

*Failure for the Wicked:*

Influences of the  
Second Great Awakening  
in a Soldier's Experience  
in the Union Army

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U.S. History 568 Sectionalism

Duquesne University

April 2013

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By the time of the Civil War, the religious ferment and turmoil of the Second Great Awakening had pervaded the daily life of Americans for decades. Focusing on a Civil War soldier named David Scott, who was a member of the 140th Pennsylvania Volunteers, this paper will analyze how David's particular religious tradition was influenced by Second Great Awakening reformist theology.<sup>1</sup> His religious worldview would shape how he perceived life in camp, the sins of others, and the war in general. David consistently demonstrated the aspects of Second Great Awakening reformist theology this paper seeks to address. First it will be necessary to recognize important aspects of Second Great Awakening theology. Following this, David's particular experiences in the Civil War will be examined to determine the long-term impact of the Second Great Awakening on one soldier's life.

For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to focus on three significant aspects of the Second Great Awakening. The first is that there was an increased confidence that the individual could come to know and understand truth and morality. This was a democratic force which sought to spread the power in religion from an educated elite to the common people. As a result, reformists believed that humans had an increased agency in the outcome of their mortal and eternal lives. The second significant aspect is the growing sense among believers of the presence of God in the physical world. Second Great Awakening Christians had an almost pantheistic sense of the omnipresence of God in their lives and the world. Finally, combining the ideas of individual human agency with God's presence in the physical world led to a greater awareness that the individual's sin could affect the whole of society. This realization was embedded in the Puritan and later the Presbyterian belief in a national covenant with God. Within the first few decades of the nineteenth century, populist theology, focusing on the individual's agency, and

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<sup>1</sup> The term "reformist theology" in this paper shall refer to the belief that humans can and should perfect themselves through reform. Reform would be carried out through the work of societies advocating temperance, abolition and similar movements. It would also occur individually.

orthodox theology, which stressed the communal affects of individual sin, would unify through reformers like Charles G. Finney. Consequently, reformist theology would adopt elements of both traditions to form what would later serve as the core belief system of Christians like Scott.<sup>2</sup>

From the late eighteenth century through the first few decades of the nineteenth, the Second Great Awakening developed as a democratizing force within Christianity. Populist denominations such as the Baptists supported these democratic ideals. Joseph Conforti writes, "On a theological level, the awakening produced a shift...[toward a system] more compatible with nineteenth-century democratic intellectual currents."<sup>3</sup> During the revival that characterized the Awakening, individuals and groups would question authority, counter orthodox understandings of an enlightened priestly class, and espouse a priesthood of all believers.<sup>4</sup> Though moving against orthodox structures, later reformers would find ways to integrate populist elements of the Awakening with more orthodox denominations such as Presbyterians. Increasingly, religious leaders would come from outside the educated elite. This flowed naturally from the belief that the individual could come to know truth on his or her own without the need for interpretation or mediation.

The ability of the individual to discover, know, and understand truth can be seen in attitudes toward secular professionals, such as those working in law and medicine, as well as in religion. Nathan Hatch demonstrates how during the early part of the Second Great Awakening the practice of law came under scrutiny by the wider public. He writes, "'Any person of common abilities...can easily distinguish between right and wrong' and 'more especially when the parties are admitted to give a plain story without any puzzle from lawyers....' [This view] reflects a

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<sup>2</sup> Michael P. Young, "Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. National Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 67 no 5 (2002): 674.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Conforti, "The Invention of the Great Awakening: 1795-1842" *Early American Literature* 26 no. 2 (1991): 109.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 69.

moment of historical optimism, a time when politics, law, and religion flushed with the promise of the American Revolution."<sup>5</sup> This opinion holds that the common person, left to his or her own devices, could come to know truth. If a person could come to know truth without assistance, it seemed as logical to assume that that individual could not only live a moral and righteous life, but come to know God, who represents ultimate Truth for Christians. "This was a religious environment," writes Hatch, "that brought into question traditional authorities and exalted the right of the people to think for themselves."<sup>6</sup> Such a development undoubtedly increased awareness of the agency of mankind. Unlike deistic notions of an impersonal god who calibrated the world so perfectly that all events were merely an unfolding of his original purpose, humans now viewed themselves as increasingly independent. As such, humans could change the direction of providence by their actions, moral or immoral. Americans, through this tradition of social and religious populism, came to view themselves as agents of moral authority.

As agents of moral authority, individuals were charged with the duty to act accordingly. Historian of religion Mark Noll notes that this concept runs parallel to the notion that humanity had an internal moral sense and could act on it. By doing so, the individual would experience a "sense of moral excellence."<sup>7</sup> Such a sense lends itself to the concept of the perfectibility of humanity. Populist denominations such as Baptists and Methodists espoused such notions of a perfectible body of believers stemming from their focus on individual reformation. If humans could behave morally, indeed perfectly, they could, as a result, not only achieve salvation but fundamentally reform society.

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<sup>5</sup> Hatch, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>7</sup> Mark A. Noll, "The Irony of Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 no. 2 (1985): 155.

Taking moral action with the goal of pursuing one's own salvation can be seen in an excerpt from a speech given to the New England Temperance Society of Colored Persons by their president, J. W. Lewis: "'Why do we give [a temperance] pledge?' [Lewis] answered for [the members]: 'It is that we may deliver our own souls...'"<sup>8</sup> Free to pursue their own salvation through upright moral behavior, believers followed Presbyterian revivalist Charles G. Finney's idea of a saving process *not* to be passively awaited.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the opposite of moral behavior is immoral behavior, and the opposite of salvation is damnation. The consequence of immoral action is damnation. Just as believers could pave their way to heaven through their own conversion to abolition, temperance, and other reforms, those who failed to do so precipitated their fall from grace.

At the same time humans elevated themselves into the exalted position of realizing and achieving moral truth, they increasingly viewed God as more immanent, or in closer contact with the physical realm. This was unlike Deists who espoused rational religion and a distant impersonal god. Christians in these revival movements increasingly came to view God as personal, knowable, and actively controlling and participating in everyday life. Such views opened the way for "an unprecedented wave of religious leaders in the last quarter of the eighteenth century [who] expressed their openness to a variety of signs and wonders, in short, an admission of increased supernatural involvement in everyday life."<sup>10</sup>

In a telling conversion account, Dr. David Morrill<sup>11</sup> told of his experiences after his spiritual awakening. He wrote, "The heavens, the earth, the trees, and every object, spoke of

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<sup>8</sup> J.W. Lewis, quoted in Young, 681.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Carwardine, "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An examination of Methodism and the 'New Measures,'" *Journal of American History* 59 no 2 (1972): 327.

<sup>10</sup> Hatch, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. David Morrill was a physician in Epsom, New Hampshire. His account of his conversion comes from his 1799 diary. At the time of his conversion he was twenty seven.

invisible things...The Bible was a new book." He continued by demonstrating how not only God was present in the physical realm but Satan as well. "A brief backsliding taught [him] this lesson, that Satan is a busy enemy; that he constantly follows the professed disciples of Christ; that if we can rationally expect to avoid his wiles, we must watch and pray without ceasing, that the way of safety is the way of duty."<sup>12</sup> Taken with the growing emphasis on God's as well as Satan's presence in the physical realm, the fact that Second Great Awakening reformist theology focused on the individual is more striking. Individual moral action carried more weight in the presence of a personal God with a vested interest in the physical realm. In addition, since God was so present, He would act on all of society based on the behavior of individuals. This was a crucial connection between the Second Great Awakening and Calvinist (generally), or Presbyterian (specifically), faith.

During the Second Great Awakening, approximately one-third of Americans were either Presbyterian or Congregationalist.<sup>13</sup> These two Calvinist denominations represented the era's orthodox, traditional and conservative denominations in relation to the newer Methodists, Baptists, and a growing number of populist sects. From Puritan roots in New England, Presbyterians and Congregationalists believed in the idea that America was bound in a national covenant with God and that they were charged with keeping it.<sup>14</sup> Both of these denominations, which in the early nineteenth century agreed on a number of administrative goals under the 1801 Plan of Union, became heavily invested in forming benevolence organizations, or what came to be known as the "benevolence empire." For Birdsall, "The Empire...was a group of well-

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<sup>12</sup> Morrill, quoted in Richard D. Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order," *Church History* 39 no 3 (1970): 354.

<sup>13</sup> Young, 671.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

organized, interdenominational societies with various religious and humanitarian purposes," which had a national scope:<sup>15</sup>

Organized benevolence not only built an infrastructure of national resources but it also promoted a uniquely national purpose--a campaign against national sin. The leaders of organized benevolence retained a Puritan faith that America operated under a *collective contract* [emphasis added] --a "federal covenant" with God. Americans raised in this Calvinist tradition viewed themselves as chosen people to uphold this contract.<sup>16</sup>

Individuals who composed the nation were responsible then for upholding this covenant with God who actively intervened in the world. This covenant theology not only bound humans to act, but it also meant that individual Christians could know a God who did not hesitate to influence human behavior.<sup>17</sup>

Those holding a Calvinist faith believed that the parts of the whole could either positively or negatively affect the fate of the whole by their actions in carrying out the national covenant. Sin would have consequences in the physical as well as the eternal realm. These believers "declared that if individuals and the nation did not repent and reform, these special sins would bring down divine retribution."<sup>18</sup> Thus reformists saw an urgent need to rid the nation of its sins, including consumption of alcohol, breaking the Sabbath, and prostitution. The second part of J.W. Lewis's presidential address to the New England Temperance Society of Colored Persons addressed this point, in answering why one should give a temperance pledge: "It is that we may deliver our own souls *and that our example and testimony may save others* [emphasis added]."<sup>19</sup> This mentality of the collective character of sin was an issue at the forefront of the division

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<sup>15</sup> Birdsall, 360.

<sup>16</sup> Young, 672.

<sup>17</sup> David Rolfs, *No Peace for the Wicked: Northern Protestant Soldiers and the American Civil War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Young, 661.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 681.

between the orthodox conservatives and the populist denominations of the Second Great Awakening.

Contrary to the orthodoxy of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and other smaller evangelical groups placed more significance on the individual. Indeed, the non-orthodox groups tended to view sin as something more personal and less communal. Methodists, Baptists, and other populist groups viewed the benevolence empire with suspicion on the grounds of its elite leadership and its concept of national sin. Populist's focus on individual conversion and individual agency prevented them from initially accepting this belief which was centered on groups. However, by the end of the 1820's, both sides found ways to bridge the divide. The first came through the specialization of the benevolence societies, in other words, their increasingly narrow focus on specific sins. Second, what became known as "new measure" revivals, promoted by the Presbyterian Charles G. Finney, brought populist (individualistic) conversion elements to the orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, two very important belief structures drew together at this time to create a reformist theology, which later was demonstrated in men like David Scott. Populists brought with them the idea of individual human agency and human perfectibility. Presbyterians and Congregationalists, on the other hand, carried the notion of the collective effects of individual sin. This process, whereby each side became a little more like the other, helped to cement the Protestant community, creating a reform theological belief that humans possessed the agency to act morally as individuals in accordance with the wishes of God. If they did so, society as a whole would benefit collectively, but it would similarly suffer if humans individually behaved immorally.

By the time of the Civil War, David Scott adhered to reformist theology which was both shaped by three significant elements of the Second Great Awakening and the appropriation of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 674.

elements of populist and orthodox theology. He would see both individual and group sin as negatively affecting a collective whole and correct moral behavior on the part of individuals or a group affecting the whole positively. He believed that actions were rooted in an individual's agency and ability to discern morality and truth. Moral or immoral action had deep significance for David as a result of the omnipresence of a personal God Who was directly involved in the lives of humans and the physical realm. God's presence for David would in turn mean direct physical and temporal consequences for human behavior, both positive and negative.

The Scott family lived just outside the town of Beaver, Pennsylvania, the seat of Beaver County. David's great grandfather, James, came to Pittsburgh from Scotland in 1775. James' son William later married Nancy McKee and, in 1824, purchased seventy-two acres of farmland in Brighton Township. They later increased their holdings to 230 acres where they raised livestock, and a variety of crops including wheat, rye and oats. Nancy and William had nine children (three sons and six daughters) of which David was the third child and first son. When David joined the Union Army in August 1862 he was thirty-two years old.<sup>21</sup>

In Beaver, the family attended Four Mile Presbyterian Church which is located outside of the main part of town. The church, which is still active today, was founded in 1812 at a time when Beaver was, more or less, a frontier town.<sup>22</sup> David wrote of his membership in this church and his desire to return to it saying, "Oh how I would have liked to of been out at the old four mile church."<sup>23</sup> As Presbyterians, David and his family shared in one of the major orthodox religious traditions in nineteenth-century America.

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<sup>21</sup> Nan Oliver & Ken Weyand, "Re: Scott Info," personal email message, April 12, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> "Our Story," <http://www.fourmile.org/visitors/about-us/our-story.html> (accessed March 4, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> David Scott, "Letter 29, 30 September 1862," Scott Civil War Letters, Scott Collection, Beaver Area Heritage Museum Archives, Beaver PA, page 1.

Religious soldierslike David Scott were numerous in camp despite the irreligion in the army.<sup>24</sup> The generation that was primarily involved in the Civil War is today considered to be one of the most religious in American history.<sup>25</sup> Because of the Second Great Awakening, many Americans by the time of the Civil War had been deeply affected by the renewal of Christian faith. While the army as a whole may have not presented the most favorable conditions for religious soldiers, their presence nonetheless cannot be ignored. Scott wrote in a letter to his mother dated October 3, 1862, "We have prayer meetings in the different companies every night."<sup>26</sup> Still, men like Scott faced problems because of the often inadequate religious services the army had to offer.

Army appointed chaplains often failed due to ineptitude, laziness, and vice. The army chaplains tended to be the North's least qualified ministers.<sup>27</sup> Typically, successful and well-qualified ministers stayed home, preferring to preach to their congregations in the towns and cities in the North, living off a modest income and free from the rigors of camp life. The inability as well as unwillingness of many army chaplains to work effectively with their men was recognized by religious soldiers. David wrote to his brother William in May 1863, "I fear there is too many of our chaplains that fails to do their duty and are after the filthy lure more than the souls of men. These are sad things but they are true."<sup>28</sup> Scott often wrote of the absence of the chaplains from camp as well as their lack of popularity: "We have not had any preaching in camp for two weeks and scarcely ever see the Chaplain. I am sorry to say he is not very popular among the men."<sup>29</sup> As chaplains were considered unpopular by men like Scott, both their inability to

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<sup>24</sup> Rolfs, 198.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>26</sup> David Scott, "Letter 31, 7 October 1862," page 1.

<sup>27</sup> Rolfs, 170.

<sup>28</sup> David Scott, "Letter 136, 20 May 1863," page 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> David Scott, "Letter 57, 4 December 1862," page 1.

reach out to irreligious soldiers and their ability to satisfy soldiers who were already religious must be considered.

As a new soldier, David was unaccustomed to the ways of unchurched people. At a camp near Harrisburg early in the war, David wrote of the lack of religiosity among the men: "We had no preaching here yesterday...You would scarcely know when the Sabbath comes here for there is not much attention paid to it. It appears as though man has forgot that there is a God in heaven that rules in the armies there and here upon earth among the children of men."<sup>30</sup> David was by no means alone in this observation. For many, camp was where "religious soldiers learned that the Union army did not always attach the same importance to religion as their communities had back home." Religious soldiers lacked the community structure in which they grew up. Further, they found few qualified ministers to tend to their spiritual needs, as well as a general disregard for the observance of the Sabbath.<sup>31</sup>

Soldiers in the army camps of the Union were far from their families and religious communities, making the ability to resist temptations associated with army life that much more difficult for religious soldiers. These men would not be able to find regular opportunities to worship or practice their faith. In addition to this, they were living in an almost exclusively male society in a time when matters of morality and faith were largely in the charge of women. The communities in which the soldiers found themselves were increasingly hostile, as a whole, to the life of a religious soldier.<sup>32</sup> Scott takes account of this in his numerous letters to family members. In a letter to his mother, David lamented "We had no preaching in camp last Sabbath and it was one of the longest Sabbaths I think I ever spent. I felt worse than I have done anytime since I left

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<sup>30</sup> David Scott, "Letter 15, undated," page 2.

<sup>31</sup> Rolfs, 169-70.

<sup>32</sup> Rolfs, 167.

home...I spent the day in reading my Bible and find more comfort than ever before."<sup>33</sup> Even when there was an opportunity to meet and have a religious service, the men lacked adequate facilities. "[Prayer meeting] was tollerable well attended," wrote Scott on the fourth of December 1862, "considering the coolness of the night as we have no place for the meeting but the open air and the sky for covering."<sup>34</sup> Lack of preaching and facilities aside, the most significant challenge Scott faced, indeed the most significant challenge the army faced, was the rampant wickedness in camp.

Within the Union Army camp, activities went on which not only offended religious soldiers but also convinced them that such activity would curse the whole army. The most common sins a religious soldier saw were gambling, drinking, swearing and association with prostitutes.<sup>35</sup> This immoral behavior stemmed in part from the lack of traditional Christian community restraints, the desire to experiment with newfound freedom, and the lack of facilities dedicated to religious practice.<sup>36</sup> Scott reaffirms this in a letter to his brother William, "Thare is a great deal of wickedness here among the men and it appears as they would rather do anything else than go to church. And thare is a great many that we would expect better of out of the four companies that are in camp."<sup>37</sup>

There also were many men who came to the army from outside the Christian fold. In the firsthand account of a Civil War veteran named Louis Bir, one finds a man quite unlike David Scott and other religious soldiers. Bir was the son of a French immigrant family and born circa 1846. His father died in 1850, when Bir was about four. From an early age, Bir worked to

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<sup>33</sup> David Scott, "Letter 29, 30 September 1863," page 1.

<sup>34</sup> David Scott, "Letter 57, 4 December 1862," page 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rolfs, 175.

<sup>36</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Charter Books, 1952), 248.

<sup>37</sup> David Scott, "Letter 38, undated" page 1.

support his family and received very little schooling. He mustered into the Union army, presumably at the age of 16, in the town of New Albany, Indiana.<sup>38</sup>

From the beginning of his army career, Bir participated in some of the evils denounced by Scott. Bir wrote, "After our meal we went out to find [someone] that wanted Recruits and found Lafe Frederick [on] the corner of Pearl & Market and We Three Put down our name & of Coarse we were men then and we had to go and take a Drink & then anothe[er]..."<sup>39</sup> On more than one occasion he wrote of stealing food, whiskey, a turkey and a calf. Furthermore, on multiple occasions he wrote of him and his comrades being quite intoxicated. For most of these situations Bir justified or excused himself, showing no shame. Indeed, such behavior was often considered normal for wartime, such as the acquisition of food in lieu of proper rations and the use of alcohol to cope with the ravages of war. After stealing some pies he wrote, "I being a-good-Boy Did not take but 2 Pies & Having no money I thought I would Pay [the baker] another time and will too if I Ever See him."<sup>40</sup> Though less common than gambling and drinking, theft was common among Union soldiers. Targets included their fellow soldiers, Northern civilians, and most commonly Southerners.<sup>41</sup>

Beyond his admitted actions, Bir also demonstrated his lack of a professed Christian faith. "Just after dark," wrote Bir, "it Began to Rain & blow and in 3 minutes there was not a tent in the Brigad a Standing and we got an awful Dranching and I a-good-boy of Coarse was not Praying about this time but felt Like going Home..."<sup>42</sup> His lack of Christian faith can be seen in his account of charging a fortified Confederate position. He and his group of men were fired

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<sup>38</sup> Louis Bir "Remenecence of My Army Life," ed. George P. Clark, *Indiana Magazine of History* 101, no. 1 (2005): 15, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Bir, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Bir, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Wiley, 254.

<sup>42</sup> Bir, 22.

upon at close range by the Southerners but experienced no casualties. Another group farther away, however, were not so lucky.<sup>43</sup> Had Bir been a religious soldier in the same sense as a man like Scott, it is very likely that he would have attributed his survival to God's providence and blessing. However, he did not write anything which would suggest having a view similar to Scott's, merely brushing the event off as seemingly meaningless.

Wickedness in camp was a significant element of soldiers' daily life which carried weighty consequences for the army and the Northern war effort in Scott's view. This resulted from the influences on Scott of the Second Great Awakening's tradition of human agency, an immanent and personal God, and the remnants of the old Puritan worldview which considered communal consequences for individual sin a reality.<sup>44</sup> When there was preaching in camp, it often centered around texts "stressing the homely virtues, warning against the evils of camp, proclaiming the transforming power of divine grace, calling attention to the precariousness of life and threatening sinners with eternal damnation." Furthermore, these preachers would identify the Union with morality and righteousness. Following this logic, they would ensure the men that because their cause was just, they would receive God's blessing. Any time the Union soldiers experienced a defeat or set back, failure was attributed to sin.<sup>45</sup>

David's accounts of camp wickedness fit within this wider context. He wrote, "Surely I am surrounded with many trials and temptations and all kinds of wickedness but my heavenly Father has enabled me this far to bear up under them all."<sup>46</sup> Eventually and unsurprisingly, David begins to attribute the failures of the army to the sin in the camps. On December 19, 1862, following the Union loss at the battle of Fredericksburg, David wrote a letter to one of his sisters

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>44</sup> Rolfs, 205.

<sup>45</sup> Wiley, 269.

<sup>46</sup> David Scott, "Letter 70, 2 January 1863" page 1.

from camp near Aquia Creek on the Virginia shore of the Potomac: "I have witnessed many hard sights during the short time I have been in the army but I am afraid the worst is to come yet for surely our army can never prosper while there is so much wickedness among them. It is horrible to think of it."<sup>47</sup> Within a month David was writing his mother with a similar view from his camp near Fredericksburg. Dated January 2, 1863, this letter was written the day following the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and still within a month of that recent Union loss. "We had a very quiet new year," wrote David, "in the 140th [Pennsylvania Volunteers]. In some of the regts they had quite a frolick, horse racing, drinking whiskey, and all kinds of wickedness going on and particularly among the officers. It is no wonder our army don't prosper. The men here all seem to be disheartened and the army of the Potomac is very much demoralized at present."<sup>48</sup>

David often wrote about wickedness in letters to women in his family. He also offered similar views in writing to men. David wrote to his brother John on the 19th of January, 1863 from his camp near Falmouth saying, "I am surrounded by all kinds of wickedness. It appears to me sometimes as though the men had forgotten everything that was good and how can we expect success to our army when such is the case for vengeance is mine and I will repay saith the Lord."<sup>49</sup> Following this letter the Union would enact the first conscription act in March, demoralizing many in the army.<sup>50</sup> A few weeks after another Union loss at the battle of Chancellorsville, David wrote from his camp near Falmouth to his brother William: "Among our officers there is but two of them praying men. And there is profanity and wickedness enough

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<sup>47</sup> David Scott, "Letter 67, 19 December 1862," page 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., "Letter 70, 2 January 1863," pages 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., "Letter 80, 19 January 1863," page 1.

<sup>50</sup> Joanne Freeman, "Time Line of The Civil War, 1863," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/tl1863.html> (accessed 11 April 2013).

among the privates to sink a whole army."<sup>51</sup> The consistency of David's views extended to his friends as well. Following a gunshot wound at Gettysburg Scott returned home. He later received a letter from his friend J.B. Hunter who wrote the following on February 22, 1864:

There is almost as many women here now as men. The officers have got thare wives out. At least they say that they are thare wives. There is a grate number of them that would not soot me for a wife. I think it is no wonder we have no success whale thare is so much wickedness going on in our army.<sup>52</sup>

Though by this point the Union had experienced a number of decisive victories, namely that at Gettysburg almost a year before, men like Scott were still concerned over the effect sin would have on the army as a whole. This situation shows a consistency of belief among religious soldiers not necessarily tied to the events of the war, but derived from a strong religious sense of morality.

Not only did David hold his beliefs while communicating to both male and female family members, but he also associated with men in the army who shared the same view of sin. Others to whom the wider Scott family wrote seemed to hold similar religious views. In a letter to one of David's sisters, Jane, a friend named D. H. Gibson wrote, "I think that the reason why our army is not more victorious is on account of its wickedness. It appears to me that some men think that they are licensed to take God's name in vain here in the army. Oh that men of this grand army would be governed by the Third Commandment. Then God would go with us and fight our battles for us."<sup>53</sup> This was by no means an uncommon view. Musician Henry E. Schafer, a soldier in the 103rd Illinois, is quoted in *Soldiers: Blue & Gray* saying, "It is indeed wonderful what a demoralizing influence the vices of army life have upon the minds of a great

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<sup>51</sup> David Scott, "Letter 136, 20 May 1863," pages 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> J. B. Hunter, "Letter 195, 22 February 1864," page 1.

<sup>53</sup> D. H. Gibson, "Letter 78, January 1863," page 2.

many. It sometimes seems to me that the Almighty would never bless the efforts of our army to put down this rebellion while it is so depraved."<sup>54</sup>

For all those, like David, whose religious convictions seem to have remained consistent throughout their time at war, there were many more whose convictions waned as the war progressed. Gerald Linderman writes, "For every story in the war's first months about a pocket Bible that stopped an otherwise fatal bullet, there was in later years a matching tale of the opposite implication--that, for example, of the Union colonel who told his men that the replica Virgin Mary around his neck would protect him, and minutes later was mortally wounded."<sup>55</sup> No doubt, horrible experiences in war may have led men to question their faith. Scott, however, seems to have remained consistent in his beliefs which very likely helped sustain him through his difficult experiences.

David did not only focus on the negative side of sin and God's judgment on the army because of it. He was an avid believer in providence and the blessings God bestowed on those who had faith in Him and lived moral lives. David believed that he was secure in God's mercy as a faithful Christian. In a letter to his sister David wrote, "I hope we shall all be spared to meet again if not in this world in the next where there is no parting."<sup>56</sup> To another sister he said, "God has promised to support all those that put their trust in him..."<sup>57</sup> True to form, David did not take for granted the fact that he survived battles. Multiple times he wrote that it was God alone who sustained him through the war. David firmly believed that "God through his goodness [had] protected [him] this far and permitted [him] to Behold another Glorious Sabbath morning while

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<sup>54</sup> Henry E. Schafer, quoted in James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue & Gray* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 81.

<sup>55</sup> Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 158-9.

<sup>56</sup> David Scott, "Letter 16, 16 September 1862," page 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, "Letter 24, 18 September 1862," page 1.

He has been calling thousands of our fellow beings from time to eternity since the last."<sup>58</sup> The positive side, then, of the direct action of God on man was a sustaining presence which guided and protected men like David, who even if "called to eternity," would be assured a better life with those they loved.

In conclusion, David, like many others, saw through the individual instances of sin. He believed, like countless men and women on both sides of the Civil War, that his cause was just. To his sister Mary he wrote, "I feel confidently that God will finally give us victory for surely our cause is a good one and right will conquer."<sup>59</sup> He was no doubt influenced by his mother, Nancy, who believed that the North and South had sinned as a nation and were now the instruments God was using to punish each other. She wrote, "In Isaiah God says is not this the path(?) that I have chosen to loose the bands of wickedness[,] to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free and that ye break every yolk."<sup>60</sup> Nancy believed that God had chosen the path of war to cleanse the nation of the sin of slavery. This optimism in the purpose of the war was no doubt of some influence on David as he endured the hardships of battle and life in camp. Though the movement towards this end was temporarily interrupted by sin in the army, ultimately faith in God's providence would assure the victory of the Union.

David ultimately left the war upon receiving a gunshot wound through the jaw at the battle of Gettysburg. Following his wound he was taken prisoner by Confederate forces but managed to make it back to Union lines where he was put into a hospital.<sup>61</sup> During his brief time in captivity, he wrote that the Confederates did everything they could to make him comfortable, such as trimming his beard and giving him water. He communicated using notes, some of which

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., "Letter 68, 21 December 1862," page 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., "Letter 87, 31 January 1863," page 2.

<sup>60</sup> Nancy Scott, "Letter 2, undated," page 2.

<sup>61</sup> J. E. Harton, "Letter 156, 4 July 1863," page 1.

say "what will you do with me," and "I am not afraid but you will take care of me."<sup>62</sup> By September 1863 David was home and being treated in a hospital in Pittsburgh. The following year, September 1864, David's mother died. In November 1866 David's father William died, leaving David the family farm where he lived out his life with Caroline Virginia Barclay whom he had married on June 1, 1865. He later ran for and held a position as a county commissioner. Without a doubt, David maintained a consistent faith which if not strengthened, was at least maintained throughout the war. As a leader in county politics and an inheritor of a successful farm, David most likely continued to live with the same notions of the blessings for those who followed a moral life and the repercussions for those who failed to do so.

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<sup>62</sup> David Scott, "Letter 157, 3 July 1863," page 2.

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