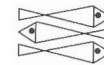




Wilky James recovering from wounds received in the attack on Fort Wagner, 1863. (Drawing by William James.)

THE METAPHYSICAL CLUB

LOUIS MENAND



FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

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PREFACE

IT IS A REMARKABLE FACT about the United States that it fought a civil war without undergoing a change in its form of government. The Constitution was not abandoned during the American Civil War; elections were not suspended; there was no coup d'état. The war was fought to preserve the system of government that had been established at the nation's founding—to prove, in fact, that the system was worth preserving, that the idea of democracy had not failed. This is the meaning of the Gettysburg Address and of the great fighting cry of the North: "Union." And the system was preserved; the union did survive. But in almost every other respect, the United States became a different country. The war alone did not make America modern, but the war marks the birth of modern America.

As a political and economic event, the transformation is not hard to see or difficult to explain. Secession allowed the North, for four years, to set the terms for national expansion without interference from the South, and the wartime Congress did not let the opportunity slip. That Congress was one of the most active in American history. It supported scientific training and research; it established the

