CHAPTER 15

The Civil War

Two Soldiers and Their Worlds

During the American Revolution, Loyalist opponents of independence had claimed that the colonists could never create a unified nation because the economic and cultural differences between North and South would lead to civil strife. But the two sections were able to lay aside their differences while they fought the Revolutionary War, drafted the Constitution, and began the new government. Even as they cooperated in some enterprises, however, they disagreed over tariffs, slavery, and western lands, widening the breach that Tories had discerned almost a century before. Antagonism between the two sections exploded into war in 1861, each side believing in the righteousness of its cause. The Civil War not only revealed the depths of sectional differences, but also demonstrated the underlying similarities between the sections. The careers of William Wheeler and Charles Colcock Jones Jr. personify both the brutality of warfare and the common humanity of North and South.

The Civil War occupies a unique position in American history. No event, not even the Revolution, holds a higher place in the national regard. Its battles were the bloodiest ever fought on American soil, and its people were at once the most human and resourceful of American heroes. The names of its events and leaders read like a patriotic litany: Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, Thomas ("Stonewall") Jackson, and Robert E. Lee; the Gettysburg Address and the Emancipation Proclamation; the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack*; and the Battles of Bull Run, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and the Wilderness. The history of the war includes stories of recruitment, war industries, supplies, military leadership, politics, diplomacy, and civilian morale. It is really not one tale but many separate histories, each complex and elusive.

The Civil War can, however, be reduced to human scale by the very soldiers who fought in it. Each had his own history, personal experiences that reflected in some fashion

the larger forces of the war. Although most soldiers left no record of their thoughts and activities beyond the brief notices they received in troop lists, casualty reports, and other public records, some wrote diaries and letters that allow us to observe closely their personal histories. Two such men were William Wheeler, captain of New York's Thirteenth Artillery, and Charles Colcock Jones Jr., lieutenant colonel of the Georgia Artillery. Their Civil War letters help explain why northerners and southerners took up arms against one another and describe how they spent their days during the hard years of the war.

In spring 1864 William Wheeler was an artillery captain in a northern army marching toward Atlanta, Georgia, under the command of William Tecumseh Sherman. Wheeler had been in the army for three years and fought at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga. The army had become so much his way of life that after his infrequent leaves he actually enjoyed returning to camp. Recently back from a trip home, he wrote his mother that he rejoined his men with "a quiet feeling of satisfaction and contentment, a happiness in being back at my work again."

By this time Wheeler was a seasoned professional, a soldier's soldier. We can understand him and his work best if we look at his early years as a civilian and as a raw recruit. William Wheeler was born in New York City on August 14, 1836. He developed an early interest in literature, reading when he was four and improvising stories to entertain neighborhood children when he was eight. Wheeler absorbed literature easily and could recall lines from Shakespeare, the Latin and Greek classics, and contemporary poetry. He developed a love of outdoors and became a skilled fisherman, catching seventy-two trout as a boy on a two-day trip to the Catskill Mountains.

In 1852, at age sixteen, Wheeler entered Yale College. His undergraduate letters combine prudery and playfulness. As a freshman he wrote home that four older boys had been "caught in the interesting occupation of cementing up the bell." His mother "need not fear" that he would be found in any such "scrapes." On a "stupendously cold" morning in January, he wrote her, "The fire itself froze the other morning. I would send you a piece, but . . . fear it would burn a hole in the paper." In fall 1854, when he was a senior, he attempted to grow whiskers; finding, however, that his beard's "powers of increasing were exactly the opposite of Jack's bean-stalk," he gave it up.

At college William Wheeler enjoyed his studies and nature equally. He excelled in classics and mathematics and formed a secret society for scholars. He observed closely the patterns of nature around the college—the spring when green and purple mosses came out upon the hills; the fall when the thick woods seemed painted by "unearthly artists, in earth-surpassing colors"; and the winter when he took sleigh rides over the snow through the valley between East and West Rocks, two hills that overlooked New Haven "like ermine-clad giants."

After completing his undergraduate program he studied law at Yale until 1857, then made a grand tour of Europe, a common postgraduate activity for well-to-do young men of his day. Wheeler's zest for life, his most appealing quality, was especially evident in his letters on the trip. His sailing ship, *Australia*, ran into a storm of rain, wind, and mountainous waves; while other passengers cringed in fear, Wheeler found that the threat of destruction gave the sea "a more sublime and lofty" character and reminded him of his "own littleness in comparison with this greatest of God's works." When the sea was calm on the long journey, he loved to watch the "snowy canvass" of

the great sails, the moonlight's "flood of glory" on the water, and the glow of phosphorescence shining in the sea "like stars rolled out" of an angel's cloak.

Wheeler delighted in such scenes. He was drawn also to literary and historical grandeur. As the *Australia* sailed past Gibraltar into the Mediterranean, he thought of the great seamen whose keels had "furrowed" these waters. Here the fleets of Rome and Greece had fought, the Crusaders had sailed for the Holy Land, and Nelson had won the Battle of Trafalgar. And now along their path came William Wheeler, "not to strike a blow for Grecian or Italian Independence, but bound for Marseilles, in the merchant ship *Australia* consigned to Ribaud Brothers & Co., and oh! horror, laden with alcohol (I smell it now), stores, wheat, and bacon." Despite his amusement at the common circumstances of his arrival in Europe, Wheeler made the most of his year abroad, hiking through the Swiss Alps, studying in Berlin, and visiting Paris, Florence, and London.

He returned to America in 1858 and resumed his legal studies at Harvard. After graduating in 1860, he moved to New York, where he took an apartment and studied for the bar, alternately reading Shakespeare's plays and legal tomes to fight the sleep-inducing effects of "cramming up the Revised Statutes" for his examination.

Wheeler was absorbed by the year's political events. He was intensely interested in the outcome of the 1860 presidential election. Describing himself frankly as belonging to "the extreme Abolition edge of the Republican party," he worked hard for the election of Abraham Lincoln. As the outcome of the election became clear and the southern states began to move toward secession, Wheeler actually hoped for war so that slavery could be ended once and for all. If a civil war occurred, he wrote, "then the

Civil War encampment. Yankee and Confederate soldiers slept in crude huts of canvas and wood, often with pork-barrel chimneys.

country will emerge from that chaos of fire and blood, fresh and free, its dross purged away, and its great sin expiated." As the conflict drew near he decided that he would join the army rather than hire a substitute, as many wealthy young men did. "I do not suppose that I am very well fitted for a soldier," he wrote, "but still I have a good deal of fight in me, and think that I shall never see a holier cause to fight for."

That spring New York City was ablaze with patriotism, recruits marching up and down to the sound of fife and drum and the streets "a long arbor of flags." Full of excitement and hoping not to miss the first engagements of the war, Wheeler joined the Seventh Regiment in New York; purchased a uniform, blankets, and mess kit; and had his hair cut to regulation length. On May 9, 1861, he boarded the steamer *Mantanzas*, having written his mother, "For myself, I cannot see how a life could be more worthily given up, unless it were for God's sake, though is not this God's cause?" He was twenty-four years old; a practicing lawyer; a scholar proficient in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, and French; and now a soldier going forth on his greatest adventure.

The soldiers aboard the *Mantanzas* were crazed with exuberance, and Wheeler feared that "the younger ones seem to look upon the whole affair as a gigantic spree, and to form no true conception of the serious character of the undertaking." Yet it was Wheeler who led the men in giving three cheers when the steamer passed a ship bearing the Italian flag "under which Garibaldi achieved the freedom of Italy." Soon afterward he and the others cheered an English ship called the *Union* and joined in singing verse after verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The next day the spirit of patriotism was still ablaze as the ship streamed up the Potomac past Mount Vernon, her flag at half-mast, her bell tolling, and her men standing respectfully with heads uncovered, a traditional sign of respect for George Washington.

On May 14, 1861, Wheeler was stationed at Camp Cameron, the first of dozens of posts where he would spend the next three years sleeping in tents, in makeshift cabins, and beneath the stars. When his regiment made camp on its long marches and countermarches in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia, the soldiers normally slept under canvas, a perfectly adequate arrangement when the elements were at rest. But there were nights when gales ripped through the camp and Wheeler's tent "rocked like a boat on the waves." In the winter the shelters became so cold that "the only way was to lie [in bed] and take it." After a particularly cold night Wheeler wrote home, "ten degrees below zero is not exactly comfortable in a tent." To make matters worse, the fragile dwellings caught fire with alarming regularity.

The more resourceful soldiers made an occupation of improving their tents. Sometimes Wheeler had stone fireplaces built in his, using pork barrels as chimneys and lining the floors with boards. But such efforts were often frustrated by the need to move on, and moving frequently meant sleeping outdoors. Wheeler rather liked camping out, even in the cold, when he could lie beside a roaring fire with the stars overhead. But when he had to sleep in the rain and the mud, then, he said, "the fun ceases to be perceptible."

The food was no better than the shelter. Men often had nothing more than crackers and coffee for breakfast and supper, with meat and soup for lunch. Worse, there were days of "salt horse and hard bisquit." On good days the diet might be improved with mutton or chicken purchased or stolen from southern farmers, but on bad days Wheeler had to make do with a handful of horse's grain, a meal he called

"maize au naturel." Worn down by poor shelter and food, he wrote his mother that he had become "a shabby, muddy soldier."

Wheeler and others attempted to improve the tone of camp life with ceremonies, song, and even learning. On Christmas Eve in 1862, when the regiment was camped near the Stafford courthouse in Virginia, he went out into the woods and found "a most beautiful little holly-tree, with splendid leaves and full of berries," which he planted at the foot of a flagpole. In the war's early months, before he became disillusioned with the army chaplains, he organized well-attended prayer meetings at which the men sang "ever so many hymns." He enjoyed, too, the songs men sung by campfires. Wheeler's men, mainly German immigrants, sang fine old songs from their fatherland, while black servants sang camp-meeting tunes, "in a minor and melancholy key."

Such moments softened the hard outlines of camp life. Wheeler sought also to uplift his surroundings by establishing a school for the soldiers. The schoolhouse was a collection of desks and chairs made from split logs and arranged around a tree; the teacher, an old corporal chosen by Wheeler; the pupils, "rough, wild" enlisted men, many of whom did not know how to read. Some forty men came to classes of their own accord, and Wheeler hoped they would soon sign their own payroll slips. But before he could strike a blow for literacy, the regiment had to move on again, leaving behind its latest encampment and Wheeler's improvised school.

Despite the disruption of each move, Wheeler generally welcomed the chance to break camp. "I am twice as buoyant, and hopeful, and happy," he wrote his mother, "on a hard march, as when vegetating in camp." Wheeler especially liked traveling through the mountainous parts of Virginia, where the soldiers "went fishing, blackberrying, and cherry-picking, and where at times it seemed more like a charming summer picnic 'long drawn out' than anything else." Pleasant, too, was the train journey from Virginia to Tennessee on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, through the "mysterious lights and shadows of a perfect moonlight autumn night," and across Indiana where the citizens cheered the soldiers at each stop and ladies gave them cakes, cold meats, doughnuts, handkerchiefs, towels, and soap. In such moments the whole war seemed a glorious adventure, made all the more exciting by "the inspiring prospect of a conflict with an enemy a few miles ahead."

Wheeler's regiment was never required to wait long for that next engagement. For two years they fought indecisive skirmishes and battles in Virginia. Then one day in 1863 the army began to move north, following Robert E. Lee into Pennsylvania. The men, who had lived for months in the South, were pleased by their reception as they marched through Frederick County, Maryland. Children waved handkerchiefs and tiny flags; hotels were wrapped in red, white, and blue bunting; an old lady stood at her door handing out cups of cold water to thirsty soldiers; her gray-haired husband stood at her side, his eyes half filled with tears. "Good luck to you boys," he murmured, "God bless you."

On the morning of July 1, 1863, Wheeler's artillery battery was eleven miles from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, moving along at a deliberate pace, when a messenger arrived urging speed. The men flew toward the town, gun carriages rattling and bouncing over the stony road, food and kettles breaking loose from the caissons, and cannoneers running to keep up. When they reached Gettysburg, tens of thousands of men in gray and blue were gathering their forces in a vast pattern of artillery, infantry,

and cavalry. Wheeler's battery rushed from one point to another in this scene of noise, movement, and confusion. Hurrying through town, the soldiers passed ladies waving handkerchiefs and cheering them on and stopped at a place called Cemetery Hill, where the Union forces concentrated their artillery.

During the next three days the two armies mauled one another with cannon, rifle, and bayonet. Lee unleashed the greatest artillery barrage ever known in America. "The air," said Wheeler, "was literally alive with flying projectiles." Cemetery Hill was hit with a hailstorm of shot, ranging from six-pound missiles the size of cricket balls to Whitworth rifle shot so huge they gave "rise to the story of the rebs firing railroad iron." Most dangerous of all were the Confederate charges that drove right in among the Union ranks. When the enemy came close, and the Federal infantry drew back leaving the artillery dangerously exposed, Wheeler abandoned the large shells used against the Confederate artillery and aimed small canister shot at the infantry.

"Wheeler," said another officer, "which *are* the rebels and which are our men?"

"You pays your money," said Wheeler, "and you takes your choice."

The Confederates were driven back, then and in other efforts to break the Union lines. Both armies rested on July 4, and the next day Lee began the dismal march back to Virginia. He had failed to win the northern victory that would have meant so much to his cause.

William Wheeler's role at the Battle of Gettysburg was like that of hundreds of other junior officers. He stuck to his post, opposed the enemy advance, and kept up a strong fire. He was a minor actor in an epic drama. Yet he loved his role. "Somehow or other," he told his friends at home, "I felt a joyous exaltation, a perfect indifference to circumstances, through the whole of that three days' fight, and have seldom enjoyed three days more in my life."

Strange words, perhaps, for a man who admired the classics, led prayer meetings, and established a camp school. But battle had become a way of life to Wheeler. Not that he was unaffected by suffering; in his mind he carried images of the devastation of war: trees speckled with bullets and bored through by shells; a fellow artillery officer killed when a shell plowed through his horse; an infantryman's leg, blown off at Gettysburg, whirling "through the air like a stone, until it came against a caisson with a loud whack." Worse still was the sight of his own men hospitalized with mortal wounds. One of the hardest to bear was a "fine-looking young Irishman, with a . . . deep susceptibility to both pain and pleasure," whom Wheeler visited in the hospital. "One of his wounds had affected the nerves," he wrote, "and the pain came in great wrenches and spasms that made him gnash his teeth and beat his feet on the bed in agony. I became so sick that I could hardly get to the door."

Despite his familiarity with the reality of injury and death, Wheeler appears to have had few worries about his own fate. He admitted that he felt anxiety at the approach to battle, before his guns were in place. He said that he "would prefer to be either in the midst of the affair or else entirely absent." When he had to set up his guns while the enemy was firing at him, he felt "unpleasantly"; but once the battery was ready and he was busy loading, aiming, and firing, his chief sensation was excitement. He enjoyed the challenge of his work as well as "the sense of bodily danger and of continual escape from it." In these engagements, death and injury were so common as to be unintimidating. At Gettysburg, he wrote, "the danger was so great and so constant that, at

last, it took away the sense of danger." Wheeler even found that he slept especially well on the night before a battle. When conflict was inevitable, one might as well rest.

Different men accommodated to battle in various ways. Some were armed with the giddy assurance that they could never be shot. Others refused to speculate about their prospective fortunes. Wheeler's resolution came from another source—the certitude that he *would* be killed. In the first years of the war he had looked at the magnitude of the conflict and concluded that almost everyone who stayed in the army for the duration would die. He wrote home in 1861, "This is emphatically a war deadly to officers, and I have fully made up my mind never to see any of you again." In the next year he predicted that "few of the army now in the field will ever see their homes again; the new conscripts will win the glory of finishing the war." He disliked thinking about the possibility of survival, because such imaginings weakened his resolve. "I prefer to accept the belief that I must fall," he wrote. "The question with us is not whether we shall die or not, but how we shall die and among what surroundings."

The expectation that he would die a soldier in the field intensified his relationship to the army. It was, quite literally, his life's work. "My battery," he told his cousin, "is my plighted bride." His weapons, a half dozen three-inch rifled guns, were to him "as a sweetheart, yea, as many sweethearts." When he lost one of his guns in an engagement at Gettysburg, he went out on the field after the battle, found the gun, and repaired it, glad in the recovery of an old friend. He was equally fond of his horse, who ate sugar from his hand, followed him like a dog, and bore the name Barry, after Wheeler's artillery chief. Then, too, there was the pleasure of leadership. When he was elevated from the rank of lieutenant to captain in 1863, he wrote home, "I like to have the command of men, and to say, like the centurion, 'Go! and he goeth.'"

As much as Wheeler enjoyed the craft of artilleryman, the war's purpose excited him more than its process. He called himself an "extreme Emancipationist" determined to see the end of slavery. Men fought in the Civil War for many reasons: some because they were drafted, others for adventure, and others to save the Union. Wheeler and soldiers like him fought with the moral fervor of medieval knights on a crusade, their goal the eradication of slavery. The war, he told his mother, "has become the religion of very many of our lives, and those of us who think, and who did not enter the service for gain of military distinction, have come more and more to identify this cause for which we are fighting, with all of good and religion in our previous lives." His hero was Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, whom he called "a steam engine in pantaloons." He had no patience with men who gave sparingly for the cause and rejoiced when the timorous McClellan, a "softy warrior," was dismissed from command. Disgusted at the news of draft riots in New York City, he proposed a simple solution: he would set up his battery at a place on Broadway he knew where "the balls would ricochet splendidly on the hard pavement."

The Union cause simply must prevail. It was to him "the same that the quest of the Holy Grail was to Sir Galahad." He would endeavor, like Tennyson's Ulysses, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." After Gettysburg he acknowledged that the war might last many years, but he and his fellows would endure. "I am, in this matter," he said, "like St. Paul's Charity, ready to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things for the cause, knowing that if we do, we also, like Charity, shall never fail."

Wheeler was able to inspire others with his enthusiasm. He said little about his influence, but his men seem to have rallied around him in many circumstances: on the

battlefield, in hymn singing, or in the creation of a school. When time came for reenlistment early in 1864, the men of his company wanted first to be reassured that Wheeler would stay in. When he agreed to do so, almost all of them followed him.

Wheeler's influence and his personal success as a soldier owed much to his devotion to his work and his cause. That commitment so hardened him to the attractions of home that he did not like to think a great deal about his civilian life. He even hesitated to visit his family, saying, "If I should go home, the parting would be most painful, the crust of insensibility and of absorption in my duty would be cast off,—I should be like a soft-shell crab, who had cast his shell prematurely."

He acknowledged, however, that when he was not occupied by present duties, a longing for home swept through him. On a "beautiful Sabbath afternoon" in the South he thought of his mother walking through the autumn leaves on her way to church. He missed good conversation and domestic surroundings: "a quiet supper with a chosen crowd . . . and then a sensible chat over the apples and Madeira until the small hours." He begged his family and friends to fill their letters to him with the details of daily life. "It is the neat little touches thrown skillfully in," he wrote, "that make the home picture glow with life, and make the heart of the absent member beat warmly as he looks at it."

Affected as he was by memories of his home, he found himself sympathizing with the people whose lands the northern armies occupied. He could speak facetiously of "fried secessionists for breakfast," and he fired cannon shot at the enemy with unbridled enthusiasm. But when he came face to face with southerners his feelings changed. As the soldiers marched along, they often saw women "dressed in black and weeping as if their hearts would break." In Virginia Wheeler sought to prevent excessive demands on the local farmsteads, interfering in one case, "in favor of a sheep, some bee-hives, and the potato patch" and winning in return an invitation to dinner. He was solicitous of enemy soldiers wounded in battle. At Gettysburg he walked among the southerners where they "lay scattered over the field in groups of twenty, fifty, or even a hundred." Wheeler brought water to one, propped another on his side, and rigged up a bed of straw for a third. On one occasion, having driven off some Union soldiers who were about to pillage a southern house, he was rewarded by being invited in. In a letter to his mother he tells how he nearly lost his heart to a rebel:

> I met the prettiest girl I have seen in Virginia,—a real stunner, with light brown hair and perfect features, . . . I grieve to say that I was quite enthralled by this she-rebel, and the next night, being out foraging for hay, I stayed to supper, and came home so late that I found a party just saddling to go out and rescue me from the bush-wackers. The captain gave me three days on guard, but I think that it was worth it on the whole. Then, to cap the climax, being sent down to Culpepper after stores, I stopped there yesterday morning on my way back and took breakfast. If we have occasion to retreat, I shall manage to get wounded near that house and have "sweet Maud Muller" (I don't know her real name), take care of me. . . .
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> I picked up a letter on the battle field the other day, from a young married lady in Georgia to her two brothers in the army, and it might have been from you, so pleasant and naïve was the style. She chatted about her little baby, and how it resembled its young uncles, etc., and my heart smote

me when I thought that perhaps their life-blood had soaked the very ground where I stood.

In such moments Wheeler was struck by the "common humanity" of Confederate and Yankee. He mixed easily with the people of Virginia and Tennessee, arguing at one moment with an old Presbyterian clergyman in Virginia about secession and at the next singing hymns at the piano with him and his family. He and his men often visited, played games, discussed books, sang, and ate melons with civilians, then ended their visits with a chorus of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which, he said, "ought to do a secessionist's ears a great deal of good." In Tennessee he spent a pleasant evening visiting a fine old house where an aristocratic young lady sang "Union songs, and secesh airs, darkey melodies and opera morceaux with equal facility."

It was a curious war, and Wheeler's life reflected all its ambiguities—the shabby encampments, the heroic aims, the brutal battles, the moments of reconciliation, and the furtive thoughts of home. Now in spring 1864 William Wheeler was engaged in a new phase of the conflict, marching south in one of the columns of troops that Sherman sent into Georgia. Soldiering was a way of life to which he had grown accustomed, and he operated with routine efficiency: bringing his battery into play in a series of engagements; writing home while bullets flew overhead; and enjoying, in moments of respite, the honeysuckles, jasmines, and roses of this fertile southern land.

A few miles away from Sherman's army another soldier, Charles Colcock Jones Jr., was preparing to resist the invaders of his homeland. His background prepared him to see southern virtues that Wheeler could never perceive and to excoriate northern vices that Wheeler would never acknowledge. Jones was as dedicated to the Confederacy as Wheeler was to the Union. The two men were on opposite sides of a bitter struggle. Yet in retrospect, we can see that they shared many thoughts, aspirations, and experiences.

Jones was born on October 28, 1831, in Savannah, Georgia. His father was a Presbyterian minister who owned three plantations in nearby Liberty County. Jones grew up with many advantages and pleasures of plantation wealth: private tutors who nourished his interest in literature and history; lessons in riding and weekly "cavalry parades" with other children; and opportunities to hunt duck, deer, raccoon, rabbit, and alligator in the countryside near his home.

During the 1850s Jones observed the North firsthand and so became aware of his distinctive southern heritage. He was an undergraduate at Princeton and studied law at Harvard, graduating in 1855, three years before Wheeler's arrival. Jones enjoyed his Harvard years—admired his teachers, indulged his "passion" for books, and won the respect of his professors and fellow students. At times he was positively attracted to New England, especially to "all the glories" of her Indian summers. But he was reminded, too, of his attachment to the South, finding tiresome the northern climate, with its sharp temperature changes, and disliking the noise of the local Fourth of July celebrations, all firecrackers and rockets, instead of the fine orations he associated with southern celebrations.

Jones was particularly repelled by the abolitionists, who abounded in Massachusetts, even in the staid halls of the law school. He was engrossed by the Burns case in May 1854. Anthony Burns was an escaped slave owned by a Virginian, Col. Charles F. Suttle. A hearing to determine whether Burns was in fact Suttle's property

provided a focal point for antislavery sentiment. After attending the hearing, Jones wrote his parents that "Mob law, perjury, free-soilism, and abolitionism are running riot." The courtroom was filled with armed men, and even the attorneys carried guns and bowie knives. The mob in the street had to be cleared every hour. Even then, the confused noise of the soldiers and abolitionists nearly drowned out the voices of the litigants.

Jones befriended Suttle, the object of this vituperation, and found him "a perfect Virginia gentleman, of high standing, well educated, of fine, commanding, prepossessing appearance." The abolitionists considered him a vicious slavemaster bent on exploiting his fellow man, but Jones came to admire him with "such an attachment as only a Southerner can know for his brother Southerner." From such incidents and attachments Charles Colcock Jones Jr. and thousands of other southerners like him developed a sense of the beleaguered righteousness of their own region. Twenty years earlier he could have witnessed the mobbing of William Lloyd Garrison by an antiabolitionist citizenry, but the past two decades had seen popular sentiment swing against slavery. Jones noticed with dismay that some of the bitterest antisouthern diatribes came from New England's pulpits. He was treated well enough by his classmates at Harvard, but he sensed that he and his "brother" southerners were different from these harsh, misguided northerners.

Jones returned to Savannah in 1855 and practiced law, soon becoming a partner in the firm of Ward, Owens, and Jones. Like other aspiring young attorneys, he engaged in civic affairs, joining the volunteer Chatham Artillery Company and serving as a city alderman. In 1858 he married Ruth Berrien Whitehead, whom he called "a noble specimen of a young woman of the most generous impulses, and of remarkably good judgment." Two years later he was elected mayor of Savannah.

Jones's letters in this period do not mention the continuing northern campaign against slavery, but his ideas about the institution and about blacks continually appear in his correspondence. He and his family were exemplars of a benevolent, paternalistic relationship between the master and the slave. His mother spoke of slaveownership as bringing "responsibilities not only for time but for eternity." The family owned 129 blacks in 1860. Jones's father was so effective as a Presbyterian evangelist among the slaves that his region was famed throughout the South for its Christianized blacks. He wrote two books, *Catechism of Scripture Doctrine and Practice* (1837) and *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (1842), both widely used for evangelical work. The younger Jones inherited his father's sense of responsibility for the slaves. He opposed as cruel the reopening of the slave trade and was appalled when a southern commercial convention entertained such a notion. He believed that if slaves had to be sold at all they should be sold with their families and regarded slave trading as "the lowest occupation" in which men could engage.

His letters described scenes in which the lives of blacks and whites mingled in common sentiment. On June 30, 1858, he attended the funeral of the late mayor of Savannah, Richard Wayne, a solemn occasion at which volunteer organizations—the artillery company, the fire brigades, the Odd Fellows, the Irish societies, and other groups—marched through the streets past silent crowds and flags at half-mast. They formed a great procession a half-mile long, but what most impressed Jones was not the column in which he marched but the singing of hundreds of blacks, who stood near the grave. As he and the other mourners entered the cemetery, the blacks began singing

"that beautiful and solemn funeral hymn, 'We Are Passing Away.'" They sang with "a depth of feeling" that awakened "a sad echo in every breast."

In Jones's mind, master and slave in Georgia constituted a genuine community. Yet there was no question but that white authority must prevail. He disliked the arrangement that allowed slaves in Savannah and other southern cities to "live out," hiring their labor and seeing their masters only on payday. The practice, said Jones, "exerts a most injurious influence upon the relation of master and slave." If necessary he was willing to uphold slavery with the sword, as he tacitly admitted when he told his parents that the Chatham Artillery, which he had recently joined, was organized to "quell sudden insurrection or domestic lawlessness."

In 1850, when the memory of Nat Turner's Revolt was still fresh in southern minds, the blacks themselves seemed to threaten violence to the "peculiar institution" of slavery. But at the close of the decade the rise of the Republican Party and the increasing stridency of the abolitionists suggested an even greater danger from the North. Private military companies such as the Chatham Artillery offered a means of preparing southerners for the eventuality of sectional warfare. Jones and his company made an unusual out-of-state trip in 1859 to Nashville, Tennessee, to encourage formation of a similar company there. His group had been "privately" assured that they would receive a warm welcome and made the railroad journey in force—fifty men in uniform with six cannon. They were cheered along the route, and in Nashville they were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, including fifteen hundred children dressed in white who threw roses in their path. A series of banquets and artillery demonstrations highlighted their visit. Before they left, the gentlemen of Nashville had begun to form an artillery company of their own.

Within a few months the value to the South of such companies would become apparent. At the news of Abraham Lincoln's election, South Carolina seceded from the Union and declared itself an independent state. Charles Jones wrote his parents, "We are on the verge of heaven only knows what." At first, the thought of secession may have frightened him, but he was soon a leader of the movement in Georgia.

On October 12, 1861, he presided over a secession meeting in Savannah. The crowd that gathered was too large for any hall, so Jones and others addressed it from a balcony. The throng before Jones seemed to "sway to and fro on every hand like the sea lifted by the breath of the tornado." Mad with excitement, the people cheered and fired cannon and rockets when they heard the secession proposals. After the tumult quieted, Jones asked whether there were any nay votes. The throng was silent; then someone shouted, "There's *narra no*, Mayor Jones!"

Jones wholeheartedly supported the secession movement, believing that there could be no reconciliation between the sections. He wrote his father: "I have long since believed that in this country there have arisen two races which, although claiming a common parentage, have been so entirely separated by climate, by morals, by religion, and by estimates so totally opposed of all that constitutes honor, truth, and manliness, that they cannot longer coexist under the same government. Oil and water will not commingle. We are the land of rulers; fanaticism has no home here. The sooner we separate the better."

As mayor of Savannah, Jones observed the disposition of troops in the area and the strengthening of the city's defenses. He wrote with pleasure that "the ladies of Savannah" were busy making cartridges, bandages, and shirts. A spirit of sectional patriotism had swept the South, and his father declared the Union's opposition to

secession to be "an outrage upon Christianity and the civilization of the age, and upon the great and just principles of popular sovereignty." He had no doubt that "The law-abiding mass of the American people lies south of Mason's and Dixon's line." Father and son agreed that the Civil War had been brought on by a mass of lawless, godless fanatics. But they would prevail. "Heaven forbid," said the younger Jones, that the Yankees should "ever attempt to set foot upon this land of sunshine, of high-souled honor, and of liberty."

At this moment of buoyant optimism, tragedy struck Charles Jones in the death of his wife and his first daughter. He was despondent for weeks, haunted by the memories that filled his empty house. "Oh, my dear parents," he wrote, "What voices dwell in these vacant chairs, this silent piano, this desolate bed, these folded garments, these unused jewels, these neglected toys, these noiseless rooms." In his despair he had a prophetic sense that God might have taken them away to spare them from the "evil to come."

But in the summer months of 1861 his grief gave way to optimistic thoughts about the Confederacy. He welcomed news of the Battle of Manassas as a great southern victory. "Surely the God of Battles is with us," he wrote. His bereavement removed the sole impediment to his joining active service. He announced that he would not seek a second term as Savannah mayor at the expiration of his term on October 15, 1861, and accepted the rank of first lieutenant in his old company, the Chatham Artillery, now a branch of the Confederate army. He embraced the southern standard with his "whole heart," and he told his parents he would gladly give his life in the "sacred cause."

At the end of October 1861 Lt. Col. Charles Colcock Jones Jr. moved to Camp Claghorn, on a bluff on the Isle of Hope nine miles from Savannah. The encampment was picturesque: pure white tents set amid a cluster of dark overhanging oaks, "burnished" guns gleaming brightly in the sun, a garrison flag waving overhead, a "bold river" flowing past, and the soft waves of the ocean sounding in the distance. This was one of several camps near Savannah. In the morning Jones could hear the sound of reveille from other camps along the river.

On November 7, a few days after Jones's arrival at Claghorn, the Union launched an attack from the sea on nearby Port Royal and the rich Georgia Sea Islands. Jones and his company expected to be moved at any moment to support the Confederate batteries on the islands, but within a few hours the Union fleet had swept around the island defenses and occupied Port Royal. The Yankees now threatened Savannah herself, and anticipating a deadly battle, Jones wrote his parents that he would gladly give his life in support of southern "honor, nationality, and principles" and in opposition to the "infamous pollution of a lawless and inhuman enemy." He anticipated that despite this initial defeat, in Georgia the Yankees would find that "a people armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as this which we possess, are invincible by any force which they may send against us." Although Jones did not say so, his phrase was derived from Patrick Henry's famous Revolutionary oration in which he said, "give me liberty or give me death." Jones, like many other southerners, believed that the principles of 1776 and 1861 were identical. And as the earlier patriots had, his people, too, would prevail.

Despite the proximity of the Union forces to Savannah, the battle Jones expected did not occur. The Yankees, controlling the seas, were impervious to threat on the Sea Islands and used their hold on this Atlantic outpost of southern plantation society as

an opportunity to experiment with the reconstruction of black life through education and economic opportunity.

Nonetheless, the Union encampment necessitated stationing batteries such as Jones's on the Georgia coast. Jones was offered the command of a volunteer company fighting in Virginia, but the threat to his native region kept him in Georgia. Small skirmishes occasionally erupted, and at times Savannah residents could see northern ships with the naked eye; but the wait for conflict stretched on month after month, and the situation acquired an aura of unreality. One day in early spring 1862 Jones rode out to an abandoned battery on nearby Skidaway Island. In the still evening the sea gulls and pelicans played above the gentle sea. The scene seemed "emblematic of perfect peace." But only a short distance away five Union ships stood in full view. When would the enemy attack?

For the present the artillery companies were left to the day-to-day work of camp life. Sometimes the men left the orderly rows of tents at Camp Claghorn and bivouacked in the country to practice the fatigues of march. One December evening they slept with only blankets in the cold clear air and awakened with frost on their caps and lumps of ice in their canteens. Sometimes they went farther afield and had to contend with bedbugs and crowded quarters. But, anchored as they were to their base near Savannah, they never had to endure the hardships of a long march.

Jones hoped for the opportunity to confront the enemy, but the Yankees at Port Royal seemed contented to stay on the Sea Islands, and the great engagements of the war took place in distant places. Jones was forced to follow the war from afar, drilling his artillery company and hoping for a chance to strike a blow for the cause.

He viewed the war with the strong religious sensibilities taught him by his Presbyterian father, believing that the South must recognize its dependence upon God in order to defeat the Union armies. When his state or the Confederacy called for days of fasting, Jones observed them strictly, halting all drills and encouraging his men to "feel their sins and their dependence upon God." Jones regarded southern defeats as scourges from God, designed to purify the southern people and draw their hearts to Him. Despite their sins and temporary setbacks, they were on the side of virtue and order, and in time God would punish the North with a "day of retribution."

But after the defeat of General Lee at Gettysburg and the Union victories on the Mississippi, the prospect of a southern victory began to dim. Still, the northern victories did not undermine Jones's sense of Yankee villainy and southern rectitude. When the Federal navy bombarded Charleston, South Carolina, in August 1863, he was appalled at this attack on a civilian population. "Can history furnish a parallel to such an act of inhumanity?" he asked. He regarded the Emancipation Proclamation as the "crowning act" in a "series of black and diabolical transactions." He wrote his father that Lincoln intended to "subvert our entire social system, desolate our homes, and convert the quiet, ignorant, dependent black son of toil into a savage incendiary and brutal murderer."

Believing, as most southerners did, that slavery was the natural and proper condition for blacks, he thought the northern promise of freedom misguided. Not understanding their own best interests, many blacks would be attracted to the Union side. "Ignorance, credulity, pliability, desire for change, the absence of the political ties of allegiance, the peculiar status of the race"—all these factors would make slaves unduly susceptible to northern enticements, contrary to their best interests. He advised his

father to offset the appeal of freedom with harsh penalties for unruly slaves. Any black who incited others to run away or acted as a spy should be summarily executed. Those who sought the Union lines should be met with "terrible corporal punishment" and imprisoned in the county jail. "If insensible to every other consideration," he wrote, "terror must be made to operate upon their minds, and fear prevent what curiosity and desire for utopian pleasures induce them to attempt." In his anger at northern efforts to undermine slavery he even suggested that Yankee captives should not be treated as prisoners of a legitimate war but as robbers and murderers.

Before the end of 1864 Jones's characterization of the Yankees as vandals was borne out by the behavior of many of the soldiers who marched through his native Georgia with General Sherman. The necessity of obtaining food on the expedition and the animosity of some soldiers toward the planters led to countless acts of violence and looting. Among the victims was Charles Jones's mother, Mary. In January 1865 her house was repeatedly plundered. Union soldiers looking for food and valuables broke open every room, closet, trunk, bureau, and box in the house. They took grain, livestock, clothing, jewelry, cutlery, and everything else worth carrying. She dared eat by candlelight only before dawn, lest the invaders take her remaining food. The children could play outside only under close supervision; at the appearance of Yankee soldiers they would "rush in and remain almost breathless, huddled together in one of the upper rooms like a bevy of frightened partridges."

No person could have prevented the suffering experienced by the civilians on Sherman's route. But one of the officers who opposed the gratuitous destruction of southern property was William Wheeler, whose path almost crossed that of the other artilleryman, Charles Jones. One wonders what the two men would have thought of one another had they met. Both were lawyers, Harvard graduates, devotees of literature, sensitive officers, and artillerymen. Each believed he was fighting for God's cause against a sinful foe.

They never had the chance to meet. On June 23, 1864, Wheeler had moved his artillery company into position for another of the skirmishes that had become a routine part of his life. This engagement, however, was different. As he stood on the battlefield, giving orders, a bullet caught him squarely in the chest. In that instant he may have thought of his boyhood in New York, the ocean voyage to Europe, his years in college, his soldier's life, and his family at home. Then the sound of battle faded, and he was gone.

Charles Jones survived the defeat of the South. His opportunity for battle came finally in December 1864 when he commanded the batteries that tried unsuccessfully to defend Savannah from Sherman. He must have known already that the Confederacy's end was near. His land had endured defeat after defeat, and food had been scarce for months. The North had been too powerful for a Confederacy that fought with fewer men, little industry, and no navy.

In 1865 Jones began the long work of accommodation to the new order of affairs. He counseled his mother to accept the fact that the slaves were now free. He found himself engaged in manual labor, loading cotton for shipment to market, his hands peculiarly hardened and tanned by the unaccustomed labor. He soon decided that he could not earn a good living in his homeland, because the plantation economy was devastated by Sherman's destruction and the effects of emancipation were uncertain. Legal and business opportunities in Savannah had become problematical, and in 1866 Jones joined a friend in establishing a law office in New York City, remaining in

the heart of Yankeeland for eleven years. Eventually he returned to Georgia and became a lawyer and one of the state's leading historians.

If Wheeler had lived, he, too, might have combined writing and the law. The parallels between his and Jones's life are intriguing but not surprising. North and South might be "oil and water," as Jones had said. But ties of common character and experience bound the two sections together. It was curious but not entirely improbable that the story would end as it did—with Jones at work as a lawyer in New York and Wheeler killed in a battle outside of Atlanta.

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Identification Topics

William Wheeler, Republican Party, Robert E. Lee, Gettysburg, Ulysses S. Grant, Charles Colcock Jones Jr., Anthony Burns, Chatham Artillery, Sea Islands, William Tecumseh Sherman

Study Questions

1. How did William Wheeler justify suppression of the South in the Civil War? What did he believe he was fighting for?
2. What were Wheeler's attitudes toward the following: the Union, army life, battle, the enemy, southern civilians, and home?

3. Describe Charles Colcock Jones Jr.'s attitude toward slaves. In what ways did he display warmth toward the blacks, and in what ways did he exhibit sternness? How did he explain the slave reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation?
4. How do you imagine that the Joneses treated their slaves? Would they have considered Thomas Foster a good master?
5. What were Jones's attitudes toward these: the North, the South, secession, and the Emancipation Proclamation?
6. Compare the views of Charles Colcock Jones Jr. and William Lloyd Garrison on slavery. How is it possible for two people to have such different views on the same institution?
7. What connections did Jones and Wheeler make between their cause and God?
8. What were the main similarities and differences between Jones and Wheeler?
9. What really divided Wheeler and Jones? Had their cultures made them completely different kinds of people? Or did the war create an artificial and impermanent hostility between them?
10. Would you describe either Wheeler or Jones as an "extremist"? What role did extremism play in the Civil War?