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**Document:** *Review of "Shoulder-Straps: A Novel of the War" and part of an article or letter following Vicksburg*

**Transcription:**

The Press

Wednesday, August 12, 1863.

“Shoulder-Straps”—A Novel of the War.\*

This is the first attempt of any importance, to produce a novel out of the war, events connected with it, and characters involved in it. In the delineation of these characters, Mr. Morford has been successful, and he has been successful, also, in contrasting their lights and shades. The hero and heroine of the story are a certain Tom Leslie, who has travelled, studied, seen life, and wasted wealth, but, by energy and ability, has reached a respectable position on the New York press, and Josephine Harris, a very uncertain but charming hoyden, with a large heart and brusque manner, who fall in love with each other almost at first sight, but are not married when the story ends. The villain of the tale is one Col. Egbert Crawford, representing a class of men who abounded in New York at the beginning of the war, pretending to raise regiments, showing mock muster rolls, drawing rations for imaginary companies, and generally cheating, under the mask of loyalty and patriotism. This man is a murderer at heart, also, and when foiled in his evil purpose, finally plunges into the war in earnest, and finds a soldier's grave at Antietam. The author shows much judgement in leaving in him the virtue of valor, for, as Byron said, “None are *all* evil.” There are four or five distinct love-plots in this story: Leslie and “Joe” Harris; Harding and “Bell” Crawford; Frank Wallace and Emily Owen; Richard Crawford and his cousin Mary; Dexter Ralston and Marion Hobart. Seldom has any one volume contained more love scenes. There is mystery, too, as well as fortune-telling, and many incidents which read as if they had occurred. The *quasi* comic scenes are the weakest. Judge Owen, with his whole family, as well as his daughters' lovers, might have been advantageously omitted. On the other hand, the quiet humor of the visit of a couple of civilians to a “Camp Lyon,” near Brooklyn, showing the system and discipline of recruiting, even in last summer, shows that Mr. Morford can amuse his readers without running into farce.

The best incident in the work, full of earnestness and truth, is the run of Josephine Harris into a remote district of New York, and the adroitness with which she meets a bold bad man on the moment of her triumph and compels him to retreat.

On the whole, our impression of the book is favorable—especially as the author carries out, to the full, his exposure of men, wearing military insignia and bearing military rank, who, at a crisis when every arm is needed for the vindication of the national character and the maintenance of the National Union, are guilty of the dishonor of not joining their fellow-soldiers in actual war. These are the persons denounced in “Shoulder-straps”—say-at-home warriors who, as Mr. Morford says, would win “military re[cogni]tion and profit without

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[Reverse side of same clipping]

the heat of the sun and the want of water almost destroyed them; that they had never suffered so much, nor wished to endure the tortures they had then to undergo. This was upon their own soil, beneath their own guns, and they were born and bred here!

It is now over twenty days since Vicksburg surrendered, and Gen. Grant has been industriously at work endeavoring to reduce it to order and to clean it up. You can see the marks of sanitary hands, but withal it is a most forlorn and desolate-looking place. A friend remarked the other day, as we were picking our way along its streets that a man ought to be a goat to get along here. The streets are full of holes; pools of water have a dark-green scum on them; rubbish of all sorts strew the streets. At the intersection of each street leading from the wharf with the first street parallel to the river are breast works thrown up of heavy earthwork, no doubt to prevent sudden assault from the river.

The bluffs here appear to have been very high, and the streets cut and graded through them, leaving in many places the squares a high bank of earth, rising perpendicular from the street fifty to sixty feet high; and in one instance in particular, near the court house, there is a house away up there, with fence, an trees, and shrubbery— a precarious looking eyrie, especially during the siege, as the house appeared to be well riddled. On a level with the streets, into these sand squares are dug caves—caves of refuge—nicely shaped, lined with old tents, and some were carpeted; the doors arched in Gothic and other fanciful styles—even in their misery not forgetting their ideas of beauty. But all over the city you see marks of war—not so much in the immediate confusion of shell and shot as in the air of misery and desolateness, the broken-down look, and worst, in the maimed and sickly, the immense hospital arrangements. There is no doubt of its capability for defence. The rebel Government must have had their hands too full, or they were culpably negligent to their interests, by not having it properly provisioned and garrisoned, so that it could have been held until relieved. The theory of war is that a besieged place must fall in time unless relieved, but the force must be large and well sustained. Perhaps the dread of yellow fever, in despite of their boasted acclimation, may have operated more strongly on the rebels than any other reason, as it does not appear that the last dog or cat was reached. Certainly, the condition of the city when taken would favor such a supposition.

There is a very observable difference between the workmanship upon the rebel works and upon ours. Perhaps they are as strong, and answer the purpose, are placed with as great engineering skill, but they have not that neatness, that air of finish about them, which ours have.

But we long to return to that good old State of Kentucky, and be with and under the man with whom we started in our war upon the rebellion, and with whom all our glory and hopes and names are all associated. Death has made the only changes in our band. Our generals and officers are all the same with whom we started. There have been no transfers, as I can now recall, as there have been in other corps.

Yet, as we go, they drop out, one by one; it does not avail that we love one most, if it be his fate, Captain Alexander, a young, handsome, brave, and capable officer of the 9th New Hampshire, is among those we lost at Jackson—a man very much beloved for his fine qualities. While posting outposts on our extreme left, one night, the line was very crooked, and he wandered outside of one of his own posts, and on his return, was fired at by them, and shot through the hip. He lingered until brought to Milldale, where he died during the night. Informed of there being no



hope, he bore it bravely, as he lived, suffered the most extreme torture on the way here, enduring it with wonderful patience, Oh, when will the last blast be blown, and the gale sink to rest, that there be no more bleeding hearts, and the sickening fear of those at home be changed to assured strength by the safe return of those they lo[ve.]

[Transcribed by MTA, November 2020.]

**Scope and Content Note:**

*The first part of a review of "Shoulder-Straps: a Novel of New York and the Army, 1862." The novel was written by Henry Morford and published by T. B. Peterson & Brothers, Philadelphia in 1863. On the reverse is part of an article or letter written after Vicksburg surrendered. [The Press]. 1863.*

