

## Then and Now.

In the midst of all the "Pomp and Circumstance" surrounding the "ambulance" of the war of to-day, a picture is ever present with me, so far away and faint that it might be a dream, but so vivid its impression that I know for certain that it is a stern reality.

It is the memory of a gentle American lady, sitting in the twilight, many years ago, in a London house, telling me of the death of her eldest son. In talking, her thoughts turned to the sorrows of others, and then, quietly and simply, came the story of some years in her early womanhood. Her name now is Mrs. N—, and her home in Canada, but I do not know her maiden-name, nor can I recall the names of the places she mentioned, my mind being intently fixed upon the pictures she was creating, the story she was telling, for it is the story of the great American Civil War in the "Sixties."

The first picture is a summer Sunday morning in Virginia, the country bathed in light and rest. A young woman is walking sedately home from Divine Service, all unconscious that every step is bringing her nearer to one as divine. Before her a long vista of country road, in the distance a man looking anxiously around. He moves eagerly to meet her, and says:—"A battle was fought yesterday, we were defeated. I am a sergeant in charge of the wounded. I brought off fifteen men and got them as far as a barn near by; we have had no food; I could only pour some water on their wounds. Then I came on for help. You are the first person I have seen. Will you go and tell your neighbours to come with food and linen? Can I trust you to do this? If I can depend on you I can go back."

The girl ran quickly to her neighbours with the tidings, told them to bring bread, milk, wine, dressings, basins, and laden with what was at hand was the first to reach the barn—only to stumble out again, sick and faint. Then, pulling herself together, went in, opened the window, and set herself to her task. And what a task! It was August in America! the place was black with flies! the wounds were full of maggots!

Any Sisters, in our orderly hospitals at the present day, work hard enough. Can we realize what work meant under the conditions described? We cannot, indeed, nor can I relate the story as it was told to me, only again a picture comes before me. Mary N— kneeling for two hours by a poor fellow, his arm fixed above his head, while she extracted the torturing horrors from a terrible wound in the armpit, he imploring her not to leave one, and blessing her as she worked.

The first fifteen all recovered, and from that time till peace was established, Mary N— never left the wounded. Her people went off to a northern state, permitting her to remain behind. She accompanied the sergeant and his ambulance, making arrangements to receive the men as they were brought in. In one town near which a battle took place, houses, churches, buildings of all kinds were full to overflowing with these sad occupants, and fifty men were brought in. There was no place for them under cover but a dirty fish market-place in the slums. They begged Mary N— not to leave them there, and she gave them her word that they should be moved before night.

She went to a large dry goods store—a draper's shop—the owner had the goods packed away, the counters moved out, and the floor space ready for the cots, while she went to get an "order." But how to get it? The sergeant was not to be found, the house where the staff sat was besieged by hundreds on like errands, there was no possibility of getting in "because of the multitude."

Mary N— went to a house in a back street, asked to go through to the yard, climbed over intervening walls, and presented herself at the window of the room in which the officers sat. Needless to say, the last man was installed in his cot in the store before 12 o'clock that night!

Well, the war went on. Only, however, children and the aged and infirm were left in the homes. Food, even of the simplest, became scarce. Day by day, through the villages, companies of strong men went marching to the front; carts full of wounded came rumbling back to the towns. When their sound was heard, the people took out what they had—it might be only milk, or even water; if sitting at a meal, they rose, took the food they badly needed themselves, and carried it to the door. Then Mary N— fell on an odd expedient to get wine for the sick. We must remember that many of the combatants simply walked away from their homes without preparation. Well, "sashes" were wanted for officers. Mary N— rose to the occasion. She took a white silk shawl, dyed it red, cut it up and improvised sashes. Other women did likewise. Silks and ribbons were turned into "cockades" at half-a-dollar each, and so a little fund was kept going, and from this the sick were provided with wine.

Such is the simple story of the work of a brave woman, one amongst many who rose to the occasion at this crisis. Their names are even now, in many instances, forgotten on earth, but they are surely noted in heaven by the recording angel, and some day these heroic souls will receive their reward.

J. P. J.

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