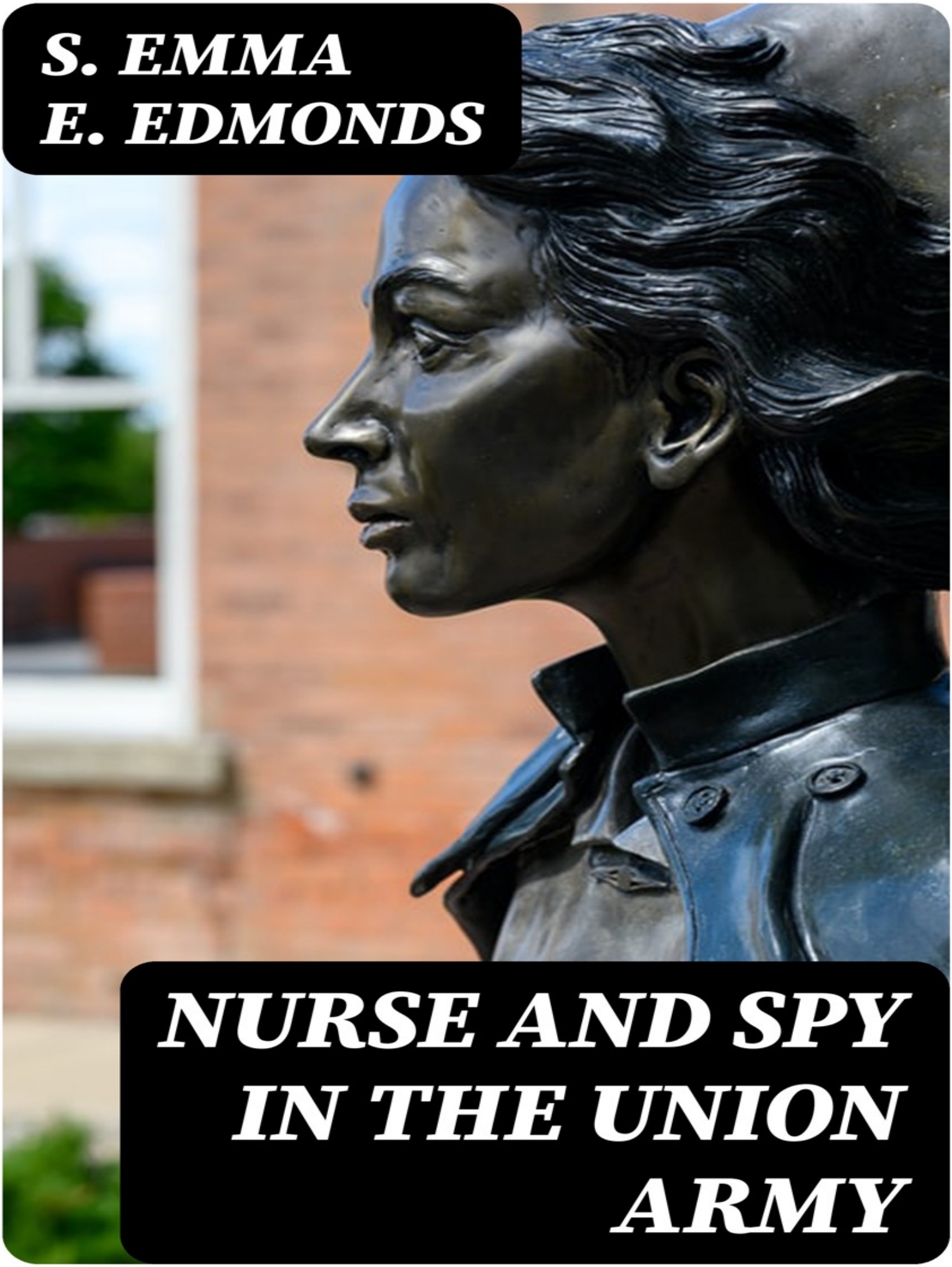

S. EMMA E. EDMONDS

NURSE AND SPY IN THE UNION ARMY

S. Emma E. Edmonds

Nurse and Spy in the Union Army

The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields

EAN 8596547171638

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

COMMENCEMENT OF THE WAR—MY HOME AND MY DUTY—I ENLIST IN THE CAUSE—EXCITEMENT AT THE WEST—TROOPS ON THE MARCH—MOBS AT BALTIMORE—TEMPORARY HOSPITALS—UNAVOIDABLE EVILS—BEGGING FOR COMFORTS—SUPPLIES FOR THE SICK—CAMP HOSPITALS—THUNDERS STORMS IN CAMP—A DYING OFFICER—SOLDIERS IN THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS—PREPARATIONS FOR THE ADVANCE.

Early in the spring of 1861, I was returning from the far West, and as I sat waiting for the train which was to bear me to my adopted home in New England, and was meditating upon the events which had transpired during the past few months, the record of which was destined to blacken the fair pages of American history, I was aroused from my reverie by a voice in the street crying “New York Herald—Fall of Fort Sumter—President’s Proclamation—Call for seventy-five thousand men!” This announcement startled me, while my imagination portrayed the coming struggle in all its fearful magnitude. War, civil war, with all its horrors seemed inevitable, and even then was ready to burst like a volcano upon the most happy and prosperous nation the sun ever shone upon. The contemplation of this sad picture filled my eyes with tears and my heart with sorrow.

It is true, I was not an American—I was not obliged to remain here during this terrible strife—I could return to my native land where my parents would welcome me to the home of my childhood, and my brothers and sisters would

rejoice at my coming. But these were not the thoughts which occupied my mind. It was not my intention, or desire, to seek my own personal ease and comfort while so much sorrow and distress filled the land. But the great question to be decided, was, what can I do? What part am I to act in this great drama? I was not able to decide for myself—so I carried this question to the Throne of Grace, and found a satisfactory answer there.

Five years previous to the time of which I write, I left my rural home, not far from the banks of the St. John's River, in the Province of New Brunswick, and made my way to the United States. An insatiable thirst for education led me to do this, for I believed then, as now, that the "Foreign Missionary" field was the one in which I must labor, sooner or later. I came here a stranger, with but little to recommend me to the favorable notice of the good people, except a letter from the Pastor of the church to which I belonged, and one from my class-leader—notwithstanding, I found kind friends to help me in all my undertakings, and whether in business, education, or spiritual advancement, I have been assisted beyond my highest expectation. I thank God that I am permitted in this hour of my adopted country's need to express a tithe of the gratitude which I feel toward the people of the Northern States.

Ten days after the President's proclamation was issued, I was ready to start for Washington, having been employed by the Government, and furnished with all the necessary equipments. I was not merely to go to Washington and remain there until a battle had been fought and the wounded brought in, and then in some comfortable hospital

sit quietly and fan the patients, after the Surgeon had dressed their wounds; but I was to go to the front and participate in all the excitement of the battle scenes, or in other words, be a "FIELD NURSE."

The great West was stirred to its center, and began to look like a vast military camp. Recruiting offices were filled with men eager to enroll their names as defenders of their country—and women were busily engaged in preparing all the comforts that love and patriotism could suggest, for those who were so soon to go forth to victory or to death, while the clash of arms and strains of martial music almost drowned the hum of industry, and war became the theme of every tongue.

About this time I witnessed the departure of the first western troops which started for Washington. The regiments were drawn up in line—fully equipped for their journey—with their bright bayonets flashing in the morning sunlight. It was on the principal street of a pleasant little village of about a thousand inhabitants, where there was scarcely a family who had not a father, husband, son, or brother in that little band of soldiers who stood there ready to bid them farewell, perhaps for years—perhaps forever. A farewell address was delivered by the village Pastor, and a new Testament presented to each soldier, with the following inscription: "Put your trust in God—and keep your powder dry." Then came the leave-taking—but it is too painful to dwell upon—the last fond word was spoken, the last embrace given, then came the order "march"—and amid the cheers of the citizens—with banners proudly floating, and the bands playing "The Star Spangled Banner," they moved forward on

their way to the Capital. On looking back now upon the scenes of that morning, notwithstanding I have looked upon others much more thrilling since then, yet I cannot recall that hour without feelings of deep emotion. While I stood there and beheld those manly forms convulsed with emotion, and heard the sobs of those whom they were leaving behind, I could only thank God that I was free and could go forward and work, and was not obliged to stay at home and weep. A few hours more, and I, too, was on my way to Washington.

When I reached Baltimore I found the city in an uproar—mobs were gathered in the streets and the utmost excitement prevailed: and as the crowded cars moved through the city toward the depot, the infuriated mob threw showers of stones, brickbats, and other missiles, breaking the windows and wounding some of the soldiers. Some of the men could not forbear firing into the crowd—notwithstanding their orders were to the contrary—however, it had a good effect, for the mob soon dispersed; they probably had not forgotten the Sixth Massachusetts and the Pennsylvania troops which had passed through a short time before. The cars soon reached the depot, and started immediately for Washington—where we arrived in due time—weary, and in great need of food and sleep.

Soon after reaching Washington I commenced visiting the temporary hospitals which were prepared to receive the soldiers who arrived there sick. The troops came pouring in so fast, and the weather being extremely warm, all the general hospitals were soon filled, and it seemed impossible

to prepare suitable, or comfortable, accommodations for all who required medical attention.

There are many things in connection with this war that we are disposed to find fault with, and we think the blame rests upon such and such individuals—but after investigating the matter, we find that they are all owing to a combination of circumstances entirely beyond the control of those individuals—and it requires time to bring about the desired results. This has been my experience with regard to the hospital department. After walking through the streets for hours on a sultry southern day in search of one of those temporary hospitals, I would find a number of men there delirious with fever—others had been sun-struck and carried there—but no physician to be found in attendance. Then, I would naturally come to the conclusion that the surgeons were all slack concerning their duty—but upon going to the office of the Surgeon in charge of that department, would find that a certain number of surgeons were detailed every morning to visit those hospitals, and were faithfully performing their duty; but that the number of hospitals and patients were increasing so fast that it required all day to make the tour. Consequently the last ones visited were obliged to wait and suffer—without any blame attaching to the surgeons.

Then another great evil was to be remedied—there were thousands of sick men to be taken care of—but for these the Government had made no provision as regards more delicate kinds of food—nothing but hard bread, coffee and pork, for sick and well, alike. The Sanitary Commission had not yet come into operation and the consequence was our

poor sick soldiers suffered unspeakably from want of proper nourishment. I was speaking upon this subject one day to Chaplain B. and his wife—my constant companions in hospital labor—when Mrs. B. suggested that she and I should appeal to the sympathies of the ladies of Washington and Georgetown, and try our hand at begging. I agreed to the proposal at once, and wondered why I had not thought of it myself—among all my schemes for alleviating the sufferings of these men, it had never entered into my head to *beg* for them. We decided to go to Georgetown first and if we succeeded there, to canvass Washington. So we started, and commenced operations by calling first upon a clergyman's wife. We made inquiry there with regard to our prospects of success, and the sentiments of the ladies generally upon the war question, and finding that the majority were in our favor, we started again quite hopefully —but not until the lady above mentioned had given us an order on her grocer to the amount of five dollars. I gave Sister B. the credit of that, for I had introduced her as the wife of the Rev. Mr. B., chaplain of the 7th. Then I suggested that we should separate for a few hours—she to take one street and I another, so that we might sooner get through the city. My next call was at a doctor's mansion, but I did not find the lady at home; however, I learned that the doctor in question kept a drug-store near by; she might be there; went, but found no lady; thought fit to make my business known to the doctor, and the consequence was, half a dozen bottles of blackberry wine and two of lemon syrup, with a cordial invitation to call again. So prospered our mission throughout the day, and at the close of it we had a

sufficient supply of groceries, brandy, ice, jellies, etc., to fill our little ambulance; and oh, what a change those little delicacies wrought upon our poor sick boys. We were encouraged by that day's work, to continue our efforts in that direction, and finally made Dr. W.'s store a depot for the donations of those kind friends who wished to assist us in restoring to health the defenders of our beloved country.

Typhoid fever began to make its appearance in camp, as the burning sun of June came pouring down upon us, and the hospitals were soon crowded with its victims. It was then that my labors began in earnest, and as I went from tent to tent, ministering to the wants of those delirious, helpless men, I wondered if there ever was a "Missionary Field" which promised a richer harvest, than the one in which I was already engaged; and oh, how thankful I was that it was my privilege to take some small part in so great a work.

I shall notice, briefly, the manner in which the hospitals are conducted in camp. There are large tents furnished for hospital purposes, which will accommodate from twenty to twenty-five men. These tents are usually put up in the most pleasant and shady part of the camp; the inside is nicely leveled, and board floors laid, if boards can be procured, if not, rubber blankets are laid down instead. Sometimes there are straw ticks and cot bedsteads furnished, but not in sufficient quantity to supply all the hospitals. Along each side of the tent the sick are laid, on blankets or cots, leaving room to pass between the beds. In the center of the tent stands a temporary board table, on which are kept books, medicines, et cetera. The hospital corps consists of a surgeon, an assistant surgeon, a hospital steward, a ward-

master, four nurses, two cooks, and a man of all work to carry water, cut wood, and make himself generally useful. The immediate care of the sick devolves upon those four nurses, who are generally detailed from the ranks, each one being on duty six hours without intermission. The surgeons visit the patients twice every day, oftener if required; the prescriptions are filled by the hospital steward, and the medicine is administered by the nurses. The nurses are usually very kind to the sick, and when off duty in the hospital, spend much of their time in digging drains around the tents, planting evergreens, and putting up awnings, all of which add much to the coolness and comfort of the hospital. Draining the grounds is a very important part of hospital duty, for when those terrible thunder-storms come, which are so frequent in the south, it is morally impossible to keep the tent floors from being flooded, unless there are drains all around the tents. Great excitement prevails in camp during those tempests—the rain comes down in torrents, while the wind blows a hurricane—lifting the tents from the ground, and throwing everything into wild confusion. I have seen a dozen men stand for hours around one hospital, holding down the ropes and tent poles to prevent the sick from being exposed to the raging elements.

In one of those storms, I saw a tent blown down, in which one of our officers lay suffering from typhoid fever. We did our best to keep him dry until a stretcher could be procured, but all in vain. Notwithstanding we wrapped him in rubber blankets and shawls, yet the rain penetrated them all, and by the time he was carried to a house, a quarter of a mile distant, he was completely drenched. He was a noble fellow

and I love to speak of him. Mrs. B. and I remained with him alternately until he died, which was five days from that time. We sent for his wife, who arrived just in time to see him die. He was unconscious when she came, and we were standing around his cot watching every shadow which the sable wing of advancing death cast upon his features, and eagerly looking for a single ray of returning reason. He looked up suddenly, and seeing his wife standing weeping, he beckoned her to come to him. Kneeling beside him, she bent her ear close to the lips of the dying man. He whispered distinctly, “I am going—the way is bright, don’t weep—farewell!” A little later he was asked, “What is the foundation of your hope of Heaven?” His face was calm and beautiful in its expression, and his splendid dark eyes lit up with holy confidence and trust, as he replied, “Christ—Christ!” These were his last words. Glorious words for a dying soldier. He lingered a few hours, and then quietly and peacefully breathed out his life. So passed away one of the most exemplary men it has ever been my lot to meet, either in the army or elsewhere. The same day, the sorrowing widow, with the remains of her beloved and noble husband, started for her northern home; and that christian patriot now sleeps in a beautiful little cemetery near the city of Detroit, Michigan, having rendered up his life a willing sacrifice for his country.

Mrs. B. was desirous of visiting some of the public buildings in Washington and wished me to accompany her. I did so, but found that it was almost impossible to get along through the crowded streets. The gallant troops were coming in by thousands from every loyal State in the Union.

The Capitol and White House were common places of resort for soldiers. Arms were stacked in the rotunda of the one and the lobbies of the other, while our “noble boys in blue” lounged in the cushioned seats of members of Congress, or reclined in easy chairs in the President’s Mansion.

Camps of instruction were prepared near the city, while every hillside and valley for miles around was thickly dotted with snow white tents. Soldiers drilling, fatigue parties building forts, artillery practicing, and the supply trains moving to and from the various headquarters, presented a picture deeply interesting. As I rode from camp to camp and contemplated that immense army concentrating its force on the banks of the Potomac, and saw with what zeal and enthusiasm the soldiers entered upon their duties, I could but feel assured of the speedy termination of the conflict, and look forward with eager anticipation to the day when that mighty host would advance upon the enemy, and like an overwhelming torrent sweep rebellion from the land.

CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

MARCHING ORDERS—REMOVAL OF THE SICK—A YOUNG PATIENT—VISIT FROM HIS MOTHER—MARCH TOWARD MANASSAS—COLLECTING SUPPLIES—FATIGUES OF THE MARCH—PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE—A CAMP PRAYER MEETING—DIVISIONS DETAILED—MY PLACE ON THE FIELD—“RATHER CLOSE QUARTERS”—A BATTLE SUNDAY—SKULKING FROM THE FIELD.

Marching orders received to-day—two days more, and the Army of the Potomac will be on its way to Bull Run. I find this registered in my journal July 15th, 1861, without any comment whatever. But I do not require a journal to refresh my memory with regard to the events of those two days of preparation which followed their announcement. The Army of the Potomac was soon to meet the enemy for the first time—a great battle was to be fought. Oh, what excitement and enthusiasm that order produced—nothing could be heard but the wild cheering of the men, as regiment after regiment received their orders. The possibility of a defeat never seemed to enter the mind of any. All the sick in camp now were to be sent to Washington, clothes changed, knapsacks packed, letters written home, packages sent to the express office, etc. After all was done, everything in readiness, and the sick men tenderly laid in the ambulances, Mrs. B. said: “Now let us go to every ambulance and bid the boys good-bye.” As we passed along from one ambulance to another, speaking words of encouragement to each soldier, many a tear would start from grateful eyes, and many a feeble voice uttered an earnest “God bless you,” while others would draw from their bosoms some cherished relic, and give as a token of

remembrance. Oh how hard it was to part with those men, with whom we had watched so many weary days and nights —we felt that they had, truly, “become endeared to us through suffering.”

There was one patient, however, we did not put into an ambulance, and who was a great source of anxiety to us. He lay there upon a stretcher close by, waiting to be carried to a house not far distant. He was young, not seventeen, with clear blue eyes, curly auburn hair, and a broad, white brow; his mother’s pride, and an only son. Two weeks previously he had been attacked with typhoid fever. The surgeon said, “You may do all you can for him, but it is a hopeless case.” Mrs. B. had devoted most of her time to him and I was often called to assist her. He was delirious and became quite unmanageable at times, and it required all the strength we possessed to keep him in bed; but now the delirium of fever had passed away and he was helpless as an infant. We had written for his mother to come if possible, and had just received a letter from her, stating that she was on her way to Washington; but would she come before we were obliged to leave? Oh, we hoped so, and were anxiously looking for her.

The ambulances started with their freight of emaciated, suffering men. Slowly that long train wound its way toward the city looking like a great funeral procession, and sadly we turned to our remaining patient, who was deeply affected at the removal of his comrades. He was then carried to the house above mentioned and a nurse left to take care of him, while we were obliged to prepare for our own comfort on the long weary march which was so near at hand. We had just

commenced to pack our saddle-bags, when we heard an unusual noise, as of some one crying piteously, and going out to learn the cause of the excitement, whom should we find but the mother of our handsome blue-eyed patient. She had called at the surgeon’s tent to inquire for her son, and he had told her that all the sick had been sent to Washington, he having forgotten for the moment, the exception with regard to her son. The first words I heard were spoken in the most touching manner—“Oh, why did you send away my boy? I wrote you I was coming; Oh, why did you send him away!”

I shall never forget the expression of that mother’s face as she stood there wringing her hands and repeating the question. We very soon rectified the mistake which the surgeon had made, and in a few moments she was kneeling by the bedside of her darling boy, and we returned rejoicing that it had been our privilege to “deliver him to his mother.” Oh, how many, who come to Washington in search of loved ones, are caused unnecessary pain, yes, weeks of torturing suspense and fruitless search, in consequence of some little mistake on the part of a surgeon, a nurse, or some person who is supposed to know just where the sought for are to be found.

The 17th of July dawned bright and clear, and everything being in readiness, the Army of the Potomac took up its line of march for Manassas. In gay spirits the army moved forward, the air resounding with the music of the regimental bands, and patriotic songs of the soldiers. No gloomy forebodings seemed to damp the spirits of the men, for a moment, but “On to Richmond,” was echoed and re-echoed,

as that vast army moved rapidly over the country. I felt strangely out of harmony with the wild, joyous spirit which pervaded the troops. As I rode slowly along, watching those long lines of bayonets as they gleamed and flashed in the sunlight, I thought that many, very many, of those enthusiastic men who appeared so eager to meet the enemy, would never return to relate the success or defeat of that splendid army. Even if victory should perch upon their banners, and I had no doubt it would, yet many noble lives must be sacrificed ere it could be obtained.

The main column reached Fairfax toward evening and encamped for the night. Col. R.'s wife of the Second ——, Mrs. B. and myself were, I think, the only three females who reached Fairfax that night. The day had been extremely hot, and not being accustomed to ride all day beneath a burning sun, we felt its effects very sensibly, and consequently, hailed with joy the order to encamp for the night. Notwithstanding the heat and fatigue of the day's march, the troops were in high spirits, and immediately began preparing supper. Some built fires while others went in search of, and appropriated, every available article which might in any way add to the comfort of hungry and fatigued men.

The whole neighborhood was ransacked for milk, butter, eggs, poultry, etc. which were found insufficient in quantity to supply the wants of such a multitude. There might have been heard some stray shots fired in the direction of a field where a drove of cattle were quietly grazing; and soon after the odor of fresh steak was issuing from every part of the camp. I wish to state, however, that all "raids" made upon

hen-coops, etc. were contrary to the orders of the General in command, for during the day I had seen men put under arrest for shooting chickens by the roadside.

I was amused to hear the answer of a hopeful young darkey cook, when interrogated with regard to the broiled chickens and beef steak which he brought on for supper. Col. R. demanded, in a very stern voice, “Jack, where did you get that beef steak and those chickens?” “Massa, I’se carried dem cl’ar from Washington; thought I’d cook ’em ’fore dey sp’il’d”; and then added, with a broad grin, “I aint no thief, I aint.” Col. R. replied: “That will do, Jack, you can go now.” Then the Colonel told us how he had seen Jack running out of a house, as he rode along, and a woman ran out calling after him with all her might, but Jack never looked behind him, but escaped as fast as he could, and was soon out of sight. Said he, “I thought the young rascal had been up to some mischief, so I rode up and asked the woman what was the matter, and found he had stolen all her chickens; I asked her how much they were worth; she “reckoned” about two dollars. I think she made a pretty good hit, for after I paid her, she told me she had had only two chickens.” Supper being over, pickets posted, and camp guards detailed, all became quiet for the night.

Early the next morning the reveille beat, the whole camp was soon in motion, and after a slight breakfast from our haversacks the march was resumed. The day was very hot, and we found great difficulty in obtaining water, the want of which caused the troops much suffering. Many of the men were sun-struck, and others began to drop out of the ranks from exhaustion. All such as were not able to march were

put into ambulances and sent back to Washington. Toward noon, the tedium of the march began to be enlivened by sharp volleys of musketry, in the direction of the advance guard; but those alarms were only occasioned by our skirmishers, pouring a volley into everything which looked as if it might contain a masked battery, or a band of the enemy's sharpshooters.

Considerable excitement prevailed throughout the day, as we were every hour in expectation of meeting the enemy. Carefully feeling its way, however, the army moved steadily on, investigating every field, building, and ravine, for miles in front and to the right and left, until it reached Centerville, where we halted for the night.

The troops now began to feel the effects of the march, and there was evidently a lack of that pic-nic hilarity which had characterized them the day before. Several regiments had been supplied with new shoes the day before leaving camp, and they found by sad experience, that they were not the most comfortable things to march in, as their poor blistered feet testified; in many cases their feet were literally raw, the thick woolen stockings having chafed the skin off. Mrs. B. and I, having provided ourselves before leaving camp, with a quantity of linen, bandages, lint, ointment, etc. found it very convenient now, even before a shot had been fired by the enemy.

Our surgeons began to prepare for the coming battle, by appropriating several buildings and fitting them up for the wounded—among others the stone church at Centerville—a church which many a soldier will remember, as long as memory lasts. Late that evening as I was returning from this

church, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. B., I proposed that we should walk through the entire camp to see how the boys were employed, on this, the eve of their first battle. We found many engaged in writing by the glimmering light of the camp-fire—soldiers always carry writing materials on a march; some were reading their bibles, perhaps with more than usual interest; while others sat in groups, conversing in low earnest tones; but the great mass were stretched upon the ground, wrapped in their blankets, fast asleep, and all unconscious of the dangers of the morrow.

We were about to return to our quarters in a log cabin built by the rebel soldiers, and which had been evacuated only a few days previous, when we heard several voices singing in a little grove not far from camp. We turned and walked toward the grove, until we could hear distinctly, the words of the following beautiful hymn:

“O, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though press’d by every foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe;

That will not murmur or complain
Beneath the chastening rod,
But, in the hour of grief and pain,
Will lean upon its God;

A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without;
That, when in danger, knows no fear,
In darkness knows no doubt.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mr. B., “I recognize Willie L.’s voice there. I understand now; this is Willie’s prayer meeting night, and notwithstanding the fatigue of the march and blistered feet, he has not forgotten it.” We drew nearer to listen to and enjoy the exercises unperceived, for no sooner had the last words of the hymn died away on the still midnight air, than Willie’s clear voice rose in prayer, filling the grove with its rich, pathetic tones. He prayed for victory on the morrow, for his comrades, for loved ones at home, and his voice grew tremulous with emotion, as he plead with the Saviour to comfort and support his widowed mother, if he should fall in battle.

Then followed a practical talk about being faithful soldiers of Jesus, as well as of their beloved country; of the necessity of being prepared at any moment, to lay down the cross and take up the crown. One after another prayed and spoke, until about a dozen—and that included the whole number present—had addressed the Throne of Grace, and testified to the power of the Gospel of Christ in the salvation of sinners. No one was called upon to pray or speak, no one said he had nothing to say and then talked long enough to prove it, no one excused his inability to interest his brethren, and no time was lost by delay, but every one did his duty, and did it promptly. We retired feeling refreshed and encouraged.

After ascertaining the position of the enemy, Gen. McDowell ordered forward three divisions, commanded by Heintzelman, Hunter and Tyler, Miles being left in reserve at Centerville. Sunday morning before dawn, those three divisions moved forward, presenting a magnificent

spectacle, as column after column wound its way over the green hills and through the hazy valleys, with the soft moonlight falling on the long lines of shining steel. Not a drum or bugle was heard during the march, and the deep silence was only broken by the rumbling of artillery, the muffled tread of infantry, or the low hum of thousands of subdued voices.

The divisions separated where three roads branch off toward Bull Run, each taking the road leading to its respective position. Soon the morning broke bright and clear, bringing the two contending armies in plain sight of each other. The enemy was posted on heights that rose in regular slopes from the shore crowned here and there by earthworks. The woods that interfered with his cannon ranges had all been cut away, and his guns had a clean sweep of every approach. On our side the descent was more gradual, and covered with a dense forest. The roar of artillery soon announced that the battle had actually commenced.

Mrs. B. and myself took our position on the field, according to orders, in connection with Gen. Heintzelman's division, having delivered our horses to Jack for safe keeping, with strict orders to remain where he was, for we might require them at any moment. I imagine now, I see Mrs. B., as she stood there, looking as brave as possible, with her narrow brimmed leghorn hat, black cloth riding habit, shortened to walking length by the use of a page, a silver-mounted seven-shooter in her belt, a canteen of water swung over one shoulder and a flask of brandy over the other, and a haversack with provision, lint, bandages,

adhesive plaster, etc. hanging by her side. She was tall and slender, with dark brown hair, pale face, and blue eyes.

Chaplain B. sat upon his horse looking as solemn as if standing face to face with the angel of death. The first man I saw killed was a gunner belonging to Col. R.'s command. A shell had burst in the midst of the battery, killing one and wounding three men and two horses. Mr. B. jumped from his horse, hitched it to a tree, and ran forward to the battery; Mrs. B. and I following his example as fast as we could. I stooped over one of the wounded, who lay upon his face weltering in his blood; I raised his head, and who should it be but Willie L. He was mortally wounded in the breast, and the tide of life was fast ebbing away; the stretchers were soon brought, and he was carried from the field.

Seeing the disaster from a distance, Col. R. rode up to the battery, and as he was engaged in giving orders, a solid shot came whizzing by in such close proximity to his head, that it stunned him for a moment; but soon recovering, he turned up the side of his head and shrugged his shoulders, a peculiarity of his, and in his usual nasal twang, said, "rather close quarters," and rode away, apparently as unconcerned as if it had been a humming bird which crossed his path. But not content with admonishing the Colonel, the same shot struck my poor little flask of brandy which lay near me on a drum-head, shattering it as spitefully as if sent by the combined force of the Order of "Good Templars."

Now the battle began to rage with terrible fury. Nothing could be heard save the thunder of artillery, the clash of steel, and the continuous roar of musketry. Oh, what a scene for the bright sun of a holy Sabbath morning to shine upon!

Instead of the sweet influences which we associate with the Sabbath—the chiming of church bells calling us to the house of prayer, the Sabbath school, and all the solemn duties of the sanctuary, there was confusion, destruction and death. There was no place of safety for miles around; the safest place was the post of duty. Many that day who turned their backs upon the enemy and sought refuge in the woods some two miles distant, were found torn to pieces by shell, or mangled by cannon ball—a proper reward for those who, insensible to shame, duty, or patriotism, desert their cause and comrades in the trying hour of battle, and skulk away cringing under the fear of death.

CHAPTER III.

Table of Contents

WATER FOR THE WOUNDED—COL. CAMERON KILLED—SCENES ON THE BATTLE-FIELD—BURNSIDE'S BRIGADE—CAPTURE OF GRIFFIN'S AND RICKETT'S BATTERIES—REBELS REINFORCED—THE PANIC AND RETREAT—THE WOUNDED AT CENTERVILLE—MY RECONNOISSANCE—AN INSANE WOMAN ON THE FIELD—HIDING FROM THE ENEMY—RETURN TO THE WOUNDED—EXPECTATION OF CAPTURE—ESCAPE FROM THE REBELS—MY WALK TO ALEXANDRIA—FOOTSORE AND WEARY—ARRIVAL IN WASHINGTON—LETTERS FROM DEAD SOLDIERS' FRIENDS.

I was hurried off to Centerville, a distance of seven miles, for a fresh supply of brandy, lint, etc. When I returned, the field was literally strewn with wounded, dead and dying. Mrs. B. was nowhere to be found. Had she been killed or wounded? A few moments of torturing suspense and then I saw her coming toward me, running her horse with all possible speed, with about fifty canteens hanging from the pommel of her saddle. To all my inquiries there was but one answer: "Don't stay to care for the wounded now; the troops are famishing with thirst and are beginning to fall back." Mr. B. then rode up with the same order, and we three started for a spring a mile distant, having gathered up the empty canteens which lay strewn on the field. This was the nearest spring; the enemy knew it, and consequently had posted sharpshooters within rifle range to prevent the troops being supplied with water. Notwithstanding this, we filled our

canteens, while the Minnie balls fell thick and fast around us, and returned in safety to distribute the fruits of our labor among the exhausted men.

We spent three hours in this manner, while the tide of battle rolled on more fiercely than before, until the enemy made a desperate charge on our troops driving them back and taking full possession of the spring. Chaplain B.'s horse was shot through the neck and bled to death in a few moments. Then Mrs. B. and I dismounted and went to work again among the wounded.

Not long afterwards Col. Cameron, brother of the Secretary of War, came dashing along the line, shouting, "Come on boys, the rebels are in full retreat." The words had scarcely been uttered when he fell, pierced to the heart by a bullet. Surgeon P. was on the ground in an instant, but nothing could be done for him; his wound was mortal, and he soon ceased to breathe. There was no time to carry off the dead; we folded his arms across his breast, closed his eyes, and left him in the cold embrace of death.

Still the battle continues without cessation; the grape and canister fill the air as they go screaming on their fearful errand; the sight of that field is perfectly appalling; men tossing their arms wildly calling for help; there they lie bleeding, torn and mangled; legs, arms and bodies are crushed and broken as if smitten by thunder-bolts; the ground is crimson with blood; it is terrible to witness. Burnside's brigade is being mown down like grass by the rebel batteries; the men are not able to stand that terrible storm of shot and shell; they begin to waver and fall back slowly, but just at the right moment Capt. Sykes comes up

to their relief with his command of regulars. They sweep up the hill where Burnside's exhausted, shattered brigade still lingers, and are greeted with a shout of joy, such as none but soldiers, who are almost overpowered by a fierce enemy, and are reinforced by their brave comrades, can give.

Onward they go, close up to the cloud of flame and smoke rolling from the hill upon which the rebel batteries are placed—their muskets are leveled—there is a click, click—a sheet of flame—a deep roll like that of thunder, and the rebel gunners are seen to stagger and fall. The guns become silent, and in a few moments are abandoned. This seems to occasion great confusion in the rebel ranks. Regiments were scattered, and officers were seen riding furiously and shouting their orders, which were heard above the roar and din of battle.

Captain Griffin's and Rickett's batteries are ordered forward to an eminence from which the rebels have been driven. They come into position and open a most destructive fire which completely routs the enemy. The battle seems almost won and the enemy is retreating in confusion. Hear what rebel Gen. Johnson says of his prospects at that time, in his official report: "The long contest against a powerful enemy, and heavy losses, especially of field officers, had greatly discouraged the troops of Gen. Bee and Col. Evans. The aspect of affairs was critical." Another writes: "Fighting for hours under a burning sun, without a drop of water, the conduct of our men could not be excelled; but human endurance has its bounds, and all seemed about to be lost." This goes to prove that it was

a desperately hard fought battle on both sides, and if no fresh troops had been brought into the field, the victory would assuredly have been ours.

But just as our army is confident of success, and is following up the advantage which it has gained, rebel reinforcements arrive and turn the tide of battle. Two rebel regiments of fresh troops are sent to make a flank movement in order to capture Griffin's and Rickett's batteries. They march through the woods, reach the top of the hill, and form a line so completely in our rear as to fire almost upon the backs of the gunners. Griffin sees them approach, but supposes them to be his supports sent by Major Barry. However looking more intently at them, he thinks they are rebels, and turns his guns upon them. Just as he is about to give the order to fire, Major B. rides up shouting, "They are your supports, don't fire." "No, sir, they are rebels," replied Capt. Griffin. "I tell you, sir, they are your supports," said Major B. In obedience to orders the guns were turned again, and while in the act of doing so, the supposed supports fired a volley upon the gunners. Men and horses went down in an instant. A moment more and those famous batteries were in the hands of the enemy.

The news of this disaster spread along our lines like wildfire; officers and men were alike confounded; regiment after regiment broke and ran, and almost immediately the panic commenced. Companies of cavalry were drawn up in line across the road, with drawn sabers, but all was not sufficient to stop the refluent tide of fugitives. Then came the artillery thundering along, drivers lashing their horses furiously, which greatly added to the terror of the panic