Winter History & Heritage -- #5 (January 23)

The following entries are based on our readings in *America, Volume 1* (William Bennett) and *The Christian Almanac* (George Grant & Gregory Wilbur):

Sartor Resartus -- (*Almanac*, Dec. 27)
Scotsman Thomas Carlyle (1795--1881) wrote acclaimed biographies and histories, but **this novel** (its Latin title means "The Tailor Retailored") may be his most inspired work? First published in the 1830s, it centers on the musings of Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, an eccentric German philosopher obsessed with the properties of clothes. On its deepest level, some critics say, the novel's about man's long history, the record of the fallen race, as it both conceals and reveals the presence and purposes of God.

Winslow Homer -- (*Almanac*, Dec. 20)
This gifted New Englander (1836--1910) earned acclaim for his idyllic portraits (pictures of farms, pastures, children at play), his tropical scenes in watercolor, and his grand settings of the sea including *Eight Bells*? He had little support from his family and no formal training, yet his talents did not go unnoticed by *Harper's Weekly*, a periodical to which he contributed illustrations by the 1850s . For *Harper's* he went to Virginia to cover the Civil War, the occasion for his first painting in oil, *Prisoners from the Front*.

Grigory Rasputin -- (*Almanac*, Dec. 29)
This Russian mystic (c. 1872--1916), having left his Siberian birthplace to become a "holy wanderer" in 1904, unwittingly played a role in the fall of the Romanov dynasty and the rise of the Russian Revolution? The spell he seemed to cast over Nicholas II & Alexandra stemmed in part from his ability to relieve the condition of their hemophiliac son, Alexis. But his scandalous lifestyle (his name means "the debauchee") and his boasts about his political influence gave the Czar's enemies much ammunition.

G.K. Chesterton -- (*Almanac*, Dec. 22)
"At over six feet and three hundred pounds, his romantically rumpled appearance--often enhanced with the flourish of a cape and a swordstick--made him appear nearly as enigmatic, anachronistic, and convivial as he actually was." So wrote author George Grant of **this English man of letters (1874--1936)**, who may be best known for his Father Brown detective series? His works (full of mind-boggling paradox) included essays, poems, polemics, novels, stories, biographies, literary reviews and the like.

"Persons Held to Service or Labor" -- (*America, Vol. 1*, pp. 121-123)
The U.S. Constitution uses **this subtle phrase** to refer to slaves, indicating how reticent the Framers were on the subject in what is called the "supreme law of the land"? Many of the Fathers were slaveholders themselves (having inherited their circumstances from their ancestors), and yet most had grave moral qualms about the "peculiar institution." In their day, nonetheless, they deemed it prudent to allow for slavery, all the while laying the groundwork, they believed, for its "ultimate extinction."

Three-fifths of a Person -- (*America, Vol. 1,* pp. 123-124)

Among the U.S. Constitution's compromises on slavery were various clauses, one requiring runaway slaves to be returned to their masters and another making Congress wait twenty years before it could abolish the African slave trade. The best known of the compromises, however, dealt with the census and representation in Congress. **This fractional formula** was to be used to count slaves, not because they were deemed less than human, but to hold back somewhat the political power of the Southern states?

Slavery, the Constitution, and Abe Lincoln -- (*America Vol.1*, pp. 124-125)

How could an antislavery man like Abe Lincoln (1809--1865), it is often asked, embrace the U.S. Constitution's compromises on, and allowance for, slavery?

To answer the query Bill Bennett cites professor Harry Jaffa, author of numerous scholarly books and an authority on Lincoln. For Jaffa, Lincoln wisely took the long view: our sixteenth president strongly favored whatever he thought was necessary or good for the Union. This included, above all, the Constitution (even with its slave compromises), the Constitution's provision for a stronger central government, and that government's subsequent efforts to advance industry, commerce, and national prosperity.

Moreover, what was good for the American Union, Lincoln believed, would also be good for the slaves (at least in the long run). The reason? America uniquely embodied the great proposition (truth claim) about human equality and natural rights enshrined in the Declaration and so memorably restated by Lincoln himself in his Gettysburg Address (1863). As long as we preserved and strengthened the Union, the Illinoisan thought, there was every reason to hope for an eventual and definitive end of slavery. To lose the Union, on the other hand, was to lose such hope.

This helps explain Lincoln's otherwise puzzling remark to New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley in 1862: "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that."

Thus Lincoln, the Constitution's slave compromises notwithstanding, was a Constitution-man because he was a Union-man, and a Union-man because, on his reading of it, the Union stood first and foremost for the equal rights of all.