

OUR WOMEN IN THE WAR.

Searching the List of Killed, Wounded and Missing--Practical Side of a Girl's Life During the War--Singing at the Spinning Wheel--Outrage and Plunder.

In 1885 the *Charleston News and Courier* offered several prizes for the best articles submitted by ladies on the subject of "Our Women in the War." The following article, which was composed by the late Miss Anna T. Simpson, a sister of Col. R. W. Simpson, of Peadleton, was awarded the second prize and published that year. Having secured a copy of the paper containing the article, we have decided to publish it, for we know it will interest all of our readers.

Editor: "Ere long is the approach of war, but with a lingering step and slow its form departs."

Perhaps there was no portion of the Southern States that suffered less, in some respects, than many of the quiet villages in the upper part of South Carolina during our late civil war, while numerous homes elsewhere were devastated by fire and sword. We were far removed from Sherman's fiery tactics. We felt nothing of the fearful jars that shook Virginia to her very centre by actual contact with contending armies, sometimes retreating, leaving the helpless women within the enemy's lines, then advancing and enfolded them, as it were, in the very heart of the Confederate army, and even then with only a temporary sense of safety. The only personal experience we had with either army was an occasional night's entertainment given to a few straggling horsemen, who claimed to belong to Gen. Morgan's cavalry or other commands, and once or twice, after Gen. Lee had surrendered, by a visit from a small squad of Yankee soldiers belonging to some of the numerous troops that roamed upon every highway and by-path through the land in pursuit of our ill-fated President and his party.

We knew comparatively little of the terrible privations, exposures, sacrifices and losses of our sisters by the seashore. We can never fully understand the experience of the Charleston women during the bombardment of their fair "City by the Sea." And a brilliant gleam of light, like an aurora borealis, in the direction of our beautiful capital was all that we know of Columbia's fearful visitation from Sherman's merciless raiders. But while far removed from all these horrors, we had our experiences, which were sad and gloomy enough. Our losses by death—the death of our best and best-loved—exceeded in proportion the losses in many sections in the South. We mourned over as many

OPEN GRAVES AND MISSING BOYS, and took back to our homes as many precious forms, bleeding and torn by bullet and shell, after "the cruel war was over"—in some cases only to die in our arms—as any other portions of "Dixie Land." Beside this we bore our full share of burdens and privations in many other ways; and the story of our experience, even if it does not compare in thrilling adventure with some others, is nevertheless a part of the history of those eventful years. That excitement of action, under the necessity of movement, which supported many women driven ruthlessly from their homes, and enabled them to meet bravely each fiery ordeal as it came, was not at any time a part of our experience. Still we knew not what day or hour might bring the dreaded evil; and all too soon we learned the lesson that suspense is as potent a factor in the sum of human misery as the worst realizations. Then, remote as we were from the scenes of strife, when a battle had been fought and news of the slaughter was flashing over the electric wires, we could only stand still and wait—one, two, three, and sometimes ten days—enduring cruel torture: wild with anxiety, and yet afraid to hear, lest that fearful list of "dead and wounded" might contain the name of our dearest and best loved—perhaps a father, a lover, or the dear brother with whom we had sported through all our happy days of childhood.

Every battle brought its list of dead and dying to our village, when at last, its fatal results were known, and one by one, each home within its borders, was desolated. Ill news came heralded by signals well understood. Loud, prolonged and piercing screams (I might call them) from the "iron horse," which broke the stillness of the night, as it came rushing in with

ITS BLOODY FREIGHT of dead. Each quivering heart stood still—waiting for the aged father, with slow dragging steps, to return from where the news was read with messages which gave relief to some and confirmed the bitterest and most dreaded fears of others. Sympathetic hearts could only gather round the stricken household.

But what words of solace could be spoken to that poor mother as she

stood amid her weeping daughters with loud, wailing cries for her lost son, her "Benjamin," her baby boy, whose place none other of her numerous family could ever fill? The message next, perhaps, was carried to an aged widow, as she sat with dreamy brow beside her lonely hearth, thinking of her gallant soldier boy—in fancy, sees him rear aloft the drooping banner, snatched from a fallen comrade's hand, and hears him as with bated breath and flashing eyes he cries: "Come on! Come on! They fly! they fly!" She follows, she sees him halt; with victory crowned turn back, just as the kindly friends and pastor, with tearful eyes and solemn face, come in. She reads it all before they speak. With pallid cheek and glaring eyes she stretches forth her withered hands and shrieks: "O, God! O, God, they have not slain my boy!" Alas! proud, doting mother. It is even so. Your only joy and pride—the hope of your old age—is gone. The intrepid, dashing youth, his colonel said, "was to have been promoted for his brave and gallant bearing on that self-same mountain side." Alas! "the paths of glory lead but to the grave."

A YOUNG WIFE'S PITEOUS GRIEF. While still the recollection of this widow's piteous moans are saddening all our hearts, the "bugle blast to battle calls again," again long days of torturing suspense pass slowly by. Then comes the messenger! This time for yonder young and beautiful wife. Friends already crushed with bleeding hearts come in to comfort her. "No, no!" the loud, heart-searching scream replies, "my loss is greater than all, for see these little ones." She points to children mute, who tremble to behold their mother's grief, more appalled and dazed by her loud, frantic tones and gestures, as she clasps the ruddy-waked newborn babe to her wild throbbing breast, than by a proper understanding of their great loss, and her's so plainly told in the cold rigid limbs extended there with blood still oozing from the ghastly wounds.

While the realization of such calamitous sorrow was daily experienced by many Southern women, others languished and pined through long-drawn and torturous days of unending suspense, after seeing on the dreaded "list" the one word "missing" opposite the name dearest of all to loving mothers and sisters. At first, still full of hope, they listened eagerly for a message or a word of cheer from the comrades who stood next to him in the ranks.

One wrote: "I am sure he lives. I saw him shot, but I cannot think his wound was mortal. Don't give up, we will hear from him yet in the enemy's hospital—perhaps in prison."

Another comrade wrote: "I dare not raise false hopes; I think he must be dead. I saw him reel and fall and throw his hand up to his side just as he fell, and after that was seen by some one crawling off behind a tree. Had not our dear fallen in the enemy's hands we might have found his body."

Another wounded soldier soon after that came home and told just how he saw him lying near a fence, but could not tell if he were dead, because his hat was on his face. And so conflicting tidings multiplied, while the sorrowing mother and sisters struggled on—one day hoping against hope, the next in a very abandonment of despair, willing, anxious to hear anything, the very worst positively, rather than live on with this undying monster of suspense forever coiled about their aching hearts. Then again there were others assured of their loss, denied the poor privilege of seeing or burying their dead, knowing only that they filled honored graves heaped up by loving hands in the far off

BLOOD STAINED BOSOM OF VIRGINIA.

Others only knew their dear were left in the enemy's hands, and the tale of how and where they were laid was never to be told. Not even was a wretched widowed mother, known to us all, who had given up her only wealth, six sturdy husbandmen, to the cause we loved so well, permitted the small comfort of bringing back to rest in the old churchyard a single one of her five dead sons, who one by one had been slain on yonder dismal fields. These were some of the ordeals that tried our souls. The unseen gnawings of deep burning suspense through these long months of hopes and fears. The slaughter which brought

"One weep upon another's heels, So fast they followed."

Oh! those harrowing days and scenes. Human hearts must undergo such trials to appreciate them. Imagination cannot portray the living truth. 'Tis like a portrait taken after death; the breathing, palpitating anguish of

the moment is beyond the power of human pen. Let us pass them by. Let us rather recall the lesser trials of the times and tell the girls of to-day how we girls of the war managed to meet our wants at home, and how our mothers taught us to provide for the comforts of our "boys in gray," whom all alike, white-haired sires, doting mothers and loving wives, and sisters, had hurried to the front ranks. Vainly! ah, so vainly dreaming of their early return crowned with victory and freedom.

HOW THE GIRLS KEPT UP APPEARANCES.

When our ports were first blockaded, and we found ourselves cut off from all resources, it seemed like pastime to exercise our ingenuity in devising suitable articles of wear for the girls in the family. As I look back now it seems strange that wardrobes should have been so speedily exhausted. I think the only solution of the mystery, however, will be found in the fact that girls in their teens will grow, and almost before the full import of blockaded ports was realized, girls' dresses were growing so unfashionably short as to create no small concern about the wherewithal to renew them. At first old trunks and bureau drawers, top shelves in out-of-the-way closets were ransacked, and antiquated garments, long since cast aside as worthless, or laid away as relics of our mothers' and grandmothers' younger days, were brought to light.

Yes, even the treasured articles were unearthed, which in our childhood we had only been permitted to see and not handle as we stood tiptoe with eager eyes and curiosity peering into the depths of a drawer beside our mother's knee and watched her as she laid them back with a sigh and said, "These were my poor mother's." Each feeling of regret was hushed and swallowed up in the necessity of the hour as they were lifted from their various hiding places, and then with right good will and perseverance ripped up, sponged and pressed, turned inside out, upside down, and twisted and stretched and pieced, and finally converted into most respectable articles of apparel. None of your "shabby genteel" affairs either, for we would have the girls of the day understand from the outset that, sorely pressed as we then were, we felt quite as much appreciation of the neat and tidy girl as they who now have every material to supply their needs and money wherewith to buy it.

MAKING CLOTHES FOR THE SOLDIERS.

Money was almost as unavailable as material with us for a time. "Uncle Sam's" treasury was not accessible to "Rebels." Our government was young, and Confederate bonds and money yet in their infancy. We could do nothing more than await developments, and try to meet emergencies as they trooped up before us. In the meantime, children grew apace. Our village stores were emptied and deserted. Our armies in the field became grand realities. All resources were cut off. Our government could poorly provide food and clothing and ammunition for its armies. Then it was our mothers' wit was tested, and did in no sort disappoint our expectations. Spinning wheels, looms and dye pots were soon brought into requisition. Wool of home production was speedily converted, by loving hands, into warm flannels and heavy garments, with soft scarfs and snugly-fitted leggings, to shield our dear boys from Virginia's wintry blasts and fast-falling snows. Later on, when the wants and privations of the army grew more pressing, societies were formed to provide supplies for the general demand. Southern homes withheld nothing that could add to the soldiers' comfort. Every available fragment of material was converted into some kind of garment. After the stores of blankets in each home had been cheerfully given, carpets were utilized in their stead, and partitioned out to the suffering soldiers. Wool mattresses were ripped open, recarded and woven into coverings and clothing. Bits of new woolen fabrics, left from former garments, were unravelled, carded, mixed with cotton and spun and knitted into socks. Old and worn garments were carried through the same process. Even rabbits' fur was mixed with cotton or silk, and appeared again in the form of neat and comfortable gloves. Begging committees went forth (and be it truthfully said, the writer never knew of a single one being turned away empty,) to gather up the offerings from mansion and hamlet, which were soon cut out, made up, packed and forwarded with all possible speed to the soldiers.

SINGING AS THEY SPUN.

And who can tell what pleasure we took in filling boxes with substantials and such dainties as we could secure for the hospitals. Old men and little boys were occupied in winding thread and holding brooches, and even knitting on the socks when the mystery of "turning the heel" had been passed. The little spinning wheel turned by a treadle, became a fascination to the girls, and with its busy hum was mingled oft-times merry strain of patriotic song. Listen and you'll catch the words as with flashing eyes and cheeks aglow she sings:

"Our wagon's plenty big enough, The running gear is good, 'Tis stuffed with cotton round the sides and mado of Southern wood; Carolina is the driver, with Georgia by her side, Virginia'll hold the flap up and we'll all take a ride."

Or, perhaps, this couplet from "Carolina Forever," the Palmetto girl's favorite war refrain:

"She has sworn she will never submit to oppression, And her sons are willing to die for Seccession."

Alas! that her song should so soon have been changed to the plaintive air of

"Let me kiss him for his mother."

THE INGENUITY OF SOUTHERN WOMEN.

During all that time, when every woman vied with the other in working for the soldiers, there were needs at home too urgent to be disregarded. These, too, had to be met, and how, was not long the question. For those very women who had been reared in ease and affluence soon learned practically that "necessity is the mother of invention," and the story of their ingenuity, if all told, might surprise their Northern sisters, who always regarded them as inefficient, pleasure-loving members of society. Whatever may have been the fault of their institutions and rearing, the war certainly brought out the true woman, and no woman of any age or nation ever entered, heart and soul, more enthusiastically into their country's contest than those who now mourn the "Lost Cause." While our armies were victorious in the field hope lured us on. We bore our share of privations cheerfully and gladly.

We replaced our worn dresses with homespun, planning and devising checks and plaids, and intermingling colors with the skill of professional "designers." The samples we interchanged were homespuns of our last weaving, not A. T. Stewart's or John Wannamaker's sample envelopes, with their elaborate display of rich and costly fabrics. Our mothers' silk stockings, of ante-bellum date, were unravelled with patience and transformed into the prettiest of neat-fitting gloves. The writer remembers never to have been more pleased than she was by the possession of a trim pair of boots made of the tanned skins of some half dozen squirrels. They were so much softer and finer than the ordinary heavy calfskin affairs to be bought at the village "shoe shop," that no Northern maiden was ever more pleased with her ten-dollar boots. Our hats, made of palmetto and rye straw, were becoming and pretty without lace, tips or flowers. Our jackets were made of the fathers' old-fashioned cloaks, in vogue some forty years ago—those of that style represented in the pictures of Mr. Calhoun doing splendid service by supplying all the girls in the family with one. We even made palmetto jewelry of exquisite designs, intermingled with hair, that we might keep even with the boys who wore "palmetto cockades." The flowers that we wore were Nature's own beautiful, fragrant blossoms, sometimes, when in patriotic mood, nestled with symbolic cotton bolls. For our calico dresses, if ever so fortunate as to find one, we sometimes paid a hundred dollars, and for the spool of cotton that made it from ten to twenty dollars. The buttons we used were oftentimes cut from a gourd into sizes required and covered with cloth, they having the advantage of pasteboard because they were rounded. On children's clothes persimmon seed in their natural state, with two holes drilled through them, were found both neat and durable. In short, we fashioned all our garments after true Confederate style, without the aid of Madam Demorest's guide book, or Worth's Parisian models, and suffered from none of "Miss Flora McFlimsey's" harassing dilemmas.

WHAT THEY ATE AND DRANK.

The things we ate and drank came in too for a prominent position. Our first duty, after the blockade cut off all supplies, was to store away what groceries and luxuries were left in as safe places as possible for sickness and in view of the return of wounded soldiers. So, then, our coffee was made of rye, wheat and sweet potatoes chipped, dried and parched; also oak seed and other substitutes too numerous to mention. It was sweetened, if at all, with sorghum or honey. For tea the leaves of blackberry vines were gathered and dried with as much care as a Chinaman manipulates his "Young Hyson" and "Oolong." "Dixie cookeries,"ounding in recipes for molasses jakes and puddings, were quite the fashion. Our fruit cakes were made of dried apples, cherries, pears and plums, and without any spice at all. For medicines we used roots and herbs, glad to make use of the red man's medicinal skill. Salt, white and pure, was obtained by digging up the earthen floors of long used smoke-houses, dripping water through it in hoppers and boiling it down. When the long winter evenings closed in the lights we used were simple curiosities. We had no gatherings then round brilliant lamps with dainty embroideries and fancy crochets in gay worsteds and silk. Our constant work was knit-

ting coarse socks for the soldiers. Full directions for the length and breadth thereof being printed for the benefit of the inexperienced. Our best lights were tallow candles, but these were too scarce to be used except on special occasions. The ordinary lights were knots of pine, supported on iron racks at the back of the chimney to let the smoke fly upwards. Another odd light, known as a wax taper, was made by winding thirty yards of wick, previously dipped in melted wax, round an old candlestick. Imagine, if you can, its unsightly proportions.

A favorite night's employment was found in making envelopes, for we wrote letters then as well as you do now, girls. No bits of white paper, suitable for writing with pen and ink, could be wasted in envelopes; these had to take the place inside and bear our messages of love and cheer to the boys, who appreciate them quite as much as your lovers of to-day. Thus it happened that wall papering and sheets with pictures on one side, taken from old books of "United States explorations," served to make envelopes neat enough, as far as outside appearances went, to please the most fastidious. These we stuck together with gum from peach trees. Ink was manufactured from oak balls and green persimmons with rusty nails instead of coppers to deepen the color. The noisy goose supplied our pens. With these materials were sent as loving missives and, we fancy, as warmly welcome as those now penned with gold on dainty, gilt-edged sheets of dazzling whiteness.

ALONE WITH THE SLAVES.

In addition to these light privations, wives and mothers were burdened, as they had never been before, by the direction and oversight of the numerous slaves, on whom alone they depended for the homely supplies necessary to the maintenance of the whites as well as blacks. And he it said to their eternal credit, no race was ever more submissive and helpful than they during those four years of bloody strife. And had not their ignorance been abused and tampered with by designing scoundrels and carpet-baggers they might have been so still, and though freed, lived on till now in peace and harmony with their former masters. They even took a pride in feeling themselves the only protectors of the mistress at home, deprived of her natural support and guidance from the stronger sex, all of whom had volunteered in our country's cause. And yet again, there were thousands of men in the army upon whose daily labor their families depended for bread. Deprived of this and widowed and orphaned, as they rapidly were by the deadly battles which followed in quick succession, they were left suffering and starving, thrown almost entirely upon the mercy of these wives and mothers, who bravely met this additional demand upon their charity.

But why need I write further? The list of things we wore, and ate, and did, and the list of things we thought, and felt, and dreamed, might be written of forever and then leave much of the truth untold. Yet, for all that, barring suspense, we were content with just such comforts as we had. A sprig of the "herb called content" can make the poorest soup taste as rich as the lord-mayor's turtle, and our sacrifices seemed as trivial nothings in comparison with the hardships, privations and dying agonies of our suffering and impoverished boys "along the Potomac," "where the light of the camp-fires gleamed," and from whence no word of murmur ever came. Yes, our "own boys," for where was ever such an army known

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What Makes the Home?

Not the house, however fine it may be; not its furniture, pictures and appointments. The wife and mother makes the home, and to speak of going home means to go back into the shelter of the mother's love and care.

And when womanly hills sap the mother's strength, the home-life suffers. The food is not cooked as she cooked it.

Everywhere the lack of wifely supervision and motherly thoughtfulness is apparent. What a change, then, when this wife and mother comes back to take her old place in the family. Thousands of women who, because of womanly hills, and been shut out of home life and home happiness, have been enabled to once more take their place in the family after being cured by Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. It establishes regularly, dries weakening drains, heals inflammation and ulceration and cures female weakness. It makes weak women strong, sick women well.

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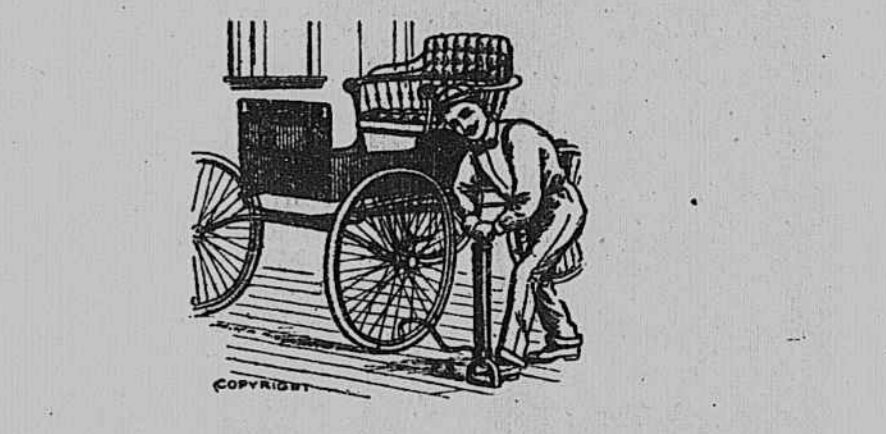


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