, 1852, the faculty voted "that *Hayes* and *Hosmer*, Sophomores, be privately admonished, one of them having copied a Latin exercise from the other."[43] Like Thoreau he joined the Institute of 1770, a campus literary society. In a Hasty Pudding theatrical he figured as the lover of a giantess played in drag by Phillips Brooks, struggling to lure the ear of his inamorata low enough to woo her. The Transcendental enthusiast Franklin Sanborn was among his classmates, as was Alexander Agassiz. Emerson was now famous, so other students were eager to join Hosmer on twenty-mile walks from Cambridge to Concord to meet the great man, who always received friends of his old colleague's son hospitably.

> Those of us who sought him had been readers of *Nature* or the poems, of *Representative Men*, and of *English Traits*. For my own part while I did not always understand his thought, much of it was entering into my very fibre. In particular the essays on self-reliance and idealism were moulding my life. We approached him with some awe, "If he asks me where I live," said one of our number, a boy who was slain in the Civil War, "I shall tell him I can be found at No. So-and-so of such an alley, but if you mean to predicate concerning the spiritual entity, I dwell in the temple of the infinite and I breathe the breath of truth."

On one visit Emerson yielded the floor to Alcott, who gave an oracular discourse, claiming that "there was probably a secondary sense in every line of Shakespeare, which would become apparent to all such as attained the necessary fineness of soul. Perhaps we should find in this the gospel of a new Covenant in which Shakespeare would be the great teacher and leader." Their heads spinning, the boys had the sense that "adumbrations of a new supernatural figure were looming in the conception of the world." Literary criticism as practiced in Harvard classrooms had nothing to compare with this séance "as Emerson sat with us, silently absorbing the mystic speculation" (*Leaf*, 248-249).

43 Harvard University, Faculty Records, XIV (1850–1855), HUA III.5.l5, f. 185.

Ranked forty-first among eighty-three seniors, Hosmer was chosen their class poet for Commencement in 1855. A proud Concord relative asked him to give a poetry reading to which Emerson and other neighbors were invited. Afterward the great man benignly said little about the undergraduate stanzas an embarrassed Hosmer had rolled off but rhapsodized privately with him for half an hour about a new poet whose work he had just discovered named Walt Whitman. At the Commencement dinner the excited class poet listened eagerly as his father's friend Dr. William G. Eliot, a pioneer of Unitarianism in the midwest, outlined "the audacities which . . . announced his program" for establishing a university in St. Louis.[44]

Training at the Divinity School followed. Though most faculty felt divinity students should "stick to their Hebrew," they organized a boat club in which Hosmer, pulling bow oar and steering, found more "rapturous pleasure" than in "hermeneutics and homilies." Hearing of this enterprise, "T. W. Higginson exclaimed that he now had some hope for the school" (*Leaf*, 222). Nor had literary pursuits lost their appeal. Harvard's assistant librarian John Sibley also boarded at Rev. Kendall's. In his diary for 1857 he recorded with pleasure the performance there by Hosmer, his cousins, and a few friends of "two short theatrical pieces," which were "acted with much success. One of them was taken from 'A pretty piece of business.'"[45] By rejecting a poem submitted to the *Atlantic* in 1857 James Russell Lowell induced the would-be bard to hang his harp on the willows for good, but his prose enjoyed more success. He had already demonstrated a burgeoning historical vocation on a Fourth of July outing by doubting the story of a drunk on an excursion boat who claimed to have been a sailor on Old Ironsides. Hosmer expressed judicious skepticism so strongly, one friend recalled, that the old salt was "threatening to throw him overboard," and Hosmer's friends were hard put to prevent this.[46] His first review article, "The Assyrian Empire," appeared in the *North American Review* in April 1860, arguing that recent historical scholarship confirmed the essential truth of Biblical accounts but went far beyond them in painting an edifying portrait of this luxurious but decadent civilization.[47]

Two review articles in *The Christian Examiner* followed in short order. "Analogues of Satan" ransacked comparative religion in pursuit of the Devil. Realizing that now

44 James K. Hosmer, "Washington University in its Early Days," *Washington University Record* (February 1923): 6.

45 John Langdon Sibley, [Diary], March 13, 1857, <http://hul.harvard.edu/huarc/refshelf/Sibley.htm>, (accessed June 10, 2010).

46 Edward S. Waters, Harvard AB 1859, Law Librarian, in "Report of the Proceedings . . . at the Dinner given Dr. James K. Hosmer, . . . January 29, 1904," HUA HUG 300 (Hosmer, J. K.), typescript, 17.

47 "The Assyrian Empire," *North American Review* 90, no. 187 (April 1860): 21-38. For attributions of Hosmer's early anonymous review articles, see Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Research Keys to the American Renaissance: Scarce Indices of The Christian Examiner, The North American Review* . . . (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1967), 74, 151.

"there is an intelligent class . . . with whom he has lost his ancient importance," Hosmer ranged from primitive demonologies to higher creeds exploring whether a principle of dualism was universal in religion.[48] It was not, he decided, and with the advance of civilization the Devil of hell-fire Christianity supremely incarnated by Milton had to yield to a figure from "a still more subtile brain," albeit hardly devout, "the mocking spectre of Mephistopheles" ("Analogues," 40). Two months later in "Three Ancient Systems of Intuitive Morality," Hosmer hitched his wagon to the Kantian star while arguing that Aristotle, Cicero, and Confucius all anticipated Transcendentalism's stress on universal moral intuition, failing to develop it so fully as Kant because (like Aristotle in his denial of an afterlife) they lacked enlightenment from "that Spirit, the highest and best which the world has known."[49]

On July 13, 1860, Hosmer accepted a call from the First Congregational Parish of Deerfield to be their minister, hoping "to help them live the true life, as made known by God in the deepest soul of man," dutifully adding, "and the gospel of his Son."[50] After consultation between the pastor-elect and a church committee, his ordination in September had a distinctly Unitarian flavor, for the two main sermons were delivered by his father and the Rev. James Freeman Clarke, secretary of the American Unitarian Association and a noted Transcendental sympathizer, who also gave the charge to the parish. Hosmer shouldered his pulpit duties conscientiously. Shortly after his installation wild whoops emanating from woods on nearby Pocumtuck gave rise to rumors that either Deerfield's Indians had returned or a wild man had taken up residence there. An alarmed search party scoured the area and found "the young minister, engaged in elocutionary exercises, forgetful of the fact that the mountainside might act as a sounding board."[51]

Two years later, explaining to his flock that he had "enlisted for nine months service in the army," Hosmer requested a leave of absence for that period, which they granted. The young minister now addressed his church as "the Unitarian Parish Deerfield," so he completed a redefinition of denominational allegiance underway since the previous incumbent.[52] He evidently had quite an impact, for on learning next spring of his illness coupled with his brother's death, they wrote with "constant gratitude and abiding love" assuring him of their "pride and joy that we have learned from numerous sources that

48 "Analogues of Satan," *The Christian Examiner*, 5th ser., 7 (July 1860): 19.

49 "Three Ancient Systems of Intuitive Morality," *The Christian Examiner*, 5th Series, 11, no. 133 (September 1862): 189.

50 J. K. Hosmer to Dr. R. N. Porter, July 13, 1860, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

51 Ralph Sheldon Hosmer, "Dr. James Kendall Hosmer," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, Mass.), undated obituary clipping in Minneapolis Public Library Special Collections and Archives.

52 J. K. Hosmer to the Committee of the Unitarian Parish Deerfield, September 12, 1862, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

the pure, useful, and unselfish life, with which we are so familiar, has been continued amid the hardships, temptations & Sorrows of the camp, winning the affection of every companion in arms."[53]

Resolved to share his experiences with a larger audience than his congregation, Hosmer published his memoir officially in 1864—conceivably his publishers even had it out earlier for the Christmas book trade. Having urged the Union cause from the pulpit as "the cause of civilization and liberty," he decided he ought to practice what he preached, especially since as a bachelor with no family to support he was better able than many fellow townsmen to go. Ancillary motives were "a love for adventure," a "desire to gain new robustness from the exposure," and "something of a military spirit" that made him long to add to his far-flung Hosmer clan's extensive record of service "in every honorable war since the settlement of the country" (*Color-Guard*, 9-10).

Starting on November 23, 1862, his book follows the form of a diary he kept like Higginson throughout his campaign. Arriving in New Orleans, he was offered a staff clerkship by General Banks, which after a brief trial he declined, preferring to remain with his brother Ed in their close-knit company. Illness soon ravaged it. Nursing many men in hospital, within two months of their arrival Hosmer had the painful job of watching his nineteen-year-old brother, a sergeant, die of fever. "He sent you no messages of love," he informed his family. "I wish it had been otherwise; but the angels' arms were around him ere we were aware" (*Color-Guard*, p 60). He was consoled by the fact that his brother looked "beautiful in death! The ghastliness of the fever is in great part gone." Throughout the military funeral as heretofore,

> the passage comes into my mind, from Henry IV. I think it is, "I saw young Harry with his armor on; beautiful as the herald Mercury now lighted on some heaven-kissing hill!" Something like that, I believe; so lithe of limb, so free and strong and jocund; a young winged god of the Greeks! I would rather have had him fall in battle; but I know him to be just as much a brave martyr to exposure and faithful work in the cause . . . (*Color-Guard*, 66).

Shakespeare seems to have done as much as Scripture to alleviate Hosmer's grief.

Throughout the book Transcendental aestheticization like this helps keep the horrors of battle at bay while high-minded moralizing deplores the fact that "our New-England men" are not immune to the temptation of looting. "Ruskin says, somewhere, that a picture, and, I believe, a natural landscape, has a shut-up, stifled look, unless there is water in it," so prospective camp sites are evaluated with respect to aesthetic as much as military criteria (*Color-Guard*, 104-105). Tiring marches are relieved by sight-

53 Warrant for Parish Meeting, March 9, 1863, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

seeing as one charming village gives way to another until in Thibodeaux "the climax of beauty was reached," and he admires one especially stately plantation mansion "as if I looked at it, not through a league or so of space, but through time, and beheld the Forest of Ardennes or the Grove of Cicero by the Fibrenus" (*Color-Guard*, 118, 113). Daylight encounters brought to mind plates of "the old Dutch painter . . . Wouvermans' skirmishes,—the same confusion and panic, a similar landscape, a lovely summer's day," while when the camp prepared at night for a dawn attack, "the forest was full of Rembrandt pictures" (*Color-Guard*, 202-203, 190). If we may believe Hosmer, such aesthetic sensitivity was general in his company, which evidently enrolled ardent Wordsworthians. "Certainly, O outer world!" he apostrophizes after quoting "Tintern Abbey," "with a smile and deep eloquence of beauty do you glide into the soldier's musings, and steal away their sharpness" (*Color-Guard*, 199).

After covering fifty miles in three days "we felt better, and had our senses open to the beauty of the road" when day broke, and "as we sweep along the road toward the firing, the day each minute becomes more and more beautiful." On the field at Franklin the engagement reached "the sad dignity of a pitched battle," which turned out to be a "bloody strife" where one brigade lost four hundred men. Ugly sights abounded like "the ghastly head of a young lieutenant . . . dying upon his stretcher," the "writhing wounded" in the hospital, or the "unintelligent" features of rebel prisoners, "the brutish face of that deteriorating class, the white trash." Emerson had declared that Nature could reflect any mood, so Hosmer looks for a change in "outward circumstances to make them correspond. . . . But no: it was a perfect summer day . . . with a cool, sweet wind coming from the woods where the rebels had been hidden . . . green and fresh and innocent, as if they were only a haunt for fairies." He had wished that his brother Ed could have met his death in battle like this, "with ardors of the conflict shining forth upon his face; but it is more dreadful than I had believed; and I thank God that we could lay his fair young body in the grave undesecrated" (*Color-Guard*, 132-135).

Under orders to forage for his company, he was mortified when another unit arrested them for pillaging a plantation. He feared that word would reach his faithful parishioners. Set free after a night in durance, he came to look back on the episode "with pleasure, as helping to round out my military experiences" (*Color-Guard*, 153). Now a swarthy and travel-stained veteran, he was startled to find that by such expedients as plundering onions, tapping Southern sugar-casks, and helping rustle cattle for the regiment he had gained fifteen pounds. This was bad, he concedes, but by no means unparalleled.

> I have read enough of war and siege,—of Magdeburg, of Badajos, of San Sebastian and Crimean outrages,—to know that such things are only the usual accompaniments of a great struggle. But how dreadful is war! how

> inexcusable, except when it is the only way to maintain goodness and refinement and truth against aggressive barbarism!
>
> Our camp now is beautiful. Who is it (one of the Brontes?) who is so eloquent about her love for midsummer, with its white, opulent cloud-massses and superb verdure? This is the weather we have. (*Color-Guard*, 156)

Evidently a smidgen of Transcendental moralism could be relinquished if the pillaged provender nourished historically sensitive Transcendental aesthetes able to quote the Brontes on the beauties of landscape.

To one aspect of conventional Christian morality this corporal clung, however, for "the color-guard are under orders not to fire, except when the colors are especially threatened. My piece is loaded and capped; but I can only be shot at without returning the discharge" (*Color-Guard*, 192). Although in none of his battles was Hosmer imperiled enough to fire a shot, volunteering for the duty took special courage, for throughout the war "those entrusted with the colors had the most consistent record" of bravery, one military historian notes. The men who vied for the privilege of holding the regimental standard aloft in the fight were generally the target of concentrated fire from the other side, and thousands of those "who aspired to the honor of carrying and guarding the flags paid for the privilege with their lives."[54] Indeed, in the Twentieth Massachusetts, the "Harvard Regiment," when the color-bearer was shot in the Wilderness campaign, two soldiers both dove for the flag; they then began disputing the right to it amid a hail of enemy fire until another bullet snapped the staff, "which settled the question" of precedence, at least temporarily.[55]

Confessing that he was "not anxious to kill a man" (*Color-Guard,* 208), this fighting minister found further outlet for his Transcendental idealism in field surgery duty.

> Here is one with foot mashed by a piece of shell. This one is struck in the calf. Here is one whose leg is gone. The bloody swathings are hot and stiff. We will moisten them with ice-cold water. Here is one struck in the groin; the ball has gone through, and has been cut out of the haunch behind. He lives, is bright, and may get well. This cavalry-man is shot clear through, from hip to hip. He is stripped, and the bullet-holes on each side are plain. He lives too. What will not the human body endure? A solid shot has struck this cannoneer in the bowels. Mortally wounded he is. The doctor takes off the broad piece of cloth that covers the hurt, then replaces it. There is nothing for him but a

54 Bell Irvin Wiley, "Heroes and Cowards," in *The Civil War Soldier*, 166.

55 Richard F. Miller, *Harvard's Civil War: A History of the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2005), 345.

> dose of morphine to deaden the pain. . . . Hardly a muscle or bone or fibre of the human body but has been struck in one or another of this unfortunate company,—lungs, shoulders and chest, arms and hands, neck, face, eyes; and while I am moving a tall Zouave in his brilliant dress, the cloth from his head drops off, as his shoulders are in my hands. The skull is cleft by a fragment of shell, apparently, deep down into the brain, whose inmost recesses are revealed in the bright sun. (*Color-Guard*, 172)

Assisting at such operations, he soon found his sensibilities blunted to sights that would first have caused him to faint. At that he counted himself luckier than another company detailed for burial duty where "the decomposition of the bodies was so advanced, that the flesh slipped from the arms as our men tried to raise them, the heads fell away from the trunks sometimes, and the worms crawled from the dead upon the hands of the living! Unspeakably dreadful!" After much arduous campaigning his quiet satisfaction that "my hands have no stain of human blood upon them" referred only to the Sixth Commandment, and the bloodstains acquired handling stumps in surgery duty prompted him to ponder (as Ambrose Bierce would later) the legitimacy of suicide and euthanasia (*Color-Guard*, 198-199).

By the time the campaign ended with the capture of Port Hudson just after the fall of Vicksburg, only twenty of the original ninety in his company remained on duty. The nine-month enlistees were beginning to mutiny, and deaths continued on the hospital ship that bore them home. Hosmer had lost a brother and seen slaughter enough to disillusion many an idealist—but not him. He found his "face set persistently as ever against the threatening power" (*Color-Guard*, 242). If anything, slavery seemed worse than before, for earlier he had felt that its chief evil might be the corruption of the master class rather than the plight of the slaves themselves. Now in his theater pitched battles involving black troops, "whose praise is in every mouth," did more to invalidate claims of Negro inferiority than the actions of Col. Higginson's men since "his fighting has been of an irregular sort" (*Color-Guard*, 178).

From contact with "men under circumstances where many of the ordinary restraints of life were taken off . . . what have I learned?" he asked in summation. "To put as much confidence in men as ever; to believe in the intrinsic goodness of the human heart. Indolence, cruelty, sensuality, meanness, are the things men invariably detest," he concluded, and in Emersonian accents drew comfort from the fact that "mercy, liberality, truth, kindness, are what they invariably commend" (*Color-Guard*, 240). It was appropriate that at the Memorial Service for Harvard alumni soldiers in 1865, where after Lowell delivered his "Commemoration Ode" Hosmer spoke on behalf of the ranks, Emerson approached him, glanced at his uniform, and said, "This day belongs to you," pronouncing the words almost as a solemn benediction (*Leaf*, 251).

In postwar years Hosmer gravitated like many Unitarian ministers with Transcendental leanings to literary pursuits. In 1865 his Civil War novel, *The Thinking Bayonet* (Boston: Walker, Fuller and Co., 1865), appeared, taking its title from a phrase of Kossuth's. He originally projected "a series of literal sketches" drawing on journal material unused in his earlier book plus "certain records of observations made in South Carolina and Georgia" which he had borrowed; conceivably some of this material was Higginson's. But "finally, a work of fiction was decided upon, in which the facts derived from actual observations and experience should be incorporated" (*Bayonet*, v). In a plot rife with implausible coincidences and lengthy epistles, it recounts the entangled destinies of half-a-dozen figures orbiting Havenbridge University (transparently Harvard) just before the war. Chief among them is Herbert Lee, son of a rich but philistine businessman, who discovers philosophy in college while rowing stroke for the crew. His best friend is his Southern classmate Claiborne De Treville, a haughty aristocrat with 400 slaves, handsome as a young medieval lord. To Lee's puny roommate Putnam May, bound for the Divinity School, it seems the two "have a love for one another, almost surpassing the love of women" (*Bayonet*, 20).

Lee's rival for the class oratorship and also for the hand of Leonora Otis, the fiery daughter of a prominent local abolitionist, is Gordon Holyoake, a tall patrician who harbors Napoleonic ambition for power. Lee prevails as class orator, where he shows a touch of the poet as well, with De Treville as class marshal. Then these three gods of the senior class go their separate ways. In the grips of a vocational crisis, Lee reads philosophy independently and in the wake of *Sartor Resartus* and Darwin blunders into "The Everlasting No." Listening to the fiery Otis, however, to his surprise Lee is stirred to join a mob assaulting a prison to free a fugitive slave, where after helping with the battering ram he "saw one man fall, and another staggered away with a cut upon his face" (*Bayonet*, 29).

Though this brush with abolitionist activism brings him closer to Leonora, it estranges him from De Treville, and Lee relapses into lethargy bred by dabbling in Hindoo metaphysics. "I have read what Emerson says on Idealism, in the 'Nature,' who seems rather to encourage one to accept it; but . . . it makes me hesitate about taking hold of life," he records in a journal full of Transcendental angst and childhood memories of doubting the existence of the world. "If it is all 'seeming,' who can want to do anything?" (*Bayonet*, 44). Eventually his exasperated father has him committed to an asylum for observation. After a sympathetic doctor there declares him sane, he joins May, Leonora, and Holyoake, who are vacationing on an offshore island that sounds rather like Appledore in the Isles of Shoals. There Lee's prowess as an oarsman lets him save Leonora from drowning, but their budding romance is nipped by Holyoake, who bribes a more eminent doctor to declare him insane.

Sequestered from Leonora by Otis and threatened with recommitment by his father, Lee sets off on a Byronic escape west resolved to earn a living with his hands. A

spell of coal-mining introduces him to a rough Irish sidekick with a heart of gold, and upon news of the war he and Pat Flanagan enlist together as common soldiers. There he recovers faith in humanity and a sense of purpose. Sundry military adventures in the Lousiana theater follow, where, incognito, he keeps running into De Treville, now a rebel colonel, Holyoake, now a Union general, Leonora, now a nurse, and May, who is trying to find him, unclear "why it is that I am so much absorbed for Herbert; but so it is." An amusing chapter about May's experience as a ministerial candidate shows that despite having authored well-regarded essays, virtually all he learned in Divinity School proves irrelevant to the rural congregations seeking preachers. Cursed with a "weak frame," he finds himself lamenting that preaching seems trifling service beside war (*Bayonet*, 225, 229).

De Treville and his old friend Lee retain a real affection for each other, but the imperious haughtiness bred by the Southern system reveals itself in the colonel's habit of striking inferiors as well as a slave mistress and an illegitimate son. After shooting an unarmed Union prisoner in a fit of temper, he is himself killed by a fellow Confederate officer in an over-heated political argument. Echoing the rationale that Emerson developed over the course of the war to justify the Union cause, Lee laments De Treville's as "a noble nature, upon which had fallen the curse" of an undemocratic, slave-holding society.[56] Holyoake's feet of clay are also exposed, for despite his undoubted courage and effectiveness as a commanding officer, when he is mortally wounded leading a charge, Napoleonic ambition falls short of its aim. It is left to Lee, conveniently wounded beside him in the same charge, and Pat Flanagan, with heart of gold and canteen ever ready, to demonstrate nobler motives in succoring the stricken leader with water. Flanagan dies as a good Samaritan, leaving the wounded Lee, after forgiving the penitent Holyoake, to inherit all the novel's moral authority (not to mention his deceased father's estate) as a Transcendental warrior. After marrying Leonora while convalescing, he accepts a commission and returns to the fray "happy . . . in following his duty; and yet . . . it is with effort that he turns away again from the books and contemplations to which his tastes incline him. To these at last may he revert is my prayer for him" (*Bayonet*, 325).

All this is preposterous enough judged as fiction to risk obscuring the more genuine literary merits of *The Color-Guard*, which William Cullen Bryant thought did for the common soldier what Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* did for the common sailor. But the novel is not without interest as a document dramatizing the evolving mindset of sensitive Harvard intellectuals as Emerson's American Scholar was called upon to shoulder arms. Although the book is hardly a *roman à clef*, Lee's storming a prison to free a fugitive slave cannot but recall the well-publicized feat of Higginson,

56 *Bayonet*, 320. On Emerson's similar statements during the war about the connections between slavery, aristocracy, and democracy, see Len Gougeon, "Emerson and the British: Challenging the Limits of Liberty," in *REAL: Yearbook for Research in English and American Literature* 22 (Tübingen: Narr, 2006): 179-211.

who also cherished an intensely romantic friendship with William Henry Hurlbert, his classmate in both college and Divinity School. "A true Southerner, the best sort—slender, graceful, dark, with raven eyes and hair," Higginson called him. "To say that I would have died for him was nothing." Their letters struck Higginson's second wife as "more like those between man and woman than between two men."[57] Their relationship resembles the passionate friendship dramatized in Lee's and De Treville's correspondence. Hurlbert's charismatic effect upon people had already made him the model for Stangrave in Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) and for the sexually ambiguous Densdeth in Theodore Winthrop's *Cecil Dreeme* (1861). Higginson too would enshrine him as the title character in his lone novel, *Malbone* (1869). For all these writers he "figured as a sort of American Mephistopheles" (Wells, 49). Given Hurlbert's notoriety within the Cambridge community, it seems likely that Hosmer too modeled aspects of De Treville upon him.

But neither De Treville nor Hosmer's other characters should be limited to particular individuals; they represent personality types common to the Cambridge scene. As much of Hosmer as of Higginson probably went into Lee, and De Treville also reminds one of the darkly handsome, haughtily opinionated charisma of the young William B. Greene. Indeed, Holyoake's desire to use war service as a springboard to power and political influence finds one analogue in Charles Dana's career. But had these four Transcendental warriors found themselves flung together in an improbable campaign encounter as the novel's characters are, one suspects that only Hosmer would have emulated his hero Lee by breaking into tears on unexpectedly hearing a military band play a marching tune "adopted as the air of the university, and known as 'Old Havenbridge'" (*Bayonet*, 287).

Shortly after publishing his novel, in 1866 Hosmer tendered his resignation to the parish, for the aging Rev. Dr. George W. Hosmer, who served as Trustee of Antioch College under Horace Mann, had been named President, "and Father makes it almost a condition of his taking the Presidency that I shall go with him." To that end he had been offered a professorship of rhetoric and English literature at "the abundant salary" of $1,500.[58] He would live with his parents in the President's house and occasionally relieve his father in the pulpit, but in his desire to teach rather than preach he regarded the recently deceased Mann as his inspirational leader in a new vocation. Literary pursuits offered more scope than ordination for many with Transcendental leanings; indeed, Emerson himself expressed regret that no college had been bold enough to offer him a professorship of rhetoric instead of pigeon-holing him as a proponent of unsettling "philosophy." While regretting leaving his Deerfield friends, Hosmer, who

57 In Looby, "As Thoroughly Black," 106, n. 18; consult this article for further information about Higginson's infatuation with Hurlbert.

58 J. K. Hosmer to Josiah A. Allen, Parish Clerk, August 15, 1866, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

had married shortly after his return from the army in 1863, explained that supporting his family required a more remunerative position. In lieu of the three-months notice he owed his parish he proposed that his younger brother Herbert, who had just completed his course of divinity studies at Meadville, Pennsylvania, who had preached once or twice acceptably at Deerfield in the past, and who was now considered an unusually promising young preacher, supply the pulpit for three months. If the parish liked Herbert, he might then be persuaded to accept a year's contract. "I may say with frankness," Hosmer assured his church, "that Herbert begins upon his profession, showing better promise than his older brother did."[59]

Hosmer had never been entirely comfortable in the pulpit, he wrote from Antioch next year to an old Deerfield friend when Herbert was installed there. "As I grow older I care less and less for those matters that are controverted. Anyway, by nature, I am not much of a fighter." Evidently the battlegrounds of the Civil War seemed less combative than theological battlegrounds. "In preaching I disliked more and more to touch upon disputed things, finding an increasing inclination to take up in preference, topics very practical—the daily life of man—and how it could be made noble . . ." Skepticism about the divinity of Christ may also have been an issue. Given his reservations about dogmatic theology, "my impression is that I shall like my new calling better than my old one. I enjoy my work of teaching very much, and incline to think I can do more than I could in the Pulpit." While he expresses no curiosity about how matters were going in his old church, he did ask his friend "how the Library has got on this winter."[60]

That was a foretaste of things to come, for "it was the rule at Antioch that the Professor of English Literature also act as librarian."[61] Hosmer found himself presiding over a heterogeneous collection of 4,500 volumes (open only from 2 o'clock to 5 most afternoons) with perhaps a third devoted to history, literature, and languages. He engaged student assistants to begin cataloging it on a primitive system of his own devising, stretching a scanty budget that left him only $125 yearly for English department acquisitions by supplementing his assistants' nominal wages with tuition remission and discarded duplicate books. By 1869–1870 the Antioch Catalogue could proudly announce that "the library has also received valuable donations. Its Reading Room is well supplied with the best Literary and Scientific Periodicals, both American

59 J. K. Hosmer to Josiah A. Allen, Parish Clerk, August 16, 1866, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

60 J. K. Hosmer to Mr. Pratt, February 10, 1867, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass., manuscript.

61 Robert Lincoln Straker, *Horace Mann and Others: Chapters from the History of Antioch College* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1963), 90. See 85-88 for information about Hosmer's relations with Hall, though Straker's date of 1869 for the beginning of their acquaintance in Berlin seems suspect since Hosmer himself claims to have arrived in Germany only in 1870 (*Leaf*, 263-264).

and foreign."[62] In 1870–71 Antioch granted him leave to study in England and Germany, where he regaled Emerson's disciple and translator Hermann Grimm with details of the Concord sage's personality. Sending a photograph of his German admirer to Emerson elicited "a kind letter from him which I still treasure."[63]

His months in London combined with historical and literary studies in Germany bore immediate fruit in a pamphlet reprinted from an *Atlantic* essay extolling "the magnificent wealth of our own old dramatic literature," which "was never meant to be read, but to be heard in living presentment." Against charges of impropriety from a skeptical Harvard interlocutor "Fastidiosus" he defended his practice of having co-educational students stage such plays as Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The False One*, and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* by deploying considerable scholarship demonstrating that throughout the Renaissance drama had found a home in European schools and universities. True, "after three hundred refining years" a few lines of Shakespeare's had to be censored, but otherwise "American young men and young women, with no resources but those of a fresh-water college, and such as their own taste and such as the woods and gardens could furnish," were capable of productions that—if not so sumptuously set as the Wagnerian *Rhein-gold* he had witnessed in Munich—nonetheless afforded pleasurable education. Reminding Fastidiosus—either Phillips Brooks or a fictionalized character modeled on him—of his own drag performance as a queen in a Hasty Pudding theatrical, Hosmer suggested that Harvard could do worse than incorporate truly educational drama in its Commencement exercises.[64]

In 1872 he was appointed professor of English and history at the University of Missouri. He nominated G. Stanley Hall, the future psychologist and president of Clark University, whom he had met in Berlin, to succeed him both as professor of English at Antioch and as a lodger in his father's house. Two years later Dr. Eliot lured him to Washington University in St. Louis. He served officially as Professor of English and German Literature there 1874–1892, but having rashly promised "to take hold wherever I could be useful," he found himself also saddled with teaching elocution, French, and logic as well as supervising instruction in Spanish. Broadened but fearing himself spread too thin intellectually by these multifarious duties coupled with service as a trustee of the St. Louis public library, he left academia to become librarian of the public library in Minneapolis, a post that promised leisure to supplement his income by writing historical works. Encounters with the St. Louis Hegelian circle led by W.

62 Judith K. Meyers, "A History of the Antioch College Library, 1850 to 1929" (master's thesis, Kent State University, 1963), 53 (ACRL Microcard Series, no. 150); see 47-54 for an account of the challenges Hosmer faced as a budding librarian.

63 *Leaf*, 224. Not included in Emerson's collected *Letters*, this letter has evidently been lost.

64 *The Drama in College* (n.p., n.d.), 11-14. This incorporates the substance of his 1872 *Atlantic* essay "The New Wrinkle at Sweetbrier; or, The Drama in College," *Atlantic Monthly* 30 (July 1872): 19-31.

T. Harris had imbued him with a distaste for German speculative philosophy and convinced him that he "cared more for what men have done than for what they have thought and dreamed."[65] Elected president of the American Library Association the year before he retired from his post in Minneapolis in 1904, along the way he had acquired a PhD *honoris causa* from the University of Missouri and an LLD from Washington University.

His *Short History of German Literature* saw several editions to general acclaim, but with significant dissent from F. H. Hedge, who savaged the book in a review. Hosmer praised Schiller for subordinating aesthetic taste to morality much like Emerson, while avoiding the excessive subjectivism of later German Romantics and the German idealist philosophers. Romantic literature he thought had born "very noteworthy . . . fruit" in "the Transcendental movement, with *The Dial* for its organ, Emerson for its poet, Margaret Fuller for its critic, Alcott for its prophet, and O. B. Frothingham for its historian."[66] As a founding father of American Transcendentalism with special interest in German idealistic philosophy, Hedge, among other strictures, took particular umbrage at the "wild and amazing proposition" that it was in any way connected with Romanticism as he defined that term. In an appendix to the second edition a puzzled Hosmer defended this linkage, justifiably certain that "in the idealism of Emerson, in the reactionary career of Brownson [like Novalis], in vapoury rhapsody and Orphic utterance, we have echoes and analogues of what was just dying away in the heart of the old world" (*German Literature*, 599-600). Although the book treated American Transcendentalism respectfully enough to garner praise from George Ripley, apparently Hosmer's mature reservations about the movement's philosophical basis still troubled Hedge.

Other books followed. Like Dana he was a prolific journalist, and the historical and literary essays that he contributed regularly to newspapers and magazines like the *New York Post*, the *Boston Transcript*, the *Atlantic*, the *Nation*, and the *Literary World* often grew into books. Like Greene he took up Judaism as a theme, and *The Jews, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (1885) became perhaps his most widely known book. Like Higginson he cultivated colonial American history, editing John Winthrop's journals in two volumes and producing biographies of Samuel Adams and Thomas Hutchinson that enjoyed late twentieth-century reprints. His interest in America's English antecedents led him to spend a year doing research at the British Museum, the fruits of which were a biography of Sir Henry Vane and *A Short History of Anglo-Saxon Freedom* (1890). As a midwesterner by adoption he wrote *A History of the Louisiana Purchase* and *A Short History of the Mississippi Valley*, as well as editing the Journals

65 Hosmer, "Washington University in its Early Days," 9, 13. See also letter from James K. Hosmer to Professor Sven Oftedal, January 18, 1892, Minneapolis Public Library, Special Collections and Archives, manuscript.

66 *Short History of German Literature*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Jones, 1879), 484.

of Lewis and Clark and the Journal of Patrick Gass. As a devotee of Hawthorne he published children's stories like *How Thankful Was Bewitched*. After retiring at seventy from his head librarianship in Minneapolis, he burrowed in the Library of Congress, closing his career as a historian with a two-volume study, *The Appeal to Arms, 1861–1863* and *The Outcome of the Civil War* (1907) as well as an edition of Theodore Parker's *The Slave Power* (1910).

All this writing, he confessed at ninety, "brought me small substantial gain." Perhaps "if I had gone into the street and worked with a pick I would have earned more money."[67] But like Thoreau he seemed hardly to regret the fact, for as a good Kantian he still held that virtue should be its own reward. Holder of various offices in historical, library, Harvard, and Unitarian associations, he took more satisfaction in his books than in any professional honors. His Transcendental idealism had been tempered by immersion in history but by no means quenched. "Though sorrowing, the result of the Civil War is worth all that it cost in blood and treasure," his magnum opus argued four decades later. Like Emerson in *English Traits* (1856), he flirted with ethnocentric interpretations of history. Incorporating many different ethnic stocks upon an Anglo-Saxon basis, the resultant Union of one hundred million people "is regulated by the best polity which has been developed in the long evolution of the human race."[68] But Emersonian cosmopolitanism made this genial WASP a tolerant soul too: "I am well aware that many other peoples beside Anglo-Saxons have come to this country and I venture to hope, though with some misgivings, that the coming together of these alien stocks will some day result in a composite that will go to the making of a better world" ("Dinner," 15). The Civil War laid the groundwork for this possibility by forestalling the country's degeneration into a condition like that of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century before its unification. "Through the lives and the resources poured out in the war, it was secured that there should be one nation, not a jarring neighborhood of rival powers . . . with conflicting interests . . . occurring and again recurring, and only to be settled in the midst of confusion and slaughter." His brother's and Deerfield townsmen's deaths had not been in vain, for "the war settled not only that the Union should persist, but that its corner-stone should be freedom" (*Outcome*, 306).

Hosmer's scholarly career ended with his edition of Theodore Parker's *The Slave Power* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910). As a youth he had "often heard the voice of Theodore Parker" and responded to "his powerful spell." But he had also seen Lincoln and heard Webster's last speech. Now he had some reservations about Parker's overly moral view of slavery as an unmitigated evil, which would have condemned

67 "Dinner of the Six O'Clock Club to Dr. Hosmer on his Ninetieth Birthday," Pocumtuck Valley Association Memorial Library, Deerfield, Mass., typescript, 11. Though sometimes wrong on details probably because of the nonagenarian's hazy memory, this seventeen-page typescript is a useful compendium of facts about his life that supplements the *Dictionary of American Biography* entry.

68 James Kendall Hosmer, *The Outcome of the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1907), 305-306.

Lincoln as a temporizer rather than a political realist for making preservation of the Union his first priority. Still subscribing to the Emersonian doctrine of compensation, Hosmer cited George Washington Carver in support of his view that in elevating American blacks from African barbarism slavery had some benign consequences while the South, as the most backward region of the country, continued to pay for its historical sins. Nonetheless, rereading Parker, he was "again deeply affected by the force and sincerity of the prophet" (*Slave Power*, i).

Consoling himself for the failing eyesight that kept him from pursuing further historical researches by taking up cigars fifty years after he had left the Rev. Kendall's smoke-free premises, Hosmer channeled his residual Transcendental idealism into his memoir *The Last Leaf* (1912). Oliver Wendell Holmes's poem of that title had described Major Melvill as the last relic of the Revolutionary generation, strolling the streets of early nineteenth-century Boston in tricorner hat and knee-breeches, eminently respectable but amusingly quaint to later generations. In echoing it Hosmer revealed his own sense of himself as the last leaf on the Transcendental tree. That sense was fully shared by the folk who turned out in scores for two testimonial dinners unprecedented in Minneapolis civic life to celebrate the seventieth and ninetieth birthdays of their beloved librarian. The Unitarian minister speaking at one dinner noted that Hosmer's father, the Rev. George Hosmer, had been born and buried in Concord, "where he himself has always belonged in kinship of soul."[69]

Some of the Minnesota businessmen present may have been celebrating Hosmer as their pet Transcendentalist in a spirit of boosterism, to be sure, when they chipped in for a gold watch for him and a brooch for his wife. In virtually the only scholarly attention paid Hosmer since his death, Cruce Stark treated the testimonial dinners as ironic evidence of how thoroughly American intellectual life had been co-opted and corrupted by commercial culture.[70] But though there are elements of truth in this,

69 Rev. Mr. Simmons in "Report of the Proceedings . . . at the Dinner given Dr. James K. Hosmer, . . . Jan. 29, 1904," HUA HUG 300 (Hosmer, J. K.) typescript, 13. Like Dana's, Hosmer's religious views were eclectic in his maturity and may well always have been. His funeral service was interdenominational, with at least three different clergy participating, all of whom remarked on his ecumenical tolerance. His rector Dr. Phillips Osgood read the Episcopal service and claimed Hosmer as a regular member of a Bible class at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. However, Osgood's tribute in the parish weekly *The Outlook* (May 12, 1927) stressed that Hosmer rejected belief in the divinity of Christ: "His theology was fearless, cleancut and mellow. His faith as a Congregationalist and Unitarian was all his own" (2). John H. Dietrich, the minister of the local Unitarian Society participating, claimed Hosmer as an active member for forty years who rarely missed a service and was always faithful to Unitarian traditions. See transcripts of their tributes under "Hosmer, James K.," Minneapolis Public Library archives.

70 "The Man of Letters as Man of War: James K. Hosmer's *The Thinking Bayonet*," *New England Quarterly* 48 (March 1975): 47-64. Stark's view of the bourgeoisie in the capital of a state with rather progressive politics comes too close to a caricature in the vein of Sinclair Lewis, and his presentation of

ultimately it fails to do justice to Hosmer—or, for that matter, to those paying tribute to him. Though hardly American scholars themselves, many other burghers present could certainly recognize and, together with their civic and educational leaders, take legitimate pride in their local embodiment of that Emersonian ideal. And the ideal was rendered more honorable in the eyes of all present by the record of army service that made this bookish intellectual the commander of the local post of the G.A.R. Outliving Higginson by fifteen years and his Harvard classmate Franklin Sanborn by nearly ten, he attended the seventieth Harvard reunion of the class of 1855 with two other withered relics. Earlier reunions had been jocular affairs, one featuring a discourse by Hosmer on "Disasters in the Pun-job," another promising a military exhibition including "Hosmarines." Their seventieth reunion was perhaps less jolly even though enlivened by Harvard's awarding Hosmer an LLD as one of its grand old men. But if toward the end of his life anyone smiled patronizingly at someone with claims to be the last living Transcendentalist, this purblind historian could have returned the smile quoting the lines by Holmes that furnish the title for his memoir:

> And if I should live to be
> The last leaf upon the tree
>   In the spring,—
> Let them smile, as I do now,
> At the old forsaken bough
>   Where I cling.[71]

Hosmer's fundamental commitments to Transcendentalism remained intact throughout his life. Likewise what initially attracted his fellow Transcendental warriors to Emersonian idealism survived the impact of the war readily enough. Military regimentation did not subvert their markedly self-reliant individualism, nor did battlefield carnage make their various philosophies ring hollowly to them. Indeed, Harvard may have helped make the younger generation of Transcendentalists more adaptable to military service than the elder. Creeping gentrification was making it harder for poor students like Thoreau and Dana to attend what was becoming a gentleman's school, a fact lamented by Theodore Parker. Mindful of obiter dicta that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the Corporation had introduced optional fencing instruction in the 1820s, encouraging attendance at a "salle d'armes," and also built the first gym. By the 1840s "many students rode for exercise," a fact reflecting their increasingly affluent origins, while by 1850 they were disporting themselves in organized cricket, baseball, and rugby. The 1850s saw the Corporation

Hosmer as a rather naive idealist involves focusing almost exclusively on his mediocre novel, whereas Hosmer's considerable shrewdness emerges more clearly in his other works.

71 Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Complete Poetical Works* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 5.

build a new gym and also welcome crew as another "suitably vigorous and masculine student activity" fostering team spirit. Hosmer was among the mid-century oarsmen whom one contemporary described as "not over-mindful if their collars flared a bit in front, and disclosed their well-tanned, muscular throats."

While richer students sought to display their bookishness by collecting gentlemanly libraries, disciplinary measures like fines and rustication were gradually replaced by "more flexible but also more severe procedures for eliciting, or compelling, individual responsibility and self-control among students," procedures stressing a sense of personal and family honor. The unruly adolescent energies that had earlier erupted in wholesale student rebellions, the last occurring in 1834 when freshman Thoreau was sporting a non-regulation greenish coat because he could not afford a new one, were successfully channeled into approved group activities with a tang of refinement. The Bicentennial celebration of 1836 "witnessed a massive outpouring of organized sentiment and solidarity, including the composition of 'Fair Harvard.'"[72] Such nascent efforts to inculcate alumni unity had relatively little effect on Thoreau—after delivering his Commencement address in 1837, he probably did not stick around to hear Emerson declaim "The American Scholar" next day but decamped promptly for Concord. One doubts that on the way he was whistling what would become the official school song. But Corporation efforts to fence in the Yard continued apace, with the aim of creating a self-contained student community bound together not just by quasi-familial institutional loyalty but by loyalty both to college class and social class. Thus in 1865 Hosmer's fictionalized Harvardian class marshall of the 1850s bursts into tears on later hearing a military band play the marching tune adopted as the school song "Old Havenbridge," tears Thoreau probably never shed over "Fair Harvard."

Subsequent Harvard men were thus educated in a milieu that increasingly stressed the athletic development of personal honor within a collective entity, so it is not surprising that when the Civil War broke out, more recent Harvard graduates volunteered for army duty in impressive numbers. The history of the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, now known as the "Harvard Regiment" but originally nicknamed the "Bloody Twentieth," testifies to how their college education allowed many Harvard men to find the natural fulfillment of its gentlemanly code in military service. Upon leaving the regiment its first commander Colonel William Raymond Lee, AM '51, was praised by Lieutenant Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. '61, on behalf of all the junior officers for teaching us "more perfectly than we could learn elsewhere . . . not only the discipline of soldiers but the high feelings and self-sacrifice of chivalrous gentlemen."[73] The original junior officers of the Twentieth commissioned by Gov. Andrew included a

72 Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard & the Boston Upper Class, 1800–1870* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 115-118; my argument in this and the preceding paragraph draws heavily on Story's ch. 7.

73 Quoted in Miller, *Harvard's Civil War*, 218.

disproportionate number of Harvard graduates, who would subsequently displease him by opposing the commissioning of non-college-educated officers they did not regard as gentlemen, especially from within the enlisted ranks. From an illustrious New England family obsessed with its descent from a soldier of William the Conqueror's created first Baron Foxton, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Winthrop Palfrey, '51, was a brave commander under fire but like many of his subordinates arrogant and snobbish in his conception of an officer's role. At the same time, however, taking care of their men came naturally to those "already imbued with notions of noblesse oblige," and Harvard-educated gentlemen officers like Casper Crowninshield, '60, often dipped into their own pockets to satisfy what they saw as their soldiers' pressing needs. Interpreting the South's challenge to the North as if "governed by the *code duello*," the athletic Captain Crowninshield, who had stroked and captained the Harvard crew, found that after being called upon to recite in Harvard classrooms giving and receiving orders came naturally enough. His fellow oarsman Henry Ropes, '62, was another dedicated athlete with a profound sense of personal honor who proved a talented leader. Often in trouble for infringing strict college rules by offenses like "participating in a disturbance in the Yard," the fiercely class-conscious Henry Abbott, '60, found "the *Revised U. S. Army Statutes of 1861* . . . no more oppressive than the *Statutes and Laws of Harvard College*."[74] So evidently did Sumner Paine, '65, who after twice being suspended from his class, the second time for "screwing a bar over the door of a professor's house on the eve of the professor's wedding," never returned to Harvard where such unruly individual energies could no longer be brooked but was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Twentieth under the command of his cousin O. W. Holmes Jr. "You have found your element at last," wrote his sister. "Better than hazing professors, isn't it?"[75] Was the regiment becoming "the private property of a few neighbors, or of a mere clique," worried Gov. Andrew, not without reason. But the gentlemanly code endorsed by the College also meant that like Paine, who died repelling Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, "many of the rich men's sons were becoming superb officers."[76]

Unlike Harvard's faculty today its professors in the 1840s and 1850s thus presided over an atmosphere conducive to students' carrying their education into military service, and Memorial Hall still stands on the campus as a mildly incongruous mid-Victorian reminder of institutional pride in that fact. Our four Transcendental soldiers were shaped by the College's gentlemanly code to a greater extent perhaps than were earlier Harvard-educated Transcendentalists. For Greene, Dana, and Higginson the experience of military leadership carried over into continuing careers as militant reformers. Throughout the Civil War Transcendentalists on all fronts were surprisingly immune to disillusionment; only Moncure Conway and perhaps the Philadelphia

74 Miller, *Harvard's Civil War*, 19-20

75 Miller, *Harvard's Civil War*, 228.

76 Miller, *Harvard's Civil War*, 221, 122.

minister William Henry Channing may have been shocked by the bloodshed to the point of questioning the war's value. Even Walt Whitman, whose experiences nursing wounded soldiers were certainly formative, persistently saw them as maturing and culminating his youthful idealism, not as abnegating it. The Civil War was the foundation of *Leaves of Grass*, he insisted throughout his life. To the extent that his later writings occasionally show traces of disillusionment with America's promise, that was prompted by the political corruption and economic inequality with which the Gilded Age betrayed the noble sacrifices of the war.

Lawrence Buell explains the centrality of *Drum-Taps* to *Leaves of Grass* in Whitman's thinking as a benign reflection of the maturing bard's desire to make his poetry more saleable by exploiting a vogue for Civil War writing, a desire also reflected in Melville's *Battle-pieces*.[77] The postwar work of Dana, Higginson, and Hosmer likewise suggests that an author's concern for selling books need not compromise literary merit nor amount to selling out one's ideals. As Higginson suggested, Darwin ultimately posed a greater challenge to Victorian idealism than did death in battle. Urbanization, industrialization, and immigration undermined Transcendental individualism more insidiously than did the war. Few turn-of-the-century writers were more stridently cynical than the author of *The Devil's Dictionary*, yet as a veteran of much of its bloodiest fighting Ambrose Bierce continued like Dana to regard the war as the moral high ground of his life, making nostalgic pilgrimages to battlefields he had fought on and feeling for comrades-in-arms, both blue and grey, an affection he could hardly summon up for most behavior in the Gilded Age. The experiences of four Transcendental soldiers confirm that the Civil War's monumental bloodshed did not by itself make a literary watershed.

77 See Lawrence Buell, "American Civil War Poetry and the Meaning of Literary Commodification: Whitman, Melville, and Others," in *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America*, ed. Stephen Fink and Susan S. Williams (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 123-138.