

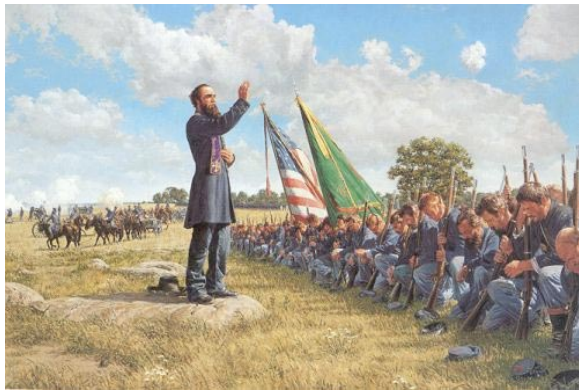
A CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS FAITH- D Wilson

Many of the men who walked away from home and family to go to war were devoutly religious, others were not. Many of the young men went with thoughts of glory and found themselves praying with their fellows and thanking God for sparing them, at least for the day. The book "Our Boys: A Civil War Photograph Album" is full of interesting stories of Civil War soldiers who did not come back from that awful tempest of carnage. You can buy a copy from our Historical Society which facilitated its publication. When they came back, many of the survivors were very different from the light hearted boys who marched away with banners, bands, and badges. Soldiers were given little books such as *The Book of Common Prayer*, or the *Soldiers Prayer Book*, from which the following is found, an example of the rigid and formal tone of the time:

Soldiers' Prayer

by the Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania

O GOD our Father! Wash us from all our sins in the Saviour's blood and we shall be whiter than snow. Create in us a clean heart, and fill us with the Holy Ghost, that we may never be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; looking to Jesus the great Captain of our salvation. We ask it all, because He lived, died, rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. Amen.



Dangerous times often required a more intimate and personal connection with God.

True and immediate heartfelt feelings were put to pen more eloquently than the Bishop could rouse in his study far from the front.

To the American of the Civil War era death was not uncommon, but death on the level being experienced was unprecedented and was repeated in no other war. The "Art of Dying" as understood in that time required an imitation of Christ's suffering; Stoic acceptance, prayer, making amends, and giving up your soul gladly and willingly to God. In war it was all the more essential to live the life of a Christian daily, as death from battle and disease was always present.

Private John Mauer from Liberty took a pledge before joining up; *"We undersigned, professors of religion having enlisted to enter upon the duties of soldiers...believing in the power of prayer and Christian fellowship...pledge ourselves that we will convene on Thurs. eve of each week, for public prayer and devotion to God... to assist each other in the faithful discharge of our Christian obligations, and letting our "light shine before the world that our good works may be constrained, thereby to glorify God with us."* How hard that would be when they were called upon to kill. Most prayed for their enemies, that they would give up their errors and make peaceful reconciliation possible.

Today in a "good death" we seek a maximum of comfort. We say it is a blessing if one loses consciousness and does not suffer, but the children of the Puritans saw dying in a far different way. Great measures were taken to keep the sufferer conscious for prayer, the affirmation of salvation, witnessing to friends and relatives, and asking forgiveness from any you may have wronged. That made death noble and meaningful, and glorified God who promised to his own eternal life in paradise.

Major Sullivan Ballou wrote the following to his wife a week before his death at the battle of Bull Run. He affirmed God's goodness, his faith in his cause, and in eternal life: *"The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grow up to honorable manhood around us... But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the brightest day and in the darkest night—amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours—always, always; and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again."*

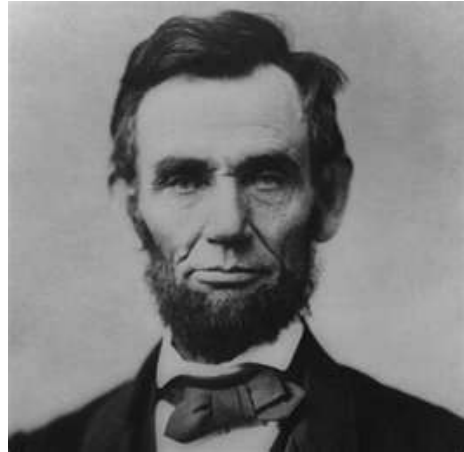
John Johnson, a soldier in the 15th Wisconsin wrote home on November 15, 1863: *"Regarding the Battle of Chickamauga on Saturday and Sunday September 19 and 20, I presume you saw in the papers a long time ago, how it went, so there is no need to repeat it. Yes, dear friend, it was a hard battle while it lasted. I have now been in three large battles and this was really the hardest. But God be praised and thanked. He held his hand over me, as He has always done, so I came out of it unscratched. If God does not hold his hand over us, we are nothing; as we are unable to do anything by ourselves. I received a visit from a bullet that went through my trousers below the knee, without harming me. Yes it is a great favor of God our father, who delivers us in such dark moments, when bullets rain over us like a hailstorm, and we have a mighty army to fight against..."*

On May 22, 1864 he wrote again: *"I must let you know that in this battle I was struck by*

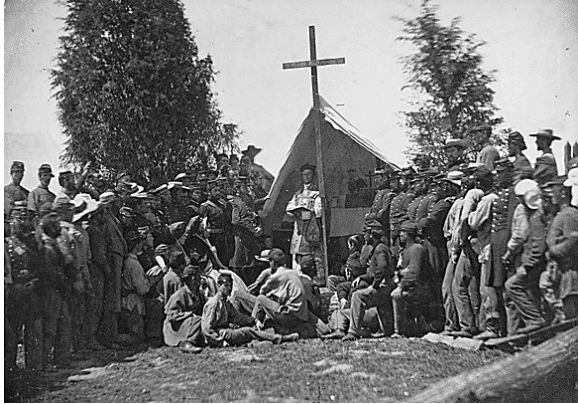
an enemy bullet in the shoulder, but it did not do much damage. I am almost good as new, which surely I must thank the good God for.

Private John Johnson, Company K, 15th Wisconsin Regiment died at the battle of Pickett's Mill in Georgia on May 27, 1864.

Lincoln Called upon God to carry the battle saying: *"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with a sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so shall it must be said, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."*



This war was not just a war, it was a moral crusade, and many a soldier accepted that God controlled his fate and if it was God's will that he should die in the cause, there was nothing he could do. When your time came, it came, and you must be ready to meet your God.



Mass

A REMARKABLE LETTER

Some idea of the way that war brought religious faith into focus are exhibited in the following excerpts from a letter from Sergeant Tanner Thomas to the parents of Private William G. Monroe Scott

Camp Near Fall's Church Sept 4th 1862

Father Scott – It is with trembling hand and sad heart I write you a few lines to inform you of the death of your brave and noble son, W. G. Monroe Scott. He fell at the battle of Bull Run on Saturday, the 30th ult., while bravely defending his country. He was a good and faithful soldier, always cheerful; ever at his post; and commanded the confidence and esteem of his companions and fellow soldiers, who sorrowfully mourn his loss.

Bereaved parents, do not give way to despair, God in his mercy had warned him of his approaching hour and was with him in his death.

I will give you as near as possible the conversation I had with him in the forenoon of that day. About 10 o'clock he came to me, and requested that I take a walk with him, saying he wished to have a talk with me. I told him I would gladly go with him anywhere, so we started and when we got out of the noise and

confusion of the camp we sat down. He broke the silence by saying, "Tanner you are the only confidential friend I have here, and I have several things to tell you. My time is short on earth, this is my last day." I looked at him in surprise and wondered what he meant. He continued by saying, "to-day I will fall in battle" – at the time we were talking no battle had yet occurred. I told him there was no prospect of our getting into battle, and if it should commence there will be so many troops ahead of us that I did not think it possible for us to be engaged that day. He said, "We will go into battle to-day; and I will fall as soon as we get there. "

I saw that it was useless to undertake to persuade him differently, he appeared no way excited or frightened, but perfectly cool, and said he was contented with his lot and felt satisfied that his time had come.

I then talked to him about his precious and immortal soul, and his prospects of heaven. I exhorted him in my very feeble way to cleave unto God with full purpose of heart, and told him to look to Jesus who alone could save. He said "he had considered these things; he knew God was a just and merciful God, and on him alone he depended for salvation, that he had put his trust in his redeemer, and had full confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, and was satisfied he would save his immortal soul.

He then talked of the goodness of God toward us, in watching over and protecting us, since we left our homes, how he had blessed us with health and strength, we then knelt with and for each other fervently, God was with us; we promised to pray for each other during the day. Monroe wished me to write you, and tell you "that all was well with him" – that "God in mercy had saved his soul," and he "desires you to meet him in Heaven;" and that you "should not weep for him, for he will be happy." While he uttered these last words and for the first time manly tears trickled down his cheeks, and for a

short time ceased speaking. After a moment or two he grasped my hand and said "Tanner you know my feelings." Our tears flowed together; I was melted down and could say nothing more for a little while.

He then talked very affectionately about his dear father, mother, brothers and sisters – he then said he had a few dollars in his pocket, and one or two other things that he wished me to take and send them to you. I told him I would do so, if he fell. He then thanked me, and with tearful eyes, we shook hands, and he wished me "a farewell" – at the same time saying "meet me in Heaven." I told him, "by the help of God I would." We then went back to the camp, as it was near noon.

Another soldier takes up the story; "One G, Monroe Scott, a member of my company, H, came into our mess, and says: "Boys, I am going to eat dinner with you to-day; this is the last meal I shall eat. I shall be killed before night." There were four of us in the mess; we laughed at him, and told him that he was welcome to eat dinner with us, and we told him to cheer up, that perhaps we would not be called on to do any fighting that day. He said, "It's no use boys, I am no coward, but you will see that what I tell you is true."

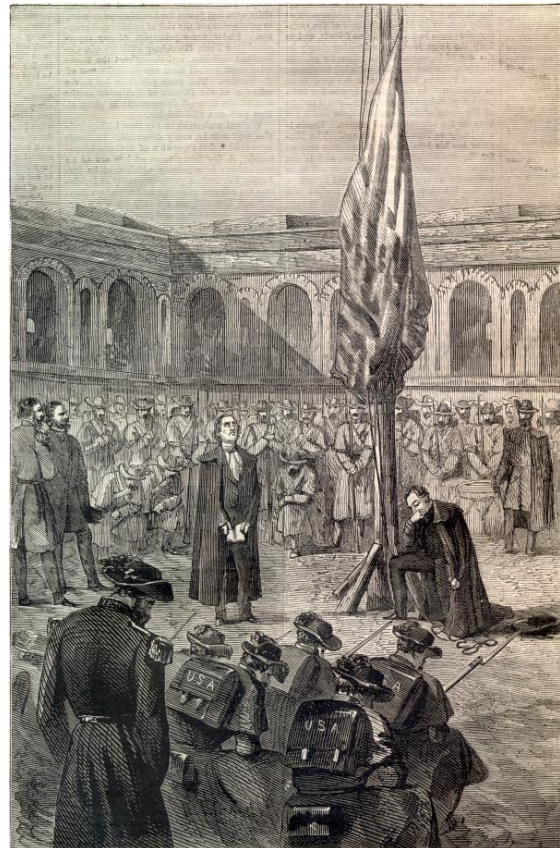
Thomas continues; "He ate a hearty dinner, and just as we had finished we were ordered to fall in and march. Monroe then marched to the battle field as willingly as he had ever marched anywhere, to all appearances. He seemed perfectly cool and firm, he looked several times to see if I was near him: we had been there but a short time when I heard the whistling of a ball, and a crashing sound and Monroe fell. I hastened to him, but life had departed. We laid him beside a tree. I took what things he had in his pocket and covered his face with his handkerchief.

"I must cease writing – my heart is sad, I feel I have lost a kind and true friend. Dear bereaved parents do not mourn him as lost, you

will meet him at the resurrection morn; not as those who have no hope, you need not have a doubt as to the safety of his immortal spirit. It should satisfy you to know, Monroe was aware of his going to meet death, and that he was firm and unshaken to the last. No signs of fear or terror were seen upon his countenance. I believe God was with him and supported him in the dark hour. While you have reason to mourn the loss of one so dear to you, you still have reason to rejoice, and give God thanks that you had so noble a boy, willing to sacrifice all for his country, and marching like a lamb to the slaughter without a murmur.

"Remember me kindly to all your and my folks, and forget me not at the throne of grace. Tell them I am well." - Tanner Thomas

Thomas later died at Petersburg on June 18th 1864.



Prayer at Fort Sumter

In the latter part of 1863 and early 1864 there was a great revival in the Southern Army. Those soldiers, undersupplied and outmanned reached out to God. Ten percent of the Army of Northern Virginia accepted Christ. Perhaps that gave them the courage and resolution to go on.

In the northern army, similar conversions were occurring, and soldiers thinking of their mothers at home made comments such as; “Tell my mother that I read my Testament and put all my trust in the Lord...I am not afraid to die.”, and “O that my mother were here! She has so long been praying for me, and now I have found the Saviour.”



Hearts were changed and soldiers returned determined to lead good and useful lives with, as Lincoln said;” malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right...” As one veteran of Cold Harbor said “In that dreadful place I resolved to forsake my evil ways and to serve God.”

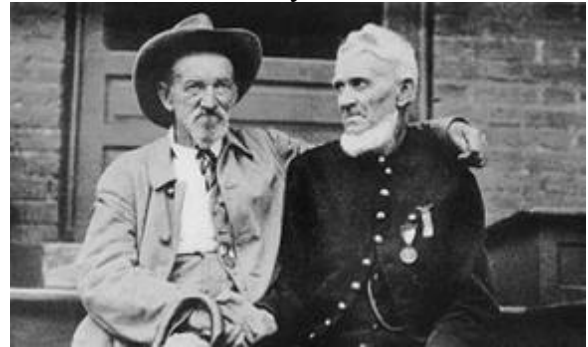
A man who was a boy when the war ended relates an event that occurred after his father returned from war: “Do any of you remember the fourth of July 1865? The celebration was held. A large Ox was killed for the dinner, large tables were made and all put their dinner together and eat, there were plenty of drums for the music, lots of soldiers were there with arms or legs off, some with fresh or nearly fresh wounds, groups of women could be

seen all around crying and asking the soldiers about their loved ones. It was a scene never to be forgotten”.

DEAD – Anonymous

**There's an empty seat where the old folks meet,
When they offer their evening prayer,
And a look forlorn, for the dear one gone,
As they gaze on his vacant chair.
There's a silent grief finds never relief,
And a face whence the bloom has fled,
And a maiden fair, in her beauty rare,
Who weeps for her lover -- dead.
There's a lonely grave, where a soldier brave,
Lies asleep in the southern land,
While a rusted gun still gleams in the sun,
On the parched and burning sand.
There's a home above, where the good God's love,
Its perfection ever discloses --
Where the soldier is blest with eternal rest,
And his quiet spirit reposes.**

Years later the old veterans of the war held reunions, embraced each other, and thanked their God for his mercy and Providence.



Stonewall Jackson Praying