

The Life and Afterlives of Captain Hedley Vicars: Evangelical Biography and the Crimean War

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Despatch

On 24 and 25 January 1855 the *Morning Post* and *The Times* printed a series of despatches from their special correspondents in the camp before Sebastopol recounting fatalities in early January from (what we now call) carbon monoxide poisoning. Newspapers had for weeks been following the shambolic progress of stores of charcoal to the front. Now *The Times* drew attention to the ‘mischief’ caused by the charcoal-fuelled stoves, probably imported from Constantinople and intended to mitigate the ferocity of the Crimean winter. On 2 January, Captain Swinton, a ‘gallant and excellent’ officer of the Royal Artillery, had succumbed to the fumes from one such stove in a well-sealed tent, while many others were reported to have been half killed in similar circumstances. Three days later, as hundreds of victims of the vicious Crimean winter were being carried to hospital tents ‘seized with cramp and half frozen’, a Lieutenant Ramsbottom of the 97th regiment had been found dead in his tent poisoned by carbonic acid gas; another officer of the 97th, a Mr Vicars, had been in ‘a precarious state from the same cause’.¹ According to the *Morning Post*’s fuller account the next day, ‘hopes are entertained of his recovery.’²

A minor incident in the catalogue of administrative accidents and failures that characterized the campaign, the matter of carbonic poisoning nevertheless neatly illustrates the dramatic mediatization of the war. Once printed in the national press, stories of the poisonings were relayed from the metropolitan to the provincial newspapers within hours. By 27 January, for instance, John Davy, Inspector General of Hospitals, was responding in writing to an account of the accident he had read in the *Evening Mail* of

¹ ‘The British Expedition’, *The Times*, 24 January 1855, p. 7. The correspondent for the *Morning Post* offered a more graphic account on the same day of the death of ‘Major’ Swinton, ‘found sitting up with paper and writing materials, as if in the act of writing a letter’ (*Morning Post*, 24 January 1855, p. 5).

² ‘The War in the East’, *Morning Post*, 25 January 1855, p. 5.

24 January (reprinted from *The Times* of that morning). In a ‘Letter to the Editor’ printed in the *Spectator* of 10 February, Davy outlined the dangers of burning charcoal in an enclosed space such as a well-sealed military tent might turn out to be.³ Meanwhile, letters to *The Times* debated the uses and abuses of charcoal as a fuel, with one writer pointing out that ‘every schoolboy in chymistry’ knew the dangers.⁴

Scholars have traced the impact of new developments in communications and reporting on both the construction and experience of the Crimean War.⁵ The charcoal stove controversy highlights the way individuals (every reader of the press, ‘every schoolboy’ even) and institutions (the inspectorate of hospitals, the commissariat) could quickly become involved, perhaps implicated, in the day-to-day unfolding of the campaign in newly immediate, newly visible ways. For the families and friends of those serving in the East, this meant that news about their loved ones could sometimes come to their notice in the brutal immediacy of special correspondence in the daily paper before any ‘official’ intelligence was available. This was the case for Captain Vicars of the 97th. After the reports in the public press of 24 and 25 January, three mails arrived back in England without any tidings of or from him. By 8 January, after what must have seemed an interminable silence, he was well enough to pen a series of letters to his friend the evangelical philanthropist Catherine Marsh and to his mother, reassuring them that he was alive and recovering. Even so, he had cause to thank God that Marsh had been able to break the initial worrying news to his fiancée before she ‘saw it in the “Times”’. It would later be within this providential framework that Marsh would recount the whole harrowing affair.⁶

The incident reminds us that the arrival on the scene of ‘modern’ communications and media was double-edged. On the one hand — and this is the familiar story — it precipitated the formation of a public audience for war willing to be swept into sympathetic engagement on a wave of immediate, urgent, eyewitness reportage. On the other hand, news could be premature, provisional, chronologically out of sequence, and disconcerting rather than unifying. As a heterogeneous mix of special correspondence and official despatch, eyewitness account and hearsay, reportage was often contradictory and sometimes just plain wrong.

³ John Davy, letter to the editor, ‘Poisonous Vapour of Charcoal’, *Spectator*, 10 February 1855, p. 16.

⁴ ‘E. U. B’, letter to the editor, *The Times*, 2 February 1855, p. 8.

⁵ See, for example, C. Dereli, *A War Culture in Action: A Study of the Literature of the Crimean War Period* (Oxford: Lang, 2003), pp. 17–50; Stefanie Markovits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 12–62.

⁶ [Catherine Marsh], *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars, Ninety-Seventh Regiment* (London: Nisbet, 1856), p. 251.

Captain Hedley Vicars's next appearance in the news underlines the point. Under the headline 'The Siege of Sebastopol', *The Times* of 4 April 1855 relayed — via its correspondents in Constantinople and Marseilles, and mediated by 'submarine and British telegraph' — the following brutal intelligence from the battlefield: 'The Russians made a sortie on the 23rd [March], and were repulsed. The English lost Colonel Kelly, of the 34th; Captain Browne, of the 7th; and Captain Vicars, of the 97th.'⁷ Two days later, William Russell's full account of the episode, written 22 and 23 March, listed 'Lieutenant Vicars' among the 'wounded'.⁸ Another day later, *The Times* reproduced Field Marshall Lord Raglan's narrative despatch of 24 March, received by the War Department on 6 April for publication in the 6 April supplement of the *London Gazette* (and reprinted in *The Times* of 7 April). This time, Captain Vicars was dead once more.⁹ One can imagine the distress this sequence of reports must have caused his family and friends.

By 1856 many readers knew that Hedley Vicars had died in the great sortie, not because they had spotted his name in the press, but because, with the permission of Vicars's mother, a Christian activist Catherine Marsh had recounted his dying hours in her unsigned volume *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars, Ninety-Seventh Regiment*. If the charcoal poisoning was Vicars's first appearance in the public eye, the *Memorials* placed him there more emphatically than it is now easy to appreciate. With it, a man 'whose name, till its last honourable mention by his commander-in-chief, was little known beyond his family and an extended circle of friends and comrades' (p. ix), suddenly became internationally famous for reasons, and according to a trajectory, this article will explore. That a matter of days could turn military misadventure into newspaper reportage, and that the resulting journalism would then be rapidly syndicated across the anglophone press and consumed by a vast and various literate public, is a truism of the Crimean as the first 'modern' war. That less than a year could transmute those column inches from ephemeral press coverage into the more enduring stuff of biography is less often considered, though the narrative possibilities this afforded were an important part of the legacy of the war.¹⁰ In particular, the popularity of

⁷ 'The Siege of Sebastopol', *The Times*, 4 April 1855, p. 7.

⁸ 'The Siege of Sebastopol', *The Times*, 6 April 1855, p. 7.

⁹ 'Despatches from the Crimea', *The Times*, 7 April 1855, p. 9. Other mistakes in Russell's account of this incident are recounted by the novelist A. L. Berridge in her blog post 'From the Horse's Mouth' <<http://the-history-girls.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/from-horses-mouth-by-l-berridge.html>> [accessed 23 February 2015].

¹⁰ The most famous example of the metamorphosis from daily journalism to monograph was, of course, the republication of William Howard Russell's despatches to *The Times* as *The War: From the Landing at Gallipoli to the Death of Lord Raglan* (London: Routledge, 1855) only months after the events recorded, and before both the end of the war and Russell's return from it. But one might equally cite the many volumes of letters and journals, some for private and some for public circulation, worked up rapidly from the testimonies of participants and observers. See, for instance,

evangelical biography in the wake of the conflict complicates any claims we might want to make about the ‘modernity’ of the war, the nature of the readership it engaged, and the kinds of sympathy it engendered.

The accelerated consumption of news, and more particularly of Crimean sufferings and fatalities, put pressure on and enabled the reconfiguration of many cultural distinctions: between the everyday ephemeral and the permanent memorial, the prosaic and the heroic, the profane and the sacred, the civilian and the military. As the extraordinary success of Marsh’s biography of her friend bears witness, one such reconfiguration was the transformation of an obscure but devout military officer into the very idea of the Christian soldier and of the Church Militant. J. R. Watson has offered a sketch of Hedley Vicars’s life, drawn from the *Memorials*, in support of his argument that mid-nineteenth-century culture saw a ‘strange combination of battle-field and religious heroism’. Within this reconfiguration, he suggests, the traditional Christian rhetoric of courage, endurance, discipline, loyalty, and resistance was given a newly belligerent edge, as the tropes of military and evangelical struggle — and victory — converged in the figure of the ‘soldier saint’.¹¹ What Watson does not take into account is that the ‘life’ of Vicars as it was familiar to nineteenth-century readers was almost entirely derived, directly or indirectly, from Marsh’s Life of him. What was the role of biographical ‘memorials’, and of a woman memorialist, in forging and disseminating Vicars’s reputation, and what were the implications of this for the gendered production of heroism and exemplarity in the closing stages of the Crimean War and beyond? Through this process of memorialization, a little-known ‘lady evangelist’ could become a celebrity mentioned in the same breath as Florence Nightingale, a rapidly assembled work of biography could become a best-seller, and Captain Hedley Vicars of the 97th as famous — for a while at least — as Henry Havelock.

Memoir

After ‘six and twenty years’ as a ‘willing servant of Satan’ (duties unspecified), the young army officer Hedley Vicars had been convicted of sin while

[Anthony Coningham Sterling], *Letters from the Army in the Crimea, Written During the Years 1854, 1855, and 1856 by a Staff-Officer Who Was There* (London: private circulation, [1857]). A notorious example of the rapid transition from ‘private’ journal to public commodity is Frances Isabella Duberly, *Journal Kept During the Russian War, from the Departure of the Army from England in April, 1854, to the Fall of Sebastopol* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1855). In this sense, biography is one strand of a wider cultural pattern.

¹¹ J. R. Watson, ‘Soldiers and Saints: The Fighting Man and the Christian Life’, in *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*, ed. by Andrew Bradstock and others (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 10–26 (p. 25).

serving in Jamaica, and, much to the delight of his godly family back home, had undergone a life-changing conversion experience in November 1851 while based in Halifax, Nova Scotia ([Marsh], *Memorials*, p. 61). At home in England from May 1853 until his embarkation for the Crimea a year later, he had been introduced by his sister, Lady Clara Rayleigh, to her friend Miss Catherine Marsh, a clergyman's daughter living in the rectory at Beckenham with her sister and brother-in-law. Around that time Marsh was writing her first book — a moderately successful deathbed tract based on her evangelizing of a mortally ill physician — and was beginning to make a name for herself locally through her ministry to the hundreds of navvies working on the new Crystal Palace site and railway in Sydenham.¹² Like many men before him and dozens after, Vicars had become Marsh's spiritual protégé and confidant. While on leave he had helped with her work with the navvies (some later joined the army, the militia, or the Army Works Corps to emulate him), and, once embarked on the Crimean campaign, he had written her long letters from allied-occupied Piraeus and then from the Siege of Sebastopol. In them he had poured forth the minutiae of his spiritual life, as well as accounts of his missionary work in the hospital tents and of his attempts to encourage Christian practice and faith among the officers and men around him. He had died on the night of 22 March 1855, within hours of his first contact with the enemy, having been injured in the shoulder leading his troops against a daring night-time attack by the Russians.

At his family's request, Marsh undertook *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars* almost immediately after his death, collating his letters to his mother, sisters, and to herself, interspersed with occasional passages of explanation or exhortation, and narrating the short life outlined above. By the time it was published in December 1855, it superseded an even earlier 'sketch' she and Vicars's family had circulated to friends and members of his regiment, called *Walking with God before Sebastopol: Reminiscences of the late Captain Vicars, 97th Regiment*.¹³ On 29 June 1855, a bare three months after Vicars's death, his commanding officer had written to Lady Rayleigh thanking her on behalf of his brother officers for 'the books descriptive of the life of their poor friend' (*Memorials*, p. 313). His letter of gratitude for *Walking with God* itself found its way into the *Memorials*, as part of an appendix headed 'In Memoriam' in which Marsh reproduced reports of and responses to Vicars's death from both public and private sources.

The pattern of these reports is one of gradually softening ripples. Marsh acknowledges but reworks the agony of the original series of bulletins:

¹² [Catherine Marsh], *The Victory Won: A Brief Memorial of the Last Days of G. R.* (London: Nisbet, 1855). For her popular account of her mission to the navvies of Crystal Palace, see Marsh's *English Hearts and English Hands; or, The Railway and the Trenches* (London: Nisbet, 1858).

¹³ I have been unable to trace a surviving copy of this text.

A passage in the despatch from Lord Raglan, published on Good Friday, April 6, closed the last door of hope that there might be some mistake in the telegraphic notice of Captain Vicars' death, communicated by the evening papers of the 4th. (p. 295)

The illusory promise held out by frail human hope, fostered by the doubtful authority of the press, is decisively relocated not only within the broader perspective of hindsight and the generic certainties of the memorial, but within the typological calendar of Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday. In Raglan's account, the nature and extent of the Russian attack are sketched out, and Vicars's fate is (conventionally enough) 'distinguished' by his gallantry and good example to the detachment under his command. News may be mistaken, but official despatches 'close the last door of hope' even as they soften the blow with commendation (p. 295). From this point the voices of fellow combatants take over the volume, as letters of condolence rehearse the final scenes for the benefit of loved ones at home. The book ends with many such letters mourning his loss, commiserating with his family and friends, and telling, often in identical phraseology, of Hedley's heroism on the field, faithful last hours, and burial service.

In the case of the charcoal-stove incident and the night of the great sortie, the memoir narrates but also contains the trauma of an encounter with mortality experienced in public. In this sense biography did what the news 'media' often did not: mediate. Responses to events, to the news of the events, and even to the biographer's first accounts of events in *Walking with God* are folded into the second version so that both civilian and 'serving' readers can find shock reframed as grief, blunt 'news' reframed as eulogy. While much scholarship on the cultural construction of the Crimean War focuses on its immediacy, and on the new ways readers became implicated in military practice and policy, less is said about the personal cost of such immediacy. Crimean memoirs such as Marsh's found an audience partly because they intervened — quietly and efficiently — in the cultural fray, resituating combatants' lives and deaths within what Esther Schor has called the 'calm commerce of condolence'.¹⁴ Through the process of memorialization, the stark reality-effects of documentary and photographic journalism are rehabilitated within a more mixed economy of mourning and commemoration: a trading back and forth of sorrow, gratitude, and sympathy in which the reader, as witness to and participant in this cycle of remembrance, is necessarily involved. The actions of writing, publishing, giving, and reading the *Life of Vicars* all participate in a communal praxis of memory which can accommodate, and in turn commemorate, such rituals

¹⁴ Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

as erecting a gravestone (*Memorials*, p. 305), decorating a grave with flowers, stones, and shells (pp. 309, 310), cherishing a locket or a lock of hair (p. 300), preserving a letter (p. 311), and shedding a manly tear (p. 303). In this alternative economy the distinction between publication and private circulation is porous, and biography is a collective ritual rather than a monographic literary practice. Through such shared rites a humble individual, even a benighted Roman Catholic ('J. O'Reilly, Private, No. 3 Company, 97th Regiment') can come to have his 'name coupled with all that was good' (p. 311), and in that way stand for a grieving public.¹⁵ In a discursive regime within which the public, official world of print 'closes the last door of hope', religious memoirs take their place alongside spoken eulogies, letters of condolence, and impromptu sermons: they oppose a multiplicity of memorials to the harsh fatality of despatch.

Mission

For Catherine Marsh, producing the *Memorials* was not just part of a collective reassertion of memory. It was also, indeed mainly, an act of evangelism. As such it featured within the suite of philanthropic and evangelical activities to which Marsh devoted her time. As one aspect of a versatile ministry, the volume encompassed, without strain or contradiction, both manuscript and print culture (private letters retooled as memoirs, for instance), both the personal and the impersonal (memoirs morphing from the 'life of their poor friend' to 'best-seller'), and both the private philanthropic and the public commercial (the *Memorials*' best-seller celebrity seems to have been unapologetically fuelled by Marsh's donation of copies in bulk to interested parties). Marsh is visible today, if at all, for her missionary work among the navvies of Sydenham, her work with cholera victims, and her moral sponsorship of godly soldiers such as Vicars.¹⁶ What is seldom noted is that all this interpersonal work is known to us almost exclusively through her own writings. Authorship was one of the many skills she developed as

¹⁵ Catherine Marsh was virulently anti-Catholic, though she made allowances for Catholic lay people as individuals.

¹⁶ Marsh's work as a philanthropist and evangelical is discussed in Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home: Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. by Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 33–63 (p. 43); F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 159–61; and Dick Sullivan, *Navvyman* (London: Coracle, 1983). Marsh appears briefly as one of the evangelical biographers of 'soldier saints' in John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843–1945* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 121, 175, 225. See also, Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 131–32.

a single woman wishing to intervene in the moral and spiritual welfare of her community and nation. Her writerly engagement with Hedley Vicars as his confidant and correspondent, and as biographer with his spiritual legacy, enabled her to campaign not just for individual souls but for a Christianized military.¹⁷

Marsh's cultural construction of Hedley Vicars as 'soldier saint' thus sits squarely within what historians have identified as an emerging civilian interest, re-galvanized by the horrors of the Crimean War, in the spiritual regeneration of soldiers and the reform of army life.¹⁸ Her popularization of Hedley Vicars's memory situates her among a group of middle-class women active in fostering Christianity in military life, through their work promoting temperance, distributing religious literature to the troops, and establishing 'soldiers' homes' (Snape, pp. 104–11). Their idea was not to reclaim the soldiery from the army, but to show that, for all its long-standing association with hard living, brutality, and recklessness, military life could be hospitable to, and could benefit from, piety, spirituality, and gentleness. The preface to Marsh's volume announces that the work is intended to embolden young Englishmen whose best feelings have been 'stifled' by the atmosphere around them to avow themselves Christian soldiers and raise the moral and spiritual tone of the society in which they find themselves. The work is designed to 'refute' the proposition that a good Christian must make a bad soldier and vice versa; to show that the 'blood-stained laurels' of the military hero are compatible with the crown of glory; and to demonstrate that the military camp and hospital are proper, even fruitful, sites for Christian mission (*Memorials*, pp. x–xi).

Hence Marsh's Hedley Vicars models a particular kind of exemplarity, as his biographer strives to show that 'Christian Soldier' is not an oxymoron.¹⁹ In an early letter to Marsh, Vicars confesses that, had his conversion come about when he was seventeen, he '*certainly*' should not have signed up. As a soldier, however, he received his call to eternal life, and so, he vows, '*as a soldier I will die*' (p. 136, emphases in original). According to Marsh's portrait, he combines the moral seriousness, compassion, and fervour of the evangelical Christian with the patriotism, institutional loyalty, physical bravery, and boyish enthusiasm of the soldier. He has the manly fortitude not just to endure the gruelling conditions of cold, want, and

¹⁷ On these grounds Marsh makes a cameo appearance in Helen Rappaport's *No Place for Ladies: The Untold Story of Women in the Crimean War* (London: Aurum, 2007), pp. 176–77.

¹⁸ The fullest account of Marsh's work in this context is Olive Anderson's classic essay, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, 55 (1971), 46–71 (pp. 47–53). See also, Snape, p. 69.

¹⁹ Some tract versions of the memoir had 'The Christian Soldier' as subheading. See, for example, the version for the Confederate soldiery at <<http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/search/collection/rarebook/cosuppress/>> [accessed 23 February 2015].

danger, but to give away to others such luxuries as he has, and — even more impressively — to face down the taunts of fellow officers and gain their respect. His final — and only — engagement with the enemy manifests ‘coolness of judgement’, bravery, and leadership, as he leads his men into battle:

Then, with his first war-shout, ‘Now 97th, on your pins, and charge!’ himself foremost in the conflict, he led on his gallant men to victory, charging two thousand with a force of barely two hundred. [...] One moment a struggling moonbeam fell upon his flashing sword, as he waved it through the air, with his last cheer for his men — ‘*This way, 97th!*’ The next, the strong arm which had been uplifted, hung powerless by his side, and he fell amidst his enemies. (p. 289, emphasis in original)

A dense collage of chivalric motifs, Marsh’s account of the episode sacrifices realism for allegory. His death, occurring on the night following the royally appointed day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation (21 March 1855), borrows from the coincidence an aura of national rite. As Marsh underlines at the volume’s conclusion, that final cry, ‘*This way!*’, captures his leadership in personal self-sacrifice *for* the nation, and the necessity for atonement *as* a nation. It was one of the many phrases that would be taken up and recirculated to inspire young Christian men across the empire:

Your Saviour mans each breach — follow Him. Remember Vicars’ last words, ‘This way!’ You are encompassed with a glorious cloud of witnesses, who all cry out, ‘This way!’ Hark! louder than the cannon’s roar, or clashing sword, or prancing steed, the voice of Jesus sounding on your ears, repeats the word ‘This way!’²⁰

While the act of serving Queen and country through warfare is understood by the *Memorials* as simply virtuous, other aspects of the engagement are less easily accommodated in Marsh’s vision of a chivalrous hero. The reasons for *this* war, the manner of its prosecution, and the day-to-day horrors of slaughter and waste have to be dealt with more gingerly. Very seldom does Marsh’s Vicars broach the geopolitics of the Crimea: war is to him a ‘visitation from the Almighty’ like ‘cholera or any other scourge’, and one must ‘drive it from amongst us’ as one would a disease. Even in so brief a defence, we find him entangled in his own metaphors (fighting against disease can be understood as continuous with fighting a specific disease; fighting against war in general is not straightforwardly compatible with fighting *a* war.) For Vicars and for his biographer it is enough that this is

²⁰ Thomas Smith, *Hedley Vicars: A Lecture Delivered Before the Members of the Young Men’s Christian Association, Sydney, July, 1858* (Sydney: Bancroft, 1858), p. 30.

clearly a ‘just war’, in so far as a Russian despot has made an unprovoked ‘aggression’ on one of ‘our’ oldest allies: ‘shall we Britons let him have his way, and tamely look on?’ (*Memorials*, p. 204). Institutional incompetence is likewise given short shrift. A few muted complaints surface in Vicars’s letters about ‘dilly-dallying’ instead of ‘go[ing] at it hammer and tongs’, and about the loss of life from disease and cold rather than from storming the fortress of Sebastopol (pp. 219, 223, 231). On the whole, however, Marsh’s hero distinguishes himself from ‘fellows who are always grumbling’, and blames himself rather than the authorities for not bringing warm clothing (p. 224). Very occasionally Vicars’s letters lapse into bellicose rhetoric about ‘thrashing’ these Russian ‘savages’ (p. 220), but even this reads more like youthful enthusiasm than homicidal intent. His desire to be near the scene of action is construed by Marsh’s commentary as the offspring of two natures: ‘his soldier heart and missionary spirit alike yearned to be at the seat of war’ (pp. 198–99). After months ministering to the disease-stricken soldiers in the hospitals of Piraeus, and in the wake of the victory of Alma, Vicars confesses (his term) to a wish for a post of danger, but, like Marsh, he emphasizes the possibilities for ministry: ‘The carnage of the battle-field has no attractions for me; but there is a wide field for missionary labour, when the roar of the cannon has ceased’ (p. 193). The notorious privations of Crimean camp life are thus an opportunity for self-discipline; its horrors an opportunity for evangelism.

That Vicars’s limited experience of battle allowed Marsh, until the last few pages of her narrative, to situate fighting in a temporal and spatial elsewhere does not obviate a tension in the rehabilitation of the Christian soldier: its twin and unavoidably countervailing effects of militarizing the idea of the Christian life even as it spiritualized the idea of military life. This was another, differently gendered, version of the ideological fissure that, as Mary Poovey has shown, produced ‘Florence Nightingale’ as at once archetypal nurturing woman and administrator of martial efficiency.²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Marsh’s celebration of Vicars’s masculinity is a version of Christian heroism refracted through the ‘Nightingale’ lens. Far more of the narrative is devoted to his praying with and preaching to the sick and dying in the hospitals of Piraeus than to combat. Clinching her claim for the significance of these duties, Marsh appeals to lines recently published by her brother-in-law, the poet and cleric Richard Chevenix Trench. Trench’s poem ‘What though yet the spirit slumbers’ laments the poetical vacuum incurred by the horrors of the war, and — in a move that would come to be conventional in Crimean War poetry — offers the self-sacrifice of the Light Brigade’s ‘six hundred’ as equivalent to the heroism

²¹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 164–98.

of the Spartan ‘three hundred’ at Thermopylae.²² However, it is not the men but the Spartan women to whom Marsh’s quotation alludes. Trench’s poem invokes as worthy successors to the heroines of antiquity the ‘noble train’ travelling to the Crimea in ‘fellowship with pain’. It is Trench’s commemoration of the Nightingale mission to which Marsh turns in her celebration of Vicars’s endeavours:

Seeking, as men seek for riches,
Painful vigils by the bed
Where the sick and dying stretches
Aching limbs beside the dead. (quoted in *Memorials*, p. 169)

Vicars’s mission is likened to Nightingale’s ‘painful vigil’ which in turn is likened — wryly but tellingly — to the struggle of ‘men’ for ‘riches’. That his efforts are two long metaphorical steps away from conventional ideas of gain, but only one short step from womanly self-sacrifice, is in this context a positive value. Marsh underlines the equation of the ‘Christian Soldier’s’ heroism with Nightingale when, recounting the winter before Sebastopol, Marsh describes Vicars’s faith as a lamp that ‘never wanted oil, but burnt with a clear and steady light which not only cheered those around but also cast its bright reflection upon praying spirits three thousand miles distant’ (p. 210). Vicars’s faith reaches out to, but is also encircled by, a community of witnesses far wider than that of the regiment.

In carving out a role for Christian patriotism, moral authority, and faithful endeavour from the shambolic squalor of the military conflict, Marsh’s text complements Nightingale’s spectacularly successful construction of — and as — a site for female self-assertion amid the unpromising wreckage of the Crimea. Fulfilling his promise as Marsh’s protégé and disciple, Hedley Vicars enacts in full view of the reading public — and of posterity — the sacred rites of the domestic missionary, nurse, and lay preacher. Marsh’s memoir draws attention to aspects of military life often overlooked: its opportunities for solitude, contemplation, leisure, and sociability. From the moment of his conversion in Nova Scotia we find him able to combine his seemingly modest duties as regimental adjutant with four or five hours’ daily Bible reading and prayer, a two hours’ walk, attendance at Bible studies, teaching in the Sunday School, and work for the Naval and Military Bible Society, the Temperance Society, and City Missions.²³ Even on campaign, the compulsory waiting involved in camp life means that much time is available for good works and prayer. In other words Marsh presents a life that

²² Richard Chevenix Trench, ‘What though yet the spirit slumbers’, in *Alma, and Other Poems* (London: Parker, 1855), pp. 1–6.

²³ In his daily programme for sinless living and improvement in faith while in Canada it is clear that no more than four and a half hours are taken up by ‘work in the orderly room’: the rest of the time is his own (p. 63).

mirrors in many important respects the ideal avocations of a middle-class evangelical woman. Far more time is spent giving tracts and testaments than giving battle. Just as Nightingale productively complicated the idea of middle-class femininity, so Vicars, in the hands of Marsh, is shown to complicate the idea of military manliness.

Portrait

This Christian soldier, then, is a complexly gendered figure. For all his heroism in battle, his self-control and discipline, he is just as notable for more ‘feminine’ qualities: self-sacrificing devotion, the provision of succour and comfort to the suffering. In this sense Marsh’s Vicars harks back to earlier forms of evangelical manliness while borrowing a certain celebrity charisma from the Nightingale effect.²⁴ That this was a version of the Crimean legacy with broad and enduring — albeit polyvalent — influence was partly because the biographical format, even in its formulaic evangelical guise, could engage its readers on many levels and in multiple ways.

Its paratextual elements were key to this. The frontispiece, in many ways blandly conventional, prefigures many of the text’s strategies of appeal. An engraving of the Captain looks out at the reader over the phrase, in flowing cursive, ‘Yours most affectionately Hedley Vicars’ (*Fig. 1*). The subscription connotes both the intimacy of the familiar letter and, more distantly but distinctly, the glamour of the autographed celebrity engraving as popularized by Byron and others. The portrait itself is a piquant mix of the formal and the rakish. Vicars has posed in civilian clothes rather than regimental uniform. A stiff upright collar is offset by an unbuttoned coat and a rather flourished necktie. Neat pre-campaign whiskers frame a square jaw and determined chin; glossily waving hair, parted fastidiously at the side, accentuates a strong nose and wistfully interrogative gaze. Altogether the image unleashes a tantalizing play of differences: of casual boyish charm and formal manly rigour; of masculine severity and coy feminine whimsy.²⁵ This fascination is in turn modulated by another set of images, albeit in softer focus and less directly striking. One is the image, centred on the title page itself, of Vicars’s headstone, palely distinct in the foreground of a (then) immediately recognizable Crimean deathscape (*Fig. 2*). The

²⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1740–1850*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002). The Marsh family are among the examples given of this early nineteenth-century configuration of class and gender.

²⁵ Paler impressions of the engraving, even within the same edition, lose some of these romantic lines and contrastive colours, making Vicars look more unambiguously masculine as well as older. American versions, with much darker hatching, have him older and butcher still.

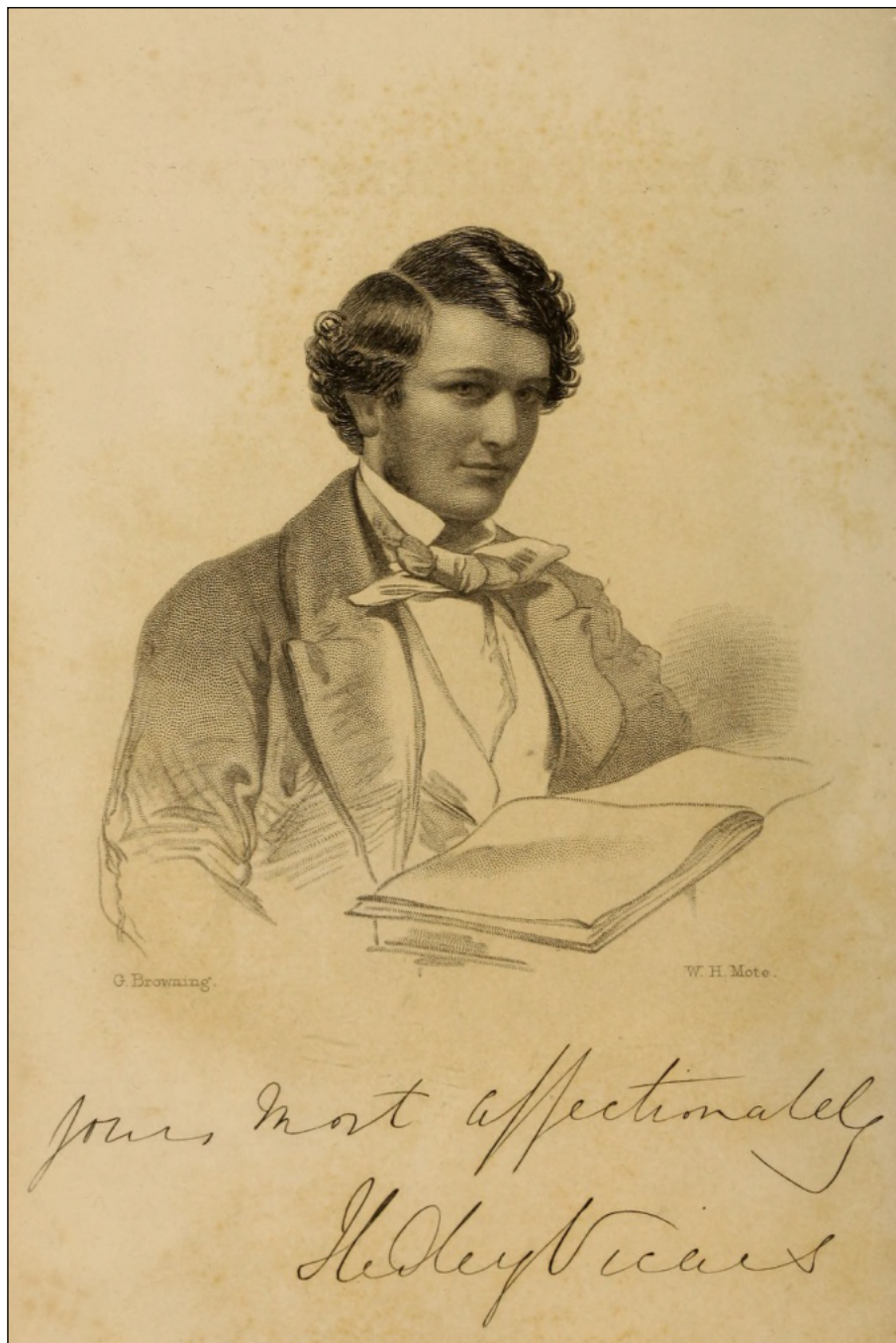


Fig. 1: Frontispiece, *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars*. Author's own copy.

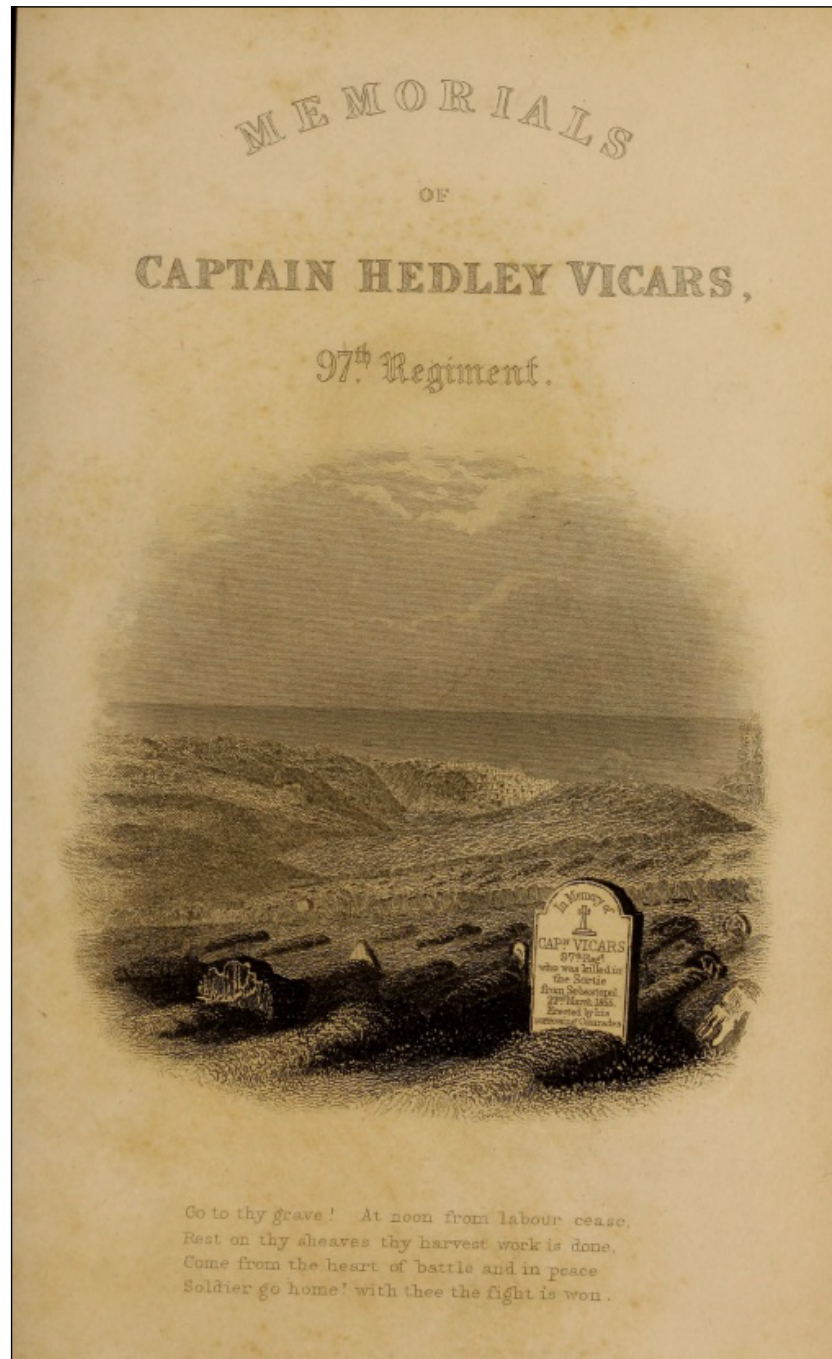


Fig. 2: Title page, *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars*. Author's own copy.

stone records his death while repelling the Russian sortie from Sebastopol on 22 March 1855. These *Memorials*, we are thus reminded, commemorate a death almost as emphatically as they do a life.

Another part of the Vicars iconography appears in the bottom right of the portrait itself, in the shape of a large but otherwise undistinguishable book, raised at chest height. This volume foreshadows and links two of the most narratively decisive moments of the biography itself. The first is the scene of conversion. The morning after his conversion, Vicars expresses his commitment in a language that marries the military with the domestic, and identifies the home — construed as site of both leisure and consumption — as a spiritual battlefield: ‘he bought a large Bible, and placed it open on the table in his sitting-room, determined that “an open Bible,” for the future, should be “his colours”’ (p. 33). The image of faith as one’s personal ‘colours’ — a term which includes even as it implicitly trumps both his unassailable personal chivalry and his regimental loyalty — would prove one of the most enduring in the Hedley Vicars mythography, suturing otherwise countervailing allegiances and ethics.²⁶ Writing to Clara Rayleigh of his first night at the camp before Sebastopol, for example, he records rallying his men with ‘a little speech around the bivouac fire’, combining ‘religious advice’ with ‘a few words about our duties as British soldiers’, and ending: “Lads, while I have life, I will stick to the colours, and I know you will never desert me” (p. 214). The earlier metalepsis equating the scriptures with the regimental colours is here reshaped, so that the colours embody Vicars’s distinctive combination of ‘almost apostolic devotedness and love’ and ‘almost boyish anticipation’ (p. 210).

The second decisive moment is Vicars’s departure for the scene of war. As part of his preparation for embarkation, he fulfils a commission from a woman friend — implicitly his biographer Catherine Marsh:

I have just returned from Simms’s [*sic*], where I had my likeness taken. I think there are two for you to choose from, both as plain as life. I brought my great Halifax Bible to have its portrait taken, as you desired. (p. 141)

By this stage the Bible has become not just a prop in Vicars’s story, but also a character in its own right, a companion in the pilgrim’s progress with its own implicit ‘it narrative’, and worthy of its own visual memento in the front matter. Like the talismanic ‘*This way!*’, Vicars’s Bible, qua his colours, functions as an intimate compact between a departing soldier and his female interlocutor, as a symbol of his fearless lay ministry and his use of personal space as domestic chapel, and as guarantee — and sublation — of personal faith and loyalty to the nation.

²⁶ See, for example, Lizzie Alldridge, ‘Catherine Marsh’, in *Florence Nightingale, Frances Ridley Havergal, Catherine Marsh, Mrs Ranyard* (‘L. N. R.’), 5th edn (London: Cassell, 1890), pp. 65–98 (p. 65).

In a complex pattern of retrospections, anticipations, and fulfilments that would have been easily legible to a scripturally literate readership, the portrait records a parting and recalls a calling while — from a reader's perspective — it prefigures both. At the same time this intratextual pattern reminds us of the unembarrassed self-mythologizing — the distinctive mode of unselfconscious self-consciousness — to which evangelical life-writing lent itself. And in this respect it is worth noting that Vicars has chosen the fashionably cutting-edge daguerreotype studio of Thomas Sims for the production of his keepsake; that the portrait has been painstakingly staged; and that it would ultimately be reproduced (depending on which of the many editions one studies) by such craftsmen as Vincent Brooks, foremost lithographer of Crimean subjects.²⁷ Hedley Vicars's image, 'as plain as life', is the result of careful preparation and considerable expense. It is also an early example of the way the relatively new technologies of the camera made possible — and stimulated an appetite for — representations of soldiers and sailors beneath the 'top brass'. Such images were of course a source of comfort and consolation to families waiting and loved ones grieving: in this case the image functions as part of the internal rhetoric of the *Memorials* as personal commemoration, while at the same time offering a poster boy for Christian militarism.²⁸

Afterlives

As Ian Bradley has pointed out, within a year seventy thousand copies of the *Memorials* were in circulation.²⁹ The accelerating responsiveness of the

²⁷ Thomas Sims (1826–1920) had two photographic studios in London in the early 1850s, but moved out of the capital after being sued for breach of patent. Vincent Brooks (1815–1885) commenced business in 1848, exhibited lithographic work at the Great Exhibition in 1851, and was responsible for reproducing the Princess Royal's 1855 watercolour *The Field of Battle* (currently in the Royal Collection), for sale on behalf of the Patriotic Fund.

²⁸ The public circulation of Vicars's image highlights further dimensions of this innovation. The availability of photographs of soldiers both from studios and from the field of battle, as Heinz K. and Bridget A. Henisch have pointed out, both underscored the common humanity of military and civilian constituencies and, at the same time, pointed up the vulnerability of the former to the latter. Significantly, the portrait of Hedley Vicars forms an important part of their evidence for the significance of photography in the wars of mid-century. Along with other innovations of Crimean representation, this democratizing of the visual representation of the soldiery helped to reshape the rhetoric, imagery, and ideology of modern war. See Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget A. Henisch, *The Photographic Experience 1839–1914: Images and Attitudes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 390.

²⁹ Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 2006), p. 147. Bradley's observation prompted Richard D. Altick to add the work to his lists of Victorian best-sellers, in 'Nineteenth-Century English

publishing industry to new markets and the formal adaptability of memoirs as a genre (hagiography, life and letters, adventure story, chronicle) enabled Marsh to target the *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars* at different audiences as the occasion arose. While the hardcover edition continued to be reprinted for decades, Nisbet also produced cheaper paper-covered, small-print editions without the illustrations, which, according to the testimony of Marsh's biographer, proved popular among working men.³⁰ During the American Civil War, a drastically abridged version entitled *A Sketch of the Life of Captain Hedley Vicars: The Christian Soldier* was published by the Soldiers' Tract Association based in Virginia for the benefit of the 'soldiers of the Confederate Army, who have left their homes and are exposing their lives in our defence'.³¹ Simultaneously, a slightly longer version under the same title, abridged by the Rev. T. N. Haskell, was circulated to the troops of the United States Army by the American Tract Society of Boston, complete with a page of 'Good Advice to Soldiers' about beards, blankets, and bowel complaints and a prayer that the memoir might increase the 'moral courage and promote the spiritual welfare' of the soldiery.³² As early as 1857, a French version had been available to England's Crimean allies, and, by 1870, the translation of the book into German by Helene Gräfin Stolber meant that Marsh could arrange its distribution to both sides in the Franco-Prussian War.³³ Such

Best-Sellers: A Third List', *Studies in Bibliography*, 39 (1986), 235–41 (p. 239). As with tracts and testaments, however, one must be wary of seeing the 'market' — from either the distribution or acquisition end — as strictly commercial.

³⁰ See L. E. O'Rorke, *The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh*, 2nd impression (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), pp. 159–60. The latest 'synopsis' held by the British Library was published in Glasgow by Pickering and Inglis in c. 1916, four years after Marsh's death.

³¹ For versions of *A Sketch of the Life of Capt. Hedley Vicars, the Christian Soldier* from 1862, 1863, and 1864 respectively, some explicitly attributed to 'Miss Marsh', see <<https://archive.org/details/sketchoflifeofcaomars>>; <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/impls/marsh/marsh.html>>; and <<https://archive.org/details/sketchoflifeofcaomars>> [accessed 23 February 2015]. According to her biographer, Marsh favoured the North as the cause of freedom, but had friends in the South. It is possible that she personally promoted the distribution of the work to both sides in the conflict (O'Rorke, p. 205).

³² Rev. T. N. Haskell, *Sketch of the Life of Captain Hedley Vicars* (Boston: American Tract Society, [n.d.]), preface.

³³ *Vie et lettres du capitaine Hedley Vicars du 97e régiment* (Paris: Meyrueis, 1857); *Histoire d'un brave [H. S. J. V.] mort devant Sébastopol* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1857); *Capitain H. V.'s Leben und Heldentod* ([n.p]: [n. pub.], 1870). O'Rorke records that during the war 25,025 French and the same number of German copies were sent out to the hospitals for the wounded (p. 250, n. 1). Though the commercial basis of such transactions is hard to ascertain, it is worth noting that her publisher later pulled the plug on her short-lived periodical *The Harbinger of Dawn* because it was a 'losing concern' (O'Rorke, p. 275).

even-handedness suggests that the ideal of the Christian soldier was to some extent a geopolitically movable feast.³⁴

While Marsh was subsequently able to plough the Hedley Vicars story back into her own ministry to a variety of audiences, confident of recognition for his name and reputation, others picked up and remediated her narrative for their own ends.³⁵ Like Florence and Alma, Hedley and Vicars quickly became popular forenames, especially in Canada (the birthplace of his mother); only two years after his death a 228-ton cargo brig built on Prince Edward Island was named after him, only to be struck by a steamer and sunk in the mouth of the Tyne in 1865, with the loss of a cabin boy.³⁶ Once returned from the Crimea, former soldiers could use his fame as a platform for their own projects of self-promotion, teaching, and fundraising, so that his life and death became something of a staple for lectures to boys and men. Shortly after the end of the war, advertisements began to appear in *The Times* for lectures on Vicars on behalf of, or to, various reforming organizations.³⁷ In 1859, for instance, capitalizing on his presence at Vicars's deathbed, Charles Cay offered a talk on his friend as a fundraising effort on behalf of the Webber Row ragged school.³⁸ The Young Men's Christian Association in cities as far apart as London and Sydney benefited from lectures on the godly Crimean hero. Also in 1859, Vicars appeared in Thomas Jones Barker's canvas *The Allied Generals with the Officers of their Respective Staffs before Sebastopol*.³⁹ *The Story of Hedley Vicars, the Christian Soldier*, sometimes paired with that of the missionary William Carey, formed part of Lucy

³⁴ The work was also translated into Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Dutch, and Italian.

³⁵ See, for example, the frequent allusions to Vicars in *English Hearts*, and *Brave, Kind, and Happy; or, Words of Hearty Friendship to the Working Men of England* (New York: Carter, 1862). As well as drawing extensively on the Vicars narrative, this New York edition of *Brave, Kind, and Happy* includes a price list offering *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars, English Hearts*, and *The Victory Won* at 40, 75, and 25 cents, respectively.

³⁶ 'Ship News', *The Times*, 6 September 1861, p. 10. The collision and lawsuit were reported in *The Times*, 29 July 1865, p. 11. See also, *Sitelines: Tyne and Wear's Historic Environment Record* <<http://www.twsitelines.info/smr/14458>>; *Farmers, Millers, and Bakers* <<http://www.shorehambysea.com/farmers-millers-and-bakers.html>> [accessed 23 February 2015].

³⁷ 'Captain Hedley Vicars — Three Lectures', advertisement in *The Times*, 26 August 1856, p. 5; 'Crimea, Sebastopol and Hedley Vicars', advertisement in *The Times*, 25 February 1860, p. 4.

³⁸ Cay's lecture, given to an illustrious audience, was later reported in "Recollections of the Crimea," on Behalf of the Webber Row Ragged Schools', *Ragged School Union Magazine*, 11 (1859), p. 80. See also, Smith, *Hedley Vicars*.

³⁹ Interestingly, a rather accomplished watercolour of *The Wounded Being Transported from the Field of Inkermann* purporting — though unlikely — to be painted by Vicars, was recently acquired by the Florence Nightingale Museum. The current curators can find no evidence for this alleged provenance (personal communication); I think it possible that the ascription is evidence of Hedley Vicars's currency as a celebrity rather than his (otherwise unheard of) artistic talents.

Taylor's 'Noble Lives' series for boys in the 1890s.⁴⁰ Such rapid, multifarious, and long-lived remediation was partly due to the fame of and fashion for all things Crimean, but partly also to Marsh's skill in accessing and impressing multiple audiences with her saintly soldier.

Yet any suggestion that Marsh was uniformly successful in promoting Vicars as exemplary Christian soldier to a male audience requires careful scrutiny. In his 1859 preface to the 1848 novel *Yeast*, Charles Kingsley, a friend and admirer of Marsh, congratulated the ascendant 'evangelical party' for its recent acquisition of two such figureheads as Hedley Vicars and Henry Havelock, suggesting they should 'trumpet' such specimens for all they were worth. At the same time he doubted that these heroes' gallantry owed as much to their creed as to the simple fact of their nation and class. Like 'geese who have unwittingly hatched a swan', Anglicans of the evangelical party seemed to Kingsley unlikely progenitors of masculine heroism. Their confidence in the necessity of social hierarchy aligned them too closely with the maxims of the marketplace and the status quo to be of long-term interest to the 'young, the active, the daring'. The common man, Kingsley reasoned — the exploited Esau-figure who 'digs Jacob's mines, founds Jacob's colonies, pours out his blood for him in those wars which Jacob himself has stirred up' would find little to inspire or to invoke his better self in the smooth, sleek rhetoric of evangelicalism. While Hedley Vicars would ultimately pall as a role model for men in favour of the socially engaged 'Esau' of the world, Kingsley argued, those Esaus had their own need for a Catherine Marsh to celebrate and cherish them. To learn the truth about his own potential a man needed to see himself reflected in the love of a woman — mother, sister, lover, or, failing that — given the wild, wandering life which is his destiny — in the reflective surface offered by such noble figures as Florence Nightingale and Catherine Marsh. A nation that could produce two such 'human angels' would be able to face down the superstition and anarchy of Europe in the name of a 'lofty and enlightened Christianity, which shall be thoroughly human, and therefore thoroughly divine'.⁴¹

What Kingsley seems to have intuited is that Vicars's life and image, the talisman of the Christian Soldier, functioned even more effectively as the avatar of a certain kind of feminine heroism; that the glamour of 'Hedley Vicars' was in part that of the lady missionary. His piety was as likely to seem priggish as heroic to some male readers, while his appeal to women readers could be interchangeably filial, fraternal, or even erotic. Certainly, his name was as likely to be dropped, or his grave tenderly visited, by female Crimean memoirists as by male.⁴² But perhaps the most

⁴⁰ Lucy Taylor, *The Story of Hedley Vicars, the Christian Soldier* (London: Nelson, 1894).

⁴¹ Charles Kingsley, *Yeast: A Problem* (London: Everyman, 1976), pp. 6, 7.

⁴² See, for example, Alicia Blackwood, *A Narrative of Personal Experiences & Impressions During a Residence on the Bosphorus Throughout the Crimean War* (London: Hatchard, 1881), pp. 150–51, 218. Beneath the transparent veil of the 'good hearted,

transgressively gendered ‘revision’ of the Hedley Vicars narrative is the discourse ‘he’ delivered in 1858, three years after his death, to a Greenwich audience of one hundred and twenty, through the mouth of a female spirit medium and dictated to the male mesmerist Mr W. Carpenter. For the most part ‘Vicars’s’ discourse ventriloquizes a breakneck, almost Beckettian version of the self-interrogative epistolary style of the *Memorials*:

You go on, gay, gay, gay, to the very last: listening to what Satan says, and doing all his works. Then comes the death-bed. ‘Oh,’ you say, ‘I am going to die: I don’t want to die, — I cannot leave this world. Oh,’ you say, ‘would that I had not listened to Satan.’

The dramatic monologue ascribed to ‘Vicars’ punctuated with outbursts of confession that, uttered in the voice and performed through the body of a woman medium, must have destabilized — hystericized, one might say — any securely gendered, or even securely ‘heroic’, assumptions about the now familiar ‘Christian soldier’:

I remember perfectly well, when the news came that I was to be selected to be *Captain*, — Oh! it was not with thanks to God for placing me in a position in which I might benefit my fellow-men. No: I thought to myself ‘How fine I shall look in my regimentals; how grand it is to have men under me.’ — I did not think that I was under *God!* My dear friends, the Almighty gave me a fine form and a handsome face: but I was a sinner, and had sins of the deepest dye.⁴³

Dissent

Marsh’s skilful deployment of the textual and paratextual resources of memoir, her integration of implied female interlocutors (mother, sister, friend), her incorporation of Vicars’s fluent religiosity, her melding of modern and traditional practices of commemoration, and, perhaps most importantly, her elision for the most part of the practices of actual combat, legitimized

lovable, noble *H — V —* [...] with whose useful heroic life the English public have become so familiar’, Vicars appears in Mary Seacole, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (London: Blackwood, 1857), pp. 8, 95. Seacole claims, not implausibly, to have met him in both Jamaica and Crimea.

⁴³ *Communion with ‘Ministering Spirits’: A Discourse with Introductory and Concluding Prayers, Delivered on Sunday Evening, April 25th, 1858, by the Immortal Spirit of Captain Hedley Vicars, and Reported Verbatim by Mr. W. Carpenter, Mesmerist and Spiritualist, Near Christchurch, Greenwich* (London: Horsell, 1858), pp. 7, 3. *Communion* is part of a series of pamphlets on vegetarianism, mesmerism, phrenology, and other fashionable nineteenth-century disciplines.

a variety of identifications, connections, and recognitions in her readers, military and civilian, male and female, that would for many years withstand scepticism and dissent. Only occasionally did a stray voice like Kingsley's query the consensus. One pamphleteer, possibly a Quaker, perturbed by the *Memorials*' 'extraordinary circulation and celebrity, among a certain section of the religious world', rebutted any suggestion that 'the example of a good man is of value enough to justify or consecrate a bad system', arguing that Vicars's personal piety did not of itself make war legitimate, nor the military profession consistent with Christianity.⁴⁴ Arguing from a different direction, Margaret Oliphant, writing anonymously in her guise as *Blackwood's* reviewer, devoted a long essay of 1858 to 'Religious Memoirs' of military men, specifically Marsh's *Memorials* and the recent *Biographical Sketch of Sir Henry Havelock* by Rev. W. Brock ('published with as much precipitation as a linendraper's circular, and certainly suggests an impulse not much different from that of the worthy shopkeeper'). For Oliphant, such volumes offer neither the distinctive individuality required of memoirs nor a distinctive picture of military life. While the extraordinary popularity of the *Memorials* (by then 150,000 'or some uncountable number') seems to imply a claim for lasting value, only the 'feeblest thread' of a story links together 'letters from which, as printed, it would be perfectly impossible to predicate who or what [Vicars] was'. These letters may be the 'true expression of a pious heart', and may therefore be objects of deepest reverence and a source of comfort for surviving family and friends, but in their sameness and prolixity, Oliphant argues, they do not lend themselves to profundity of thought or feeling in a more general reader. Oliphant even hazards the sacrilegious suggestion that she could have reproduced letters from many such religious memoirs and no one would have been able to tell them apart. The same conventionality discredits, for Oliphant, Marsh's chief claim for the *Memorials*: that they show that Christian practice is compatible with the life of a soldier. How, Oliphant asks, is this achieved by printing of scores of 'pious' letters in which the 'active duties of life' and the 'necessities of the profession' feature so scantily? The *Memorials* proved that Vicars was good, devout, fluent of pen, and assiduous in missionary work; but mainly it proved that he made large use of 'sentences which begin with "May we," or "Oh!" and end in a note of admiration'.⁴⁵

What Oliphant does not account for are the complex and flexible ways in which readers engaged with memorials such as Vicars's. Except

⁴⁴ *Soldiership and Christianity: Being a Review of the Memoirs of the Late Captain Hedley Vicars* (London: Ward, 1856), pp. 3–4. This was a view echoed by the Civil War diarist Mary Chesnut: 'Read Hedley Vicars. [...] I do not believe a genuine follower of Christ can be a soldier.' See *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. by C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 261 (December 1861).

⁴⁵ [Margaret Oliphant], 'Religious Memoirs', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1858, pp. 703–18 (pp. 709, 715–16).

for his slangy exhortation to his men before the final onslaught to get ‘up on your pins and at them’, she observes, the book offers ‘not one feature of personal identity’ that might differentiate this young hero for the discerning reader. ‘Those common words, touched with the humour of his class and time’ are the sole distinguishing mark of what might otherwise have been ‘a piece of mechanism adapted for writing letters’ (p. 715). Give or take a pronoun here or there, readers of such memoirs, she points out, would be unable to find out ‘which was the young soldier in the midst of his regiment, and which the humble Sunday school teacher dwelling at home’ (p. 705). Contemporary readers, as we have seen, found their own meaning, latching on to the typological resonances of ‘*This way!*’ rather than ‘up on your pins’. They found ways of reading for both the specific and the general, the manly and the feminine, the Christian and the soldier. That the soldier and the Sunday school teacher should appear interchangeable was the point.

Although, as we have seen, they fed on the sense of contingency, bewilderment, and urgency generated by the press, the *Memorials* circulated in a different textual economy — and a different print economy — from that dominated by authenticity, immediacy, and topicality. In this economy a Christian life and death trumped class, gender, and even national eminence. A canny biographer, attuned to the possibilities of the moment, could create a Crimean hero from the relics of piety and remembrance. Hedley Vicars’s death received a mere four-line announcement in *The Times*; his *Memorials* were popular for decades.⁴⁶ In the end of course Oliphant had history and literary fashion — what we might with hindsight call posterity — on her side. The last British edition of the *Memorials* was published in 1916, two years into the Great War, and two years before Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* pointed its accusing finger at nineteenth-century hero-worship, nineteenth-century Christian soldiers, and nineteenth-century biographical monuments.

⁴⁶ ‘Deaths’, *The Times*, 11 April 1855, p. 1.