

## Books of Special Interest

### Civil War Letters

WAR LETTERS, 1862-1865, of JOHN CHIPMAN GRAY and JOHN CODMAN ROPES. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1928. \$7.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM MACDONALD.

IT would be interesting to know whether any one today writes such long, detailed, and worthwhile letters about himself and his doings as Worthington C. Ford, the indefatigable and incomparable editor of the Massachusetts Historical Society, has here collected. From the moment when Gray, destined to be for forty years one of the most distinguished professors of the Harvard Law School, entered the Union army, where he became in due course a major and judge advocate, he poured out upon his friend Ropes, who continued his law practice at Boston, a veritable stream of correspondence of varied content, to which Ropes replied with another stream equally varied and considerably more substantial. Neither, however, descended to disquisition, and the letters keep throughout the informal and familiar tone which distinguishes good letter-writing from other form of narration. By the time the war was over and the friends were reunited, the correspondence, including a few letters to members of Gray's family, had run to what is now five hundred pages of print.

Gray, who appears to have gone to the front in a hurry in October, 1862, and who had some difficulty in getting his commission straightened out and connecting with his regiment, does not seem to have taken the war any too seriously at first, and to the end was repeatedly turning from his military duties to his reading. One of his first requests for supplies from home calls for a copy of Juvenal along with two gallons of whiskey and other drinkables, and there is a later call for Browning's poems "in blue and gold or any as small form." Off Charleston he varies Marmont's "Military Institutes" with Homer at fifty lines a day, reads St. Paul's Epistles, and sets down his thoughts about salvation and the "almost impregnable fortress" of Calvinism. Both Gray and Ropes were keenly interested in theology, and the merits of "Campbell on the Atonement" and

Farrar's "Critical History of Free Thought" jostle descriptions of marches and engagements and accounts of dinners in camp and reports on the progress and prospects of the ladies at home. Here and there is a good story, among them that of a Mrs. Wallace, "a second Wife of Bath," who had married four times, and whose many petitions for authority to resume her maiden name led a member of the Florida legislature to move that she be allowed to take her maiden name once a year.

Both Ropes and Gray were long critical of Lincoln, and the "radicals" who sought to use the war as a means of abolishing slavery. Ropes, writing in December, 1863, about the McDowell court-martial and the investigation of the Peninsula campaign, speaks of Lincoln as acting "like a devilish fool, throughout, in the military administration of the campaign," and declares that if McClellan, instead of allowing the President to "do what he pleased," had brought him up "with a short turn" and appealed to the country, "the asinine folly of the Illinois lawyer taking the military command out of the hands of his ablest generals would have been exposed." As late as August, 1864, on the eve of the presidential election, Gray, who was disposed to vote for Lincoln, remarks that Lincoln was bound in honor by the emancipation proclamation, and asks if Ropes does not think "it would have been better for Abraham to have worked less for expediency and have done what was constitutional and right, would not honesty have been better policy than those crooked ways by which he sought to cheat his own conscience and that of the North by his sophistries of military power?"

One of the most important contributions of these letters is their account of the inception of Ropes's "Story of the Civil War," the work which, though unfortunately left incomplete, placed its author in the front rank of military historians. Ropes had already been writing voluminously and in masterly fashion about both Union and Confederate operations when, in September, 1863, he confided to Gray that some friends "have suggested to me—for the idea never occurred to me—the idea

of writing a History of this War." The thing seemed to him "formidable enough to be well-nigh absurd, at first sight," but it nevertheless "resolves itself into a certainly practicable plan," and he proceeded to outline his reasons for thinking that the work ought to be done. The statement of his own qualifications which immediately follows is a real contribution to literary history:

I might say that I am one of that class from whom must come such a book, if it comes at all, and is worth anything—education, sympathy with the war and with the government, long attention to American Politics, and familiarity with them greater, I may say, than most young men in my position possess, a pretty fair acquaintance with general history, especially with military history, some smattering in military matters, art of war, etc., careful study of this war from the first, and very considerable familiarity with the details of some parts of it, the Peninsula campaign especially, the fact of having had a brother and many good friends in the war enabling me to realize the scenes in which they were engaged as well as anyone perhaps could, not a participant therein, sufficient legal knowledge to understand the legal and constitutional questions of the war, and of the policy of the government, able from several sources to get at all that need be said about the financial questions of the rebellion, and to all these I will add a pretty fair and impartial mind, and entire freedom from any bias that would disqualify me from being an impartial judge in any of these matters.

Gray promptly commended the plan, but warned Ropes not to try to do the work in a hurry. The book should be one to stand the test of time, and it would be years before a great deal of important material would be available. Ropes, on the contrary, felt the need of haste. "If I take your advice," he wrote to Gray, it is absolutely certain that I shall have formidable competitors, perhaps a Motley or some such man. If on the contrary I write a two volume book published in 1864, I am almost as absolutely certain that no Motley or any other well known man of established literary reputation will enter the field. I shall have to contend against the Headleys and Whitneys and J. S. C. Abbotts of the day, against blood and thunder, the gallant Ellsworth, bayonet charges, fire zouaves, and black horse cavalry. These militia I think I can rout, and have the first place in the estimate of Boston and Cambridge and the intelligent public generally. Fortunately for Ropes's fame Gray's advice prevailed, and more than thirty years elapsed before the first volume of the great history appeared.

### A Scholar's Essays

THE COLLECTED PAPERS OF HENRY BRADLEY, with a Memoir by R. ROBERT BRIDGES. New York: Oxford University Press. 1928.

HENRY BRADLEY was a scholar by nature and not by environment. His father was a business man in reduced circumstances. He learned to read before he was four by standing in front of his father at family prayers and watching the pages of the Bible upside down as they were read, whereby, for many years, he could read a page either end up equally well. At eighteen he became corresponding clerk to a cutlery firm, and remained with them twenty years, acquiring languages by the way. For the remaining forty years he worked for the Oxford Dictionary, at first incidentally, but for the last twenty-seven years at Oxford wholly identified with that monumental affair. He made himself one of the greatest philologists of his time, a scholar of the foremost rank.

Aside from the six volumes which he contributed to the dictionary, his bibliography consists almost entirely of articles and reviews in periodicals, most of them technical. His friends have selected a few of them, suggesting the range of his interest, and published them. The essays are practically all philological, and are grouped under headings. Place Names begins with "Ptolemy's Geography of the British Isles"; Lexicography contains his notable review (1884) of the first instalment of the dictionary—on reading which Sir James Murray immediately invited Bradley to join the staff. He did not do so at once, but his participation from that time on increased until the day when he succeeded Murray as senior editor. In the group Language, three of the five essays are concerned with the spelling and pronunciation. Bradley believed in spelling reform, but was opposed to any radical change based on phonetic principles. English is the most unsuited of European tongues to be written phonetically. His discussion of the subject is one of the sanest that we know. Among Literary Problems and Studies the most interesting is the lecture on "Beowulf." The examples of his Conjectural Emendations of text run through Hebrew, Arabic, Greek inscriptions, medieval Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and down to Elizabethan drama.

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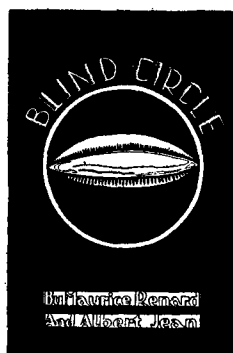


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