

"SUCH ARE THE CHANGES OF LIFE": THE LITERARY RESPONSE ON THE GEORGIA HOMEFRONT TO THE CIVIL WAR

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When the Civil War began, most southern authors welcomed secession with their heads held high in proud defiance. Writing as Bill Arp to "Mr. Linkhorn" in April 1861, for example, the Georgia humorist Charles Henry Smith boasted that the citizens of Rome were so hot "they fairly siz when you poor water on them." Free at last from the North's literary dominance and basking in the optimism captured by the South Carolina poet Henry Timrod in his poem, "Ethnogenesis," many authors predicted a great cultural flowering. Yet, as Jay B. Hubbell once observed, the anticipated renaissance failed to materialize.¹

Elisabeth Muhlenfeld contends that the reason the literature of the Confederacy is "the perennial poor relation" in an otherwise rich literary tradition lies in the extraordinary circumstances of the time. What began as a political struggle to establish separate national identity evolved into a social revolution, or a war to abolish slavery. Simply stated, fighting a revolution leaves little time or energy for public literary pursuits, especially in a region lacking adequate publishing capabilities. This is not to say, however, that Georgians did not set aside time for private literary reflection in their journals and letters. This paper, which is part of a broader study of literature and social development in nineteenth-century Georgia, explores the "literature of intimacy" for the insights it affords into a critical turning point in the state's history, giving special emphasis to Sherman's invasion because of its subsequent

importance in the Lost Cause ideology.²

Reflecting in July 1861 upon the rush of events that had followed the attack on Fort Sumter, Ella Clanton Thomas wrote in her journal that she had never been more proud of her native state. The city of Augusta had sent ten companies of troops off to war, while her husband had been named first lieutenant in the Richmond Hussars. Although she would soon sing a different tune, Thomas wrote that she had no desire for him to remain at home "in the lap of inglorious ease" when duty and honor called. Wanting nothing but "to be let alone" by "a people like ourselves whose republican independence was won by a rebellion, [and] whose liberty was achieved by a secession," Thomas angrily condemned the North's attempt to coerce the South as "preposterous." President Lincoln's call for men, money, and a blockade of southern ports also brought the realization that "indeed we are now in the midst of what all of us have read of—thought of—and dreamed of before, but never realized—A revolution— There are very many I very much fear who do not realize it now."³

Unlike many southerners, the Reverend Charles C. Jones of Liberty County thought the prospect of European intervention in the Confederacy's behalf unlikely, citing the distaste of despotic and aristocratic governments for American republican ideals and hesitancy to aid "revolutionists" for fear of setting a dangerous precedent at home. Jones believed that interest alone dictated relations with European powers. "A kind of Providence" had arranged "the provisions for man's necessity" so that the loss of any product, such as cotton or tobacco, was but a "temporary inconvenience." As he explained in a letter to his son, a people's economic interests changed over time and came second to more fundamental concerns such as life and liberty.⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to take such

statements too literally without first recognizing them as originating in a worldview grounded firmly in the political economy of slavery. Individual citizens and governments alike justify their entrance into war with lofty ideals. Once hostilities begin and unexpected consequences follow, events have a way of stripping away the patriotic veneer that hides fundamental material concerns. As did planters elsewhere in Georgia, the Reverend Jones realized that the failure of the Confederacy would result in the failure of "everything of value in property." Planters were practical men who understood the source of their favored position in society. Like Jones, many took whatever steps available to protect their investment in plantation slavery, even when such actions resulted in direct conflict with the policies and needs of the Confederate government.⁵

As often proves the case, revolution was a harsh mistress who failed to redeem all the pledges made in her honor during the early days of the war. For the second time in American history, southern planters risked everything on a calculated gamble to expand their economic and political liberties. Aware that their interests as slaveholders were on a collision course with the free labor ideology of a capitalist society entering an industrial revolution, Georgia planters had arrived at the uneasy consensus that secession was their only hope for survival. Yet when Lincoln publicly raised the stakes by putting slavery on the table beside the preservation of the Union, the South's so-called revolution turned an ominous corner.

Writing to his father in September 1862, Lt. Charles C. Jones, Jr. labeled Lincoln's pending emancipation proclamation a black and diabolical bid to incite insurrection among the slave population. The "infamous" Lincoln was out 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."

Lt. Jones angrily denounced the North as "an example of refined barbarity, moral degeneracy, religious impiety, soulless honor, and absolute degradation almost beyond belief." Nearly two years later, his uncle still found the recent course of events difficult to contemplate. As he wrote in a letter to his niece, "Are we not living in a peculiar age?"⁶

The historian George C. Rable argues that "Rather than burying class distinctions beneath a spirit of general sacrifice, the Confederacy's economic woes widened the social and political distance between the haves and have-nots." Although there is some evidence to the contrary in the literature of intimacy, especially in the aftermath of Sherman's invasion of Georgia, the war did indeed stretch "the conservative vision of an organic society to the breaking point." Ella Clanton Thomas, for example, expressed outrage in her journal toward criticism of her father's offer to sell meal at half its market value of two dollars to families of volunteers from Richmond and Columbia Counties in the spring of 1862. When an editorial signed "A poor soldiers wife" in the Augusta *Constitutionalist* pointed out that meal at ten cents a bushel would be expensive without transportation, Thomas voiced her disgust with the "ungrateful wretches." Ironically, a few months earlier she had concluded that the postage rate of ten cents per letter was a serious hardship for the families of poor soldiers, writing that it would deprive their children of bread. During a visit to Atlanta, Thomas paid a socially correct call to a hospital but confessed later that "conventionalism" prevented her from expressing her gratitude and sympathy to a wounded gentleman. Repulsed by the death and discomfort she witnessed, Thomas wrote that it must be difficult for "a man of refinement and education" to endure common association with "men essentially different from him."⁷

In the long run, few Georgia families emerged from the Civil War unscathed. The number of options available in the face of hardship, however, was directly proportionate to one's station in life. When the Jones family, for example, was finalizing the purchase of a plantation in Burke County as a safe haven for their investment in slaves, Charles C. Jones, Jr. worked diligently to arrange the best possible deal with Confederate commissary agents in Savannah for their surplus grain and livestock. Writing from Maryland shortly after Gettysburg to his wife in Hancock County, Edgeworth Bird recommended that she pay off their debts because Confederate money was at a discount below gold. Dr. George W. Peddy of Heard County, who was the 56th Georgia Volunteer Regiment's surgeon, speculated in surgical instruments, mules, and horses to reduce his family's debts. He also advised his wife, Kate, to kill and process their cattle to avoid impressment by the army. Such actions, however, reflect the efforts of families to juggle conflicting personal and social commitments more than a lack of patriotism.⁸

As one might expect, the war quickly became the dominant topic of conversation in the literature of intimacy, although many of the concerns traditionally addressed in the private correspondence of planter families remained unchanged. Edgeworth Bird of Hancock County, for example, remained mindful of his daughter's social education, reminding her to write well and neatly because he shared her letters with many gentlemen, and to tend to her duties faithfully and honestly, say her prayers, and lead a virtuous life. His wife maintained the family tradition after joining him in Virginia in the spring of 1862. Local news, visiting relatives, crops and climate, and illness were common themes in letters to loved ones in camp. In their letters, soldiers described life in camp, passed along news about men from the community, circulated the latest

political and military rumors, and included explicit instructions about plantation management. The Peddy letters are of particular interest because they communicate the loneliness and insecurity caused by wartime separations. Apparently rumors about camp life made their way home because Kate Peddy also feared that her husband would fall prey to the "inebriating bowl" or even worse temptations.⁹

Kate Peddy's insecurity was more than a reflection of her loneliness for her husband. Although men like George W. Peddy and Edgeworth Bird tried to reassure their loved ones at home, the war forced women to unaccustomed roles beyond their traditional household responsibilities. In their letters and journals, the women of the slaveholding elite wrote of organizing and attending relief fund musicals and balls, getting together to write letters and make care packages for soldiers, and attending to benevolent work in hospitals, all while waiting anxiously for news from the front. Responding to requests from their husbands and sons for clothing and provisions to supplement their meager military fare, those who were able forwarded trunks to their men at the front, often under the care of trusted slaves. Widespread discussion in the literature of intimacy of problems related to slave management, however, suggests that trust was becoming a rare commodity on Georgia plantations.¹⁰

Georgia planters also realized early in the war that the security of their property in slaves was related directly to the proximity of Union troops. Indeed, the war brought a profound moment of truth to men and women who had taken the loyalty of their slaves for granted. In the words of Leon F. Litwack, "the Civil War threatened to undermine traditional relationships and dissolve long-held assumptions and illusion." Although accustomed to the trials and tribulations of household management, many plantation

mistresses nonetheless found it difficult to assume full command while their men were away. In later years, plantation romancers would elevate the myth of the lady and slave fidelity to new heights while trying to restore ideological coherence to the postwar South. Wartime letters and diaries, however, present a more complex picture of slave accommodation and resistance. Many slaves remained faithful to their masters, but others struck boldly for their freedom. The majority continued to work much as before the war while struggling to keep their families intact. Masters at testing the parameters of their bondage, few failed to note that change was in the wind.¹¹

As many coastal planters discovered to their dismay early in the war, black Georgians became increasingly aware of the opportunities for liberty at hand. Louis Manigault wrote in his plantation journal in June 1862 that the "unrighteous and diabolical war" was causing great distress, especially among the house servants. More than 3,500 black Georgians served in the Union military before the war's end. In addition, the North's early conquest of the "golden isles" enabled the local slave population to make great strides toward autonomy after whites fled to safety on the mainland. Meanwhile, the disruption of traditional lines of plantation authority resulted in a rising tide of slave resistance that Georgia planters found alarming. In late March 1862, Kate Peddy wrote to her husband that there had been seven runaways in Troup County in the past week. One of her father's slaves boldly proclaimed to his overseer that "he was not afraid of no white man." Peddy explained that her father intended to sell the man rather than tolerate his insolence. Late in the summer of the following year, Edgeworth Bird instructed his wife to do the same with a troublesome slave named Peter, writing that "I do not wish you annoyed, and I am very certain there should be no such negro on a place in such times." Bird also wrote

that he was "gratified and very thankful that the balance of our people behave so well," although a number of his slaves participated in an aborted rebellion in Hancock County the following October that resulted in eighteen arrested and four convictions for insurrection.¹²

The response of leading antebellum paternalists like Charles C. Jones to slave resistance and flight indicates the depth of the crisis along the coast. In July 1862, the Reverend Jones wrote that no slave could resist the temptation of going over to the enemy. Especially shocking was his sister's loss of a family favorite named Joeefinny. Feelings of betrayal were common among paternalistic masters who prided themselves on being loving and benevolent. What worried the Reverend Jones most was that local slaves knew every road, swamp, creek, and planation in Liberty County and could easily "pilot and enemy into your bedchamber!" Later that month he attended a public meeting held in Hinesville to adopt measures to stop the exodus of slaves in Liberty County. The planters who attended the meeting saw no impropriety in requesting that a company of state troops be removed from the coastal defenses and reassigned to protect their property. After giving the matter some thought, Lt. Jones suggested to his father that planters take the law into their own hands if the military and civilian authorities refused to act, recommending "Terrible corporal punishment, accompanied with close and protracted confinement in the county jail, or public punishment followed by banishment from the county and sale in some distant part of the country." Such statements reveal how the war had torn asunder the mask of paternalism to expose the ugly oppression underneath.¹³

In spite of their problems with slave management, plantation mistresses continued to serve the Confederate war effort by maintain production on their family lands,

although the job became more and more difficult each year. Having managed a plantation by herself for nearly three years, the widow Dolly Lunt Burge was better prepared than most for the difficult task at hand. Like farmers throughout the South, Burge developed ways to cope with wartime shortages and inflation. The biggest dilemma she encountered in the spring of 1862 was whether or not to plant cotton on her plantation near Covington. "Everybody says we must plant little or no cotton," she wrote, but Burge remained torn between her duty to plant more provision crops and her fear that the war would end and leave her without a marketable crop. Burge shifted part of her cotton land to corn, although she confessed in her diary that she disliked doing it. The same month, the Reverend C. C. Jones also cut back on the amount of cotton planted at his inland plantation, Arcadia.¹⁴

By that summer even the affluent were feeling the pinch of the war. As Burge wrote, "I have hundreds of dollars in my pocket book & yet I cannot buy a yard of calico to make my Sadai a sunbonnet." Mary Jones wrote to her daughter in August that she was contemplating ripping up a mattress for wool to make winter clothing for the slaves. Women accustomed to buying rolls of cloth for their household needs began a desperate search for spinning wheels, cotton cards, and yarn, bemoaning the loss of distaff skills once universal in rural households. Cornelia Jones Pond later recalled how difficult it had been to learn to operate a loom that her father purchased to make slave clothing. She also remembered learning how to make plaited hats from palmetto leaves, dyes from the bark of trees and bushes, candles from myrtle berries, tallow, and lard, and coffee from sweet potatoes and parched okra seeds. In addition, she helped to extract opium for medicinal purposes from a single poppy that grew in the family garden.¹⁵

Plantation mistresses also had to contend with inflated war taxes, although inflation worked to their advantages upon occasion. Burge sold three bales of cotton at 75 cents per pound for such purposes in March 1864, for example. Direct military requisition of farm produce was another matter. On 30 October 1864, she wrote that three Confederate soldiers had breakfasted at her plantation, afterwards impressing three barrels of corn, nine hundred pounds of fodder, and nine bushels of wheat. Disturbed over her unexpected losses, Burge lamented in her diary, "Oh, what a wretched thing is war! Truly no man can call anything his own." Still mindful of her civic duty, she rode into Covington two weeks later to pay her Confederate tax, although the tax commissioners were not to be found. Writing in October 1863 from Chickamauga Station, Edgeworth Bird warned his wife to expect the impressment of her horse but to "bear it cheerfully."¹⁶

Moreover, while disease and death were hardly strangers in rural Georgia households, the war magnified both to frightening new dimensions. In the spring of 1862, the Jones family found itself battling an epidemic of measles at Montevideo that was compounded by a mysterious illness acquired by a group of slave men who had recently returned to the plantation after service on Savannah's fortifications. When her husband died in March 1863, Mary Jones grieved in isolation in Liberty County. Dolly Lunt Burge directly linked the death of her nineteen-year-old stepdaughter from consumption to being separated from the young man she had been intent on marrying, who had been "among the first to leave." Weakened by the stress caused by irregular mail service, the young woman's constitution finally had broken.¹⁷

Almost as difficult to endure was the anguish over the uncertain fate of husbands, brothers, and sons far away from home. Writing from Richmond in April 1862, Sallie

Bird told her daughter to pray earnestly for her father in his moment of "great peril" during the Peninsula campaign. Ella Clanton Thomas expressed great relief in her journal when her husband emerged unscathed from the fighting around Richmond, in spite of terrifying rumors to the contrary. Writing in her eighties during World War I, Rebecca Latimer Felton vividly remembered her mother's fears when her only son marched joyfully off to war in 1861, feelings shared by Josephine Clay Habersham for her sons as well. During the day on 1 July 1863, Habersham read a great deal, sewed, listened to her younger children recite their lessons, and enjoyed "a nice dinner of fish" caught by her husband, while the Confederacy entered what was arguably the most significant week of the entire war. She also received a short letter that day from one of her sons which kept her "in an agony of tears" throughout the night. Praying that God spare her "poor heart the misery which burdens so many hearts at this time," she did not sleep until daylight. Both sons perished the following year in the fighting around Atlanta. The rising tide of death and deprivation gradually began to take its toll. An army of veiled women in black became reluctant to sacrifice their remaining men to the war, while those in uniform found it increasingly painful to remain apart from suffering families.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the North grew stronger every day in spite of its early reversals on the battlefield. The sweet oil that Bill Arp mockingly advised Lincoln to put on his factories in January 1862 to prevent rust for want of southern cotton provided more than ample lubrication for the North's powerful industrial machine. The legendary ingenuity of its women and the impressive gains achieved in industrial production aside, Georgia found it increasingly difficult to equip its armies of soldiers and slaves. Indicative of the localized mindset that prevailed throughout the South, propertied Georgians found it equally difficult to reconcile

their own interests with those of the Confederate nation. Such disaffection on the homefront undoubtedly contributed to the Confederacy's downfall.¹⁹

Still, there was a world of difference between having doubts and abandoning the cause altogether. Although support for the war had weakened, the majority of white Georgians remained loyal to the bitter end. As long as the ragged Confederate armies continued to hold their own on the battlefield and the fighting largely remained on distant soil, they continued to believe that the South would prevail. Having grown tired of a defensive war that demanded extensive sacrifices from a civilian population living in constant fear of invasion, they applauded when General Lee invaded the North in the summer of 1863, although the long lists of casualties that filled the newspapers afterward convinced some that the end was drawing near. Reflecting their evangelical belief in a punishing yet forgiving God, others simply could not imagine that the South's suffering would go unredeemed. If all else failed, perhaps the presidential election in the fall of 1864 would bring the war-weary North to its senses. A red-bearded general from Ohio soon laid such notions to rest.²⁰

For the most part, Georgia had been spared the destruction of combat until the battle of Chickamauga in late September 1863. Although the Confederate army succeeded in driving the Federal forces back into Chattanooga, the arrival of Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman in the city boded ill for Georgia. After suffering defeats at Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, the vastly outnumbered Confederate forces fell back into defensive positions in Northwestern Georgia. When Grant proceeded to Virginia, Sherman remained to command an army of nearly 100,000 troops ready to march southward the following spring.²¹

Of all the reasons that Georgians cited for

supporting secession, defense of their homes was perhaps the only item in the Confederate lexicon of war with universal application. What made Sherman unique was his blunt determination to bring the war directly to the southern homefront. By striking at what Rable calls "the heart of the home," Sherman hoped to destroy the public morale needed to sustain a large army in a difficult war. Left alone to face "the Nero of the nineteenth century" and his legions, Confederate civilians were forced to choose between making a stand or taking flight from the terrible storm gathering in the distance.²²

Whether they elected to remain in their homes or to seek refuge elsewhere, many Georgians used journals and letters to vent traumatized emotions or to capture the historical moment for subsequent generations. Such documents communicate the intense anxiety and anger felt by those who were still uncertain as to which direction Sherman's forces would take. Initially, there was the problem of sifting through the wild rumors which preceded the movement of Union troops. Although uncertain whether Sherman's army would enter Heard County should Atlanta fall, for example, Dr. Peddy thought it unlikely. Anticipating that the Union forces would advance along the railroad for logistical reasons, Peddy concluded in September that his wife would be safer at home because their house was located a considerable distance away. Flight simply was not an option for Kate Peddy because of the pending birth of their son. Indeed, one wonders in retrospect how much solace she took from her husband's instructions to maintain her "unsullied dignity as a lady" should ten thousand "Yankee cowards" appear at her door.²³

For those who lived along the Western and Atlantic Railroad between Chattanooga and Atlanta, the major concern was when not whether the Union army would arrive. A slaveholder and ardent secessionist who was too

lame for military service, Wylie Jarrett McClatchey of Marietta took his slaves and the family south when Sherman entered Georgia, although his wife, Minerva Leah, elected for unknown reasons to stay behind on their farm with one of their sons and a niece. Her diary, which runs from January to September 1864, contains a remarkable account of life under Federal occupation that summer. As McClatchey's world crumbled, she turned to her diary for comfort and reflection, writing in May that "Everything is in confusion, no one knows what to do with our negroes and stock, nor our ownelves—almost everybody is moving off in hope of securing something."²⁴

McClatchey found herself in the midst of the Confederate army as it prepared for the advancing Union forces. Although she could hear cannon booming and pickets firing, she felt relatively secure because General John Bell Hood's headquarters were within sight of her house. On 1 July she wrote in her diary that her house was full of officers and gentlemen, all "courteous and kind" but unwilling or unable to tell her of their impending retreat, signaled the following evening by the kindling of small fires to illuminate the road for night marching. The next morning the sound of bullets whizzing near her house announced the arrival of Union troops, in hot pursuit of the Confederate cavalry. Later that same morning, General Joseph Hooker and his staff arrived. Pleased to make the acquaintance of a citizen who had not fled in fear of Yankee cruelty, Hooker assigned a detachment of guards to protect the premises but the men left soon afterward. McClatchey wrote that the officers who passed through during the day behaved very well but did nothing to prevent the looting of her storeroom and kitchen, and the destruction of her crops and chickens. Only a series of guards detached at her request by General George H. Thomas prevented her house from being ransacked. Meanwhile, the shrieks and groans emitted by

the wounded in ambulances and wagons passing on the rough road nearby kept her in constant thought of her "own poor boys who are in similar dangers--and liable to like suffering."²⁵

McClatchey recorded sporadic instances of abuse from "the strange rough men" who passed her house during the coming months, but admitted in her diary that her family survived largely through the kindnesses of Union soldiers. A cavalry major from Ohio who lodged in one of her upstairs rooms, for example, left her a good supply of provisions when the Federal forces pulled out in early November. The next group of men to arrive treated her badly, however, scavenging what little wood remained on her property and confiscating her only cow and calf. The light of burning houses in the night finally convinced McClatchey that the rumors of "a grand march to Savannah" were true. Ordered to rid themselves of excess baggage, the soldiers who had befriended McClatchey replenished her larder with confiscated goods and provisions. When the Union troops departed on the morning of 14 November, she could not repress her tears over the thought of having benefitted from the kindness of men marching south "to bring tears and suffering to those I love." That evening she watched in terror as Marietta, Kennesaw Mountain, and the railroad burned.²⁶

After the fall of Atlanta in September, Sherman became convinced that it would be extremely difficult to defend the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Rather than risk depleting his forces protecting his line of supply, Sherman telegraphed a request to General Grant in early October to cut loose his army and march against Savannah. What was strikingly modern about Sherman's plan was his explicit determination to "make Georgia Howl!" Initially hesitant, Grant came around to the idea when Hood took his army into Alabama. After detaching a contingent of troops to

keep Hood occupied, Sherman and his army of 62,000 men set out from Atlanta on 16 November.²⁷

Sherman acknowledged later that some plundering had occurred during the march to the sea, but remained sensitive to the scores of tales of his army's brutality that appeared in the press after the war. In his memoirs, he stated that he "never heard of any cases of murder or rape." In the words of a recent Sherman biographer, "Rape and murder were practically nonexistent." Sherman failed to realize, however, that slaveholding women who derived much of their social identity from the land and plantation household relations experienced his army's ruthless destruction vicariously as something akin to rape. The dictates of polite society muted the use of such language in one's intimate correspondence, but the journals and letters of many Georgia women reveal that rape is an appropriate metaphor to describe their perception of Sherman's march to the sea. In particular, the violation of the sanctity of their sleeping quarters left plantation mistresses and their relatives aghast. Years later, the mere mention of Sherman's name still brought instantly to mind one of the most terrible experiences of their lives.²⁸

The various accounts of Sherman's march written by Georgia women exhibit a fairly consistent pattern. First came the rumors that Union troops had been sighted, followed by their sudden appearance, brief pillaging, and rapid departure. What made the experience especially terrifying was the fact that new groups of soldiers continued to arrive over a period of days or weeks, often several times in one day. The feeling of helplessness and the constant fear of being ravaged was a nerve-racking ordeal for women accustomed to deference from their social inferiors and respect from their equals. Moreover, the kindnesses observed by Minerva McClatchey during Sherman's long occupation of Marietta apparently lessened as his army

moved into the heart of the plantation belt. In any event, an occasional kindness did little to calm emotions subjected to a torrent of abuse, real or imagined.²⁹

The detailed journal accounts left by Mary S. Mallard and her mother, Mary Jones, are in many ways representative of the experience of mistresses and their households on large plantations in Georgia. Anticipating childbirth and fearful of remaining in Atlanta, Mallard had joined her mother at Montevideo in Liberty County, ironically concluding that the plantation was a safer haven from Sherman's advancing army. Mary Jones was returning from another of her plantations in her carriage on 13 December 1864 when she encountered a Union soldier on horseback who advised her to turn back or risk losing her horses. Making their way along an obscure road through the woods, she and her driver finally arrived safely at Montevideo well after dark. Fearing the imminent arrival of a raiding party, her daughter had some trunks of clothing and valuable taken into the woods, along with their carts, horses, and oxen. That evening her husband, the Reverend Robert Q. Mallard, arrived for a quick visit before riding out on a mule to join the Confederate forces.³⁰

The next afternoon Mallard received the news that her husband had been captured by Hugh Judson Kilpatrick's cavalry. On the morning of the 15th, Union troops finally appeared at Montevideo, demanding horses, mules, and whiskey. The men searched the house, ordering Mallard to turn over the keys to all her trunks and bureaus. As the preeminent symbol of matriarchal authority on a souther plantation, the loss of the keys was indeed significant. To her mortification, the men also handled everything in sight. Shortly before dinner, the process was repeated by five more Union troops dressed as marines. The following afternoon, forty or fifty men ransacked their pantry, "ripping open the safe with their swords and

breaking open the crockery cupboards." During their frenzied search for valuables, the soldiers broke open her mother's worktable. Angry at not finding treasure, "they took the sweet little locks of golden hair" that her mother kept as mementos and trampled them on the floor. At the same time, more men cleaned out the sideboard and her grandfather's old liquor case. During this "horrible nightmare," she wrote, "It was vain to utter a word, for we were completely paralyzed by the fury of these ruffians." Reflecting upon the day's hellish events, Mallard vented her anger:

It is impossible to imagine the horrible uproar and stampede through the house, every room of which was occupied by them, all yelling, cursing, quarreling, and running from one room to another in wild confusion. Such was their blasphemous language, their horrible countenances and appearance, that we realized what must be the association of the lost in the world of eternal woe. Their throats were open sepulchers, their mouths filled with cursing and bitterness and lies.³¹

The Jones family's nightmare was just beginning. Around four o'clock in the morning they were awakened by soldiers outside who were apparently looking for young women. In the words of the widow Jones, "the agony of that awful hour no language can describe!" Alone, friendless, and in total terror, the women huddled around the bed with the children and prayed through the night for deliverance. Afterwards they learned that a soldier had voluntarily guarded the house, which they interpreted more as a sign of divine intervention in direct response to their prayers than an indication of individual Yankee chivalry. Women who

had endured such as night would never again look upon the North without mistrust and apprehension, feelings that undoubtedly were transmitted to the next generation.³²

In the coming days the visits lessened in number but not in intensity. A day without Yankees was a blessing spent in fearful anticipation of their return. When a slave woman ran into the big house to escape being assaulted by a Union soldier, Mary Jones confessed to her journal that "my heart palpitates with such violence against my side that with pain I bear the pressure of my dress." Only her faith in God and dreams of Confederate independence sustained the widow Jones through her ordeal. On 3 January, she wondered to herself, "Where will all this perfidy, insult, and injury to the helpless, the fatherless, and the widow end?"³³

Completely cut off from the outside world, the Jones women had become prisoners in their own home, afraid even to open their doors and windows. Mention of Yankees was enough to send their children scurrying for cover into the house "like a bevy of frightened partridges." The widow Jones thought that such suffering was surely a sign of God's terrible judgment upon the sins of her people, although she did not draw the logical association with slavery. Even the widespread desertion of her servants did not shatter her belief in the sanctity of the peculiar institution, although she admitted that "radical reforms" would be needed if the Confederacy gained its independence. The fate of her sons unknown and her world in tatters, she looked toward an uncertain future yet remained defiant, proclaiming "Every development of the enemy but confirms my desire for a separate and distinct nationality."³⁴

True to Sherman's original intent, those parts of Georgia he attacked found little cause for celebration after his departure. One of the first things that Dolly Lunt Burge did after Sherman's troops left Covington was to visit her

graveyard, which she happily found undisturbed. Lucky enough to salvage a mule and a little wagon, Burge shared her good fortune with her neighbors by hauling wheat to the mill, a most unusual activity for a widow. As she explained in her diary, "Never did I think I would have to go to mill. Such are the changes of life." As it had done since the initial outbreak of hostilities in 1861, the war continued to redefine traditional gender roles in the plantation South, albeit in ways that suggested that the collapse of plantation society was at hand.³⁵

Like Burge, Mary A. H. Gay turned her attention to helping the less fortunate. Impressing a nearly worn-out house abandoned by the Union army into service pulling a jerry-rigged wagon, she transported supplies through war-stricken country from Social Circle to Decatur, walking the entire way to rest the poor animal. When she learned of a provision store in Atlanta where war hardware could be bartered for necessities, Gay began collecting minie balls. On a cold, windy day in late November 1864, she discovered the spot where retreating Confederate troops had exploded a magazine, a bonanza that fed many poor people through the winter. While digging lead with dull case-knives, the women and children would sing "When this Cruel War is Over," then have a good cry. Minerva McClatchey and her son collected scrap lumber from abandoned Federal camps and scavenged nails from burnt buildings, "glad to make any shift to live." Traditionally a time of celebration and renewal of paternalistic bonds on Georgia plantations, Christmas was a sad time for those who remained on the land in 1864. Cornelia Jones Pond later recalled that "the little children thought that the Yankees would not let Santa Claus come." Little Sadai Burge retreated to her bed in tears after finding her stocking empty. She was soon joined by her mother when the slave children came into the house calling "Christmas gift

mistress."³⁶

Their faith in "the hand of Providence" intact, Georgians went about the grim business of rebuilding shattered lives amidst the turmoil of the new year. As they had for generations, farm families turned to the land to see them through hard times, burying themselves in the normal routines of life to dispel thoughts of all they had lost. The collapse of law and order in many areas, however, indicated that the end was drawing near. Small groups of refugees began drifting back to homes ravaged by Sherman's bummers of opportunistic scavengers. As McClatchey wrote in January, "Many citizens are almost as bad as the Yankees, one waggon after another goes by, loaded with plunder of various kinds, gathered from camps or empty houses."³⁷

During the closing months of the war, the women of the slaveholding elite struggled to come to terms with the collapse of the social order. Some turned their thoughts to good and evil, others to ways to reform the institution of slavery short of manumission. Angry and confused by feelings of betrayal and loss, women who well understood that class privilege and slavery were inexorably intertwined experienced a profound emotional crisis during the breakdown of a social system they had always taken for granted. As planned, Sherman's invasion of Georgia accelerated the collapse of the Confederacy. Minerva McClatchey's reaction to General Lee's surrender was typical: "Can it be so? It is painful—humiliating—but we must submit. It is God's will, and whatever The Will is for the best."³⁸

Nevertheless, there was a world of difference between accepting defeat and reconciling with a hated foe. As Eliza Frances Andrews of Washington, Georgia confided in her diary in early 1865, "If all the words of hatred in every language under heaven were lumped together into one

huge epithet of detestation, they could not tell how I hate Yankees." In April she admitted to being "crushed and bowed down" in sorrow but not in shame, angrily proclaiming "No! I am more of a rebel to-day than I ever was when things looked brightest for the Confederacy." The Georgia countryside and towns were filled with unreconstructed rebels who echoed Bill Arp's defiant blast, "Who's sorry? Who's repenting?" When former Confederate soldiers rioted in Augusta in May, a fearful Ella Clanton Thomas nonetheless refused to label the disturbance a rebellion because "rebel" had become "a sacred word now, worthy to be ranked with such words as Home, Heart & Heaven." The Confederate revolution was over; white resistance to the revolutionary social changes unleashed by the Civil War continued.³⁹

What, then, can we conclude from the record of life on the Georgia homefront during the Civil War found in the literature of intimacy? Admittedly, such evidence is fragmented and impressionistic. Still, the journals and letters of the time illuminate the Civil War in ways other types of historical evidence cannot, thereby enriching our understanding of gender roles, class relations, plantation slavery, and the social transformations wrought by the conflict.

By entering their perceptions of the war into the historical record, the authors of journals and letters also stockpiled ammunition for the bitter ideological struggles that swept Georgia in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It is perhaps no coincidence that Mary A. H. Gay, who was unequaled in her venomous disdain for William T. Sherman, first published her Civil War diary in 1892 at the height of the Populist rebellion. That same year the Reverend Robert Q. Mallard included his late wife's journal account of Sherman's invasion in a spirited defense of the Old South entitled *Plantation Life Before Emancipation*.

Whether published or not, the literature of intimacy was a bloody shirt that contributed to the triumph of the Lost Cause ideology. The Confederacy could not prevent Sherman's brutal rape of the Georgia landscape, but memories of the war's impact on the homefront preserved in Civil War journals and letters continued to spark southern white resistance to full reintegration into the national mainstream well into the next century.⁴⁰

NOTES

1. Charles Henry Smith, *Bill Arp, So Called. A Side Show of the Southern Side of the War* (New York, 1866), 19; James C. Austin, *Bill Arp* (New York, 1969), 19; T. Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia* (Athens, 1953), 1-32; and Jay B. Hubell, *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900* (Durham, 1954), 454. To be sure, the city of Columbus could lay some claim to Alabama's Augusta Jane Evans and her influential war novel, *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice*. Yet with the exception of "Little Giffin," Francis Orray Ticknor's ballad honoring the valor of the Confederate soldier, Sidney Lanier's war novel, *Tiger-Lilies* (completed and published in 1867), and Kittrell J. Warren's comic exploits of a roguish deserter, *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler*, Georgia authors produced no traditional literature during the war. Only Smith's acid-tongued Bill Arp sketches offer much insight into life on the Georgia homefront. See David B. Parker, *Alias Bill Arp: Charles Henry Smith and the South's "Goodly Heritage"* (Athens and London, 1991), 51-76.

2. See Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, "The Civil War and Authorship," in Louis D. Rubin, Jr., ed., *The History of Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 178-87. Appropriately, James M. McPherson emphasizes the