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"FOUR YEARS IN SECESSIA."

A NARRATIVE

OF A

RESIDENCE AT THE SOUTH

PREVIOUS TO AND DURING

THE SOUTHERN REBELLION.

UP TO NOVEMBER, 1863,

WHEN THE WRITER ESCAPED FROM RICHMOND.

BY MRS. E. C. KENT.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

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Twenty-Five Cents





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GOD has given to each one of us a genius peculiar to ourselves. Some call this genius a disposition or inclination of the mind. Some call it a guardian angel. Others call it a genius. This genius is continually prompting us; beckoning us; and cheering us onward. In its hand it holds a shining light.

If we give our hearts to God and follow the promptings of this genius, keeping in the immediate influence of its light, our hearts will glow with genial warmth, our souls will expand, and our progress will be onward and upward to the spirit from which we emanated.

We do not follow the promptings of this genius as we should. The mass of us follow public opinion, until we learn by our own sufferings, or by the sufferings of others, that it is wrong, and that it has led us darkling through the world.

We should always cherish the deepest respect for the opinions of good people. We should cherish due respect for public opinions but we should also do whatever our hands findeth to do with all our might.

I am well aware that the narrative which I am about to present to you is crude, and incomplete. But, I am also aware that it is the best I could make with the little time and talent I could command, and that it is my duty to not waste my energies in useless repinings and regrets, but to look upward and onward, and to keep hoping, praying and doing. And I am led to hope that

that the incidents which I shall relate, will present, at least, a faint view of the Southern character, and of the Southern country as it is now; and, as it has been since the rebellion.

Some of the most thrilling scenes in which my son was a prominent actor, I have not attempted to describe accurately, because I could not do so with the positive assurance of its not bringing serious trouble upon persons who befriended us in our trouble.

My son went South from Cincinnati early in the fall of 1859. In December of the same year I followed him to Mississippi, where he was employed as shipping and receiving clerk at a landing on the Yazoo river, and I was employed as teacher in a family not far distant from his place of business.

On my arrival in Mississippi, before the rebellion broke out, I was surprised to meet with persons occasionally, who advocated secession.

The gentleman in whose family I first taught advocated it in the strongest terms. He would invoke for the "Yankees" all the plagues and tortures he could invent, wishing for power to sweep them from the face of the earth.

He took great delight in listening to, and in giving accounts of horrible murders and other deeds of cruelty, and the relish with which he would listen to such accounts, and relate them himself, was awfully disgusting.

According to his own story, he had been a terror to negroes during the whole of his long life, being then over sixty years of age; and he had made himself eminently active by hunting runaway negroes, and by detecting those who were contemplating escape; and by inflicting upon them the greatest physical pain, with the least physical injury.

He was also very expert in detecting thievish negroes. When other plans failed to detect the thief, the negroes on the plantation were whipped until he was exposed. Many of you who are here to-night can judge of the moral effect which this treatment must produce upon the negroes, and the uncertainty of its detecting the guilty one. You can also judge of the character which it

must develepe in the white children who were reared in this atmosphere of misrule and cruelty. Yet this man had the appearance of a gentleman! He would receive you with a gracious self-complaisant air, and he would extend to you such hospitalities, that you would upon a slight acquaintance really think him a gentleman of the first stamp. He was also a strong advocate of dueling. A successful duelist was, in his opinion, deserving of high honor and esteem. Indeed, the generality of Southern people place a successful duelist as high on the pinnacle of fame as we place those who have achieved the greatest moral and intellectual victories.

In the fall of 1860, I was employed to teach a district school in Mississippi. In this situation I was to receive fifty dollars per month, besides board and washing. The school averaged about eight scholars. In the mean time the excitement in the South was progressing with fearful intensity.

At the end of four months, when the time arrived for me to receive my pay, I was told that there was no money in the treasury. At this, the gentleman who employed me, and who was authorized to employ the teachers, was greatly enraged. He declared that there was an abundance of money in the treasury. He explained to me how the money was received,—how much had been received, and how much paid out, and although he was, according to his own story, a strong secessionist, he hinted to me that it was only because I was from the North, “that there was no money in the treasury.” He said he hated the “Yankees” himself. He had voted the secession ticket, but he did not believe in treating a lady that way, simply because she happened to be a native of a country he disliked; and he denounced those who did so in the strongest terms.

This gentleman was a Scotchman by birth, and of good education, but he had lived in the South for many years. He was shrewd, and had acquired a property which might be considered quite a fortune by many; comprising four hundred acres of land, besides horses, cattle, &c. But he had only two negroes. I often wondered why he did not have a greater number. I did not

believe his conscience forbade, therefore I concluded that he considered himself better off without them.

During my residence in Mississippi, I did meet with a few slaveholders, who declared that they wished that there had never been such a thing as slavery. But this was rare. Those, however, who had no slaves, especially if they were poor people, could not have uttered such sentiments with impunity. But my employer declared that he was greatly in favor of slavery. He would listen with great interest to my accounts of the advanced state of society in the North, and to my views in relation to the disastrous results a separation of the Union would bring about, but at the close of the conversation he would declare that he was a Southern rights man, and that he was in favor of secession.

Sometimes I thought that he really was what he professed to be. At other times I doubted it, thinking that, perhaps, he only advocated those sentiments to keep in the good graces of his more affluent neighbors, by whom he was considered a poor man. At all events, if he had been known to be a Union man, he would have been obliged to renounce his sentiments or his life after the secession vote passed.

Soon after I was told that there was no money in the treasury, I resigned my situation and went to reside in the family of Mr. ———, only eleven miles distant. His father was a prominent judge from Kentucky. Mr. ——— was a gentleman in every sense of the term. He had received a liberal education and was endowed with a natural fondness for literary pursuits. Mrs. ——— was also a pleasant lady, much more intelligent and sensible than the mass of Southern ladies. They owned fifteen hundred acres of land, and nearly, or quite a hundred negroes. They had only three children large enough to attend school, and they were to pay me thirty dollars a month, besides board and washing.

Some months before I went to this family, a rich planter in the neighborhood killed an overseer, in consequence of some charge that the overseer had made against him. For this horrible crime the planter was not even arrested. He was not even censured by

the mass of people. But Mr. ——— denounced him in severe terms, and said that if the overseer had killed the planter he would have been hung.

I cannot present Mr. ——— to you as a specimen of any class of men, either in the North or in the South. He was an exception to the general rule. And this is the character of the man into whose hands it actually seemed to me that I had been thrown by Providence in a time of great danger. His influence was not only a perfect safeguard to me, but it extended safety to my son also, who was still at the landing on the Yazoo river, about twenty miles distant. Persons living forty and even fifty miles distant in that thinly settled country, were well acquainted with each other, and were therefore considered neighbors.

I will now return to the fall of 1860. Before doing so, however, I will say, I know but very little about politics, and as I think it hardly a woman's sphere to know much in that line, I am perfectly content with my very small accomplishment therein. But this I do believe, that it is the duty of every true friend of the Union to honestly, vigorously and heartily support the Government. I cannot see the propriety in times like these of allowing partizan predilection to interfere with that support. How any man can continually be carping at the great measures of our administration, bestowing ribald jests upon its head, or weakening the influence of its generals in battle, by unfounded or malicious charges,—and call himself a friend of the Union, or the Government, which I take to be one and the same thing, is beyond my comprehension.

I will now call your attention to the fall of 1860. At this time the most intense political excitement prevailed. The people at the South were divided mainly into two great parties under the names of "Whig" and "Democrat." The Whigs accused the Democrats of aiming at a separation of the Union, and the Democrats accused the Whigs of being favorable to the abolition of Slavery. To be an abolitionist there, was considered the greatest of crimes for which death in its most appalling shape was but a slight reward.

Whig conventions and Democratic conventions were held throughout the country. Both of these parties were opposed to

the election of Abraham Lincoln, but the Democrats were the most bitter and determined. The speakers of the Whig conventions maintained that the Democrats were working to overthrow the Government.

Only a few days before the Presidential election a Whig convention was held in Yazoo City. The Stars and Stripes had been planted on each side of the stand and were floating in the breeze. There were several speakers, and they occupied the stand in succession nearly all day. They were all of them eloquent men. They admonished the people to stand by the Union. They said the probability was that Lincoln would be elected, but his term would expire in four years. He would be obliged to abide by the Constitution and he could do them no harm. If he had the will, he would not have the power to interfere with their domestic institutions. The idea of his doing so was a humbug, gotten up by the Democrats, for the purpose of gaining their great point,—a dissolution of the Union.

One of the speakers, after reminding the people of the common cause for which their fathers had fought and bled, and of the sacred ties by which the Union was bound, pointed to the Stars and Stripes and said: "it is possible,—it is even probable,—that many of you will never again be privileged to hail that glorious banner as the flag of your country."

And sure enough, that was the last struggle made for the Union in that section of the country! News soon came that Lincoln was elected. The majority of the people believed what the Democrats had said, and they madly rushed into the vortex of secession. The voice of reason was hushed. Designing demagogues stood rampant, flourishing the vile banner of disloyalty; and the old time honored flag was not again seen, till Grant with his indomitable army, so nobly finished up his Western campaign, and opened up the navigation of the Mississippi and its tributaries!

After the secession vote passed, the Whigs were looked upon with suspicion by the dominant party, and persons with any Northern proclivities were hardly tolerated,—in fact, watched with suspicion. The most determined and desperate measures were



adopted to compel every one to aid in the rebellion. In our neighborhood it was publicly avowed that no "Yankee" should leave the place. All who were suspected of being friendly to the North were called "Yankees." A gallows was erected on a public highway, with the avowed intention of hanging any one thereon who might express sentiments in opposition to the secession movement. Everybody feared an insurrection of the negroes. The reign of terror was absolute!

Persons who had formerly expressed Union sentiments, and, more especially, those who were late from the North, had now double cause for fear. Besides the common danger of an insurrection of the negroes, they were in yet greater danger of losing their lives at the hands of an infuriate mob, instigated by some rabid secessionist.

Any hot headed, half civilized secessionist could accuse a man, who was suspected of sympathizing with the North, of being an abolitionist; and accusation was generally condemnation. Therefore the most horrible murders were perpetrated in different sections of the country.

In Texas, as you all know, a Methodist preacher was charged with being an abolitionist, and he was burned to death with several negroes who were found in company with him. And there were people who rejoiced over these barbarous cruelties.

Two young men, in the immediate neighborhood of Yazoo City were strongly suspected of being in favor of the North. One of them was missing and for a time it was said that he had made his escape and returned to the North. But after a time his body was found in the Yazoo river!

The other one who was suspected, was concealed in the house of his partner until his pursuers gave up searching for him and had come to the conclusion that he had succeeded in making his escape. Then watching a favorable opportunity, his partner, with the assistance of two other gentlemen, managed to get him to the nearest rail road station, and he finally reached his home in safety.

Another young man, while waiting for a boat in Vicksburg, was accused of being an abolitionist, and he was, notwithstanding his

eloquent entreaties and protestations of innocence, tied hand and foot, put into a canoe and sent afloat on the Mississippi river. While being tied he spoke of his mother, who, he said would be anxiously waiting for him to come home, and he begged that his life might be spared for her sake. This touched the sympathy of his executioners and he was about to be released, when some one cried out, "he's a liar, he hasn't got any mother. Away with the abolitionist!" He was then hurried off into one of the canoes and sent afloat on the Mississippi river! I have related this story as it was told to me by an eye witness, as fortunately I was spared the ordeal of witnessing so terrible a scene. Alas! what horrors would that river reveal if it could but speak; and how many mothers are waiting in vain for their sons to come home!

I knew that my son had gained much confidence from the planters, by attending to the shipping of their cotton and receiving their goods in a satisfactory manner, but I also knew, that much doubt was entertained with regard to his sentiments, and that he at one time narrowly escaped violent treatment, in consequence of incautiously expressing his true opinion.

A planter, who was not disposed to pay his debts, and who was angry at my son for letting some of his cotton fall into the hands of his creditors, took advantage of his having thus incautiously expressed himself, and raised a cry that he was an abolitionist. He said that my son had been seen talking with Mr. ——'s negroes, and that he was, according to his own avowal, an enemy to the South, and he tried to induce Mr. —— to join in a plan to have him waylaid by his negroes while on his way to visit me. But Mr. —— being friendly to my son, protested against it, and informed the gentleman for whom I was teaching, of the danger. He went directly to this demon, and in a peremptory manner gave him to understand that he would surely be held accountable for any evil that might befall my son. This man was, in consequence of his dishonesty, unpopular in the neighborhood, and the gentleman for whom I was teaching assured me that my son was in no danger.

Still I suffered dreadfully with fear for his safety, and even for

his life. With the exception of a very few families, I felt that we were alone in the midst of our mortal foes. Some few, in Yazoo City, who had formerly befriended us, were themselves, for that reason suspected, and in our terror we were as strangers to each other. Finally the most desperate characters volunteered and left the country. Three companies had been sent from Yazoo City. Those who remained had been formed into home guards. Fears of an insurrection of the negroes were dispelled, and the country assumed a more peaceful appearance.

My health, which had been poor for many months, entirely failed. My son's business at the landing was dull; and I finally ventured to say that in consequence of my poor health, I wanted to go to Virginia, and I wished to take my son with me. The gentleman and lady for whom I was teaching protested against it, saying that we would not be safe among those who did not know us. The physician who was attending me, and whom I shall call Doctor B., was a Virginian, and he thought otherwise. He said I would find the climate of Virginia delightful, and that I would rapidly recover strength, even while on my journey. He gave me letters to his friends who were living there, and he procured other letters for me from a legal gentleman, who was also a Virginian. I gave him a report of the district school I had taught, an account of the money that was due me for teaching this school, and an order to draw my pay. The money which was due was soon handed over. My son settled up his business, and in September, 1861, we left Mississippi for Virginia. I then began to hope that we should be able to get back to the North. At Charlottesville, where we spent the first winter, we were received with kindness and confidence. Doctor B. and the lawyer had, besides recommending us highly in their letters, said that we were loyal to the South. I knew very well that it was these letters which called forth the confidence, and I did not dare to even mention the North, much less to disavow the impression made. The roads about Charlottesville were thronged with soldiers, who were picketed at every station and every cross road, and it was evident that it would only be getting my son into difficulty to attempt to return

to the North without the aid of some influential persons. We were, therefore, obliged to wait.

The next spring, 1862, the rebels, after having been driven from Manassas, and finding that the Union forces were marching towards Richmond, with a prospect of capturing that city, were panic-stricken. Detective officers were picking up men wherever they could be found, and forcing them into the rebel ranks. My son, with others, was marched off to a company at the point of the bayonet. He, however, succeeded in slipping away from the officers before he was examined or mustered into service. We then went to Richmond, hoping that the city would soon fall into the hands of the Union forces, and thus allow us to return home.

The inhabitants of Richmond were then, to all outward appearances, in favor of the rebellion. Many of the soldiers and officers, from the more Southern States, manifested bitter hatred toward the citizens, who, they said, were "Yankees." But the mass of the people seemed to think that, as a matter of course, everybody was in favor of the rebellion, and that it was not worth while to say much about it.

My Northern accent and manner, which had proved so effectual in Mississippi, and even in Charlottesville, in some instances, in keeping people at a distance, as Minerva's shield did in protecting Æneas from the arrows of the Etrurians, was no longer a disadvantage.

I soon secured for myself a situation to teach in a good family, and I also secured a place for my son in the immediate vicinity of Richmond, where I hoped he would not be molested. The lady in whose family I was employed to teach, said that she never saw a Northern person whom she did not like. She said that her husband was a strong secessionist, but she could not understand what advantage it would bring to the country, and she, for one, would be glad for peace on any terms. As I became acquainted, I found that the great mass of the community were heartily tired of the war, and that nearly all, except the office-holders, would be glad for peace on any terms.

For several weeks previous to the great battle before Richmond:

in 1862, provisions were very scarce. There was no way of getting them in from the country, in consequence of the position which the Union forces occupied; and it was feared by some, that it was their intention to keep the city besieged until famine compelled the authorities to surrender, and at that time it was confidently expected that the city would be obliged to surrender. Jeff. Davis, his Cabinet, and many of the prominent citizens, left the city. The Government stores, Post Office, Telegraph Office, &c., were removed to some place in the interior, (to Denville, I think, but am not quite certain.) The city authorities issued an order, saying that if the "Yankees" overpowered the Confederate troops, the city would be shelled, as they had determined not to surrender upon any conditions whatever.

Day after day, and week after week, we were expecting, and some of us anxiously hoping for, the commencement of the attack. Night after night, I watched the signal lights on the bluff between Richmond and that part of the city called Rockets. Finally, the long-expected battle commenced. The roar of the cannon, which was distinctly heard in Richmond, was a relief to the inhabitants. That sound would frighten away the gaunt form of famine, which had for weeks been hovering around and over the city; and I do believe that the majority of the citizens, at this time, heartily wished success to the Union arms.

One evening I walked out, accompanied by several ladies and gentlemen, in the direction from whence proceeded the noise of the cannon. We walked a mile or more from the city, until we could distinctly hear the noise of the small arms. There we stopped and listened, some of us with breathless anxiety, to ascertain whether the noise of the guns was advancing or receding. The noise increased, and before we returned to the city, we were confident that the Union forces were advancing. We then began to form plans for dodging the shells, and for the reception of the "Yankees." One lady called them "her brothers," and said that she had long been waiting for them to come; and that if they would only bring her something good to eat, she would give them a cordial welcome. She said, moreover, that she would nurse the

wounded, and do everything in her power for their relief and comfort.

Another lady thought it was a pity that the city authorities had not established "dodging schools" for the people over whom they exercised such fatherly care, in order that they might practice "dodging," and thus stand some little chance of saving their lives, if not their property, by dodging the shells.

I had become so accustomed to terrible sights and sounds, that I scarcely feared the shells, and I felt that I would gladly risk all the damage they might do, rather than not have the city taken.

During the several days in which the battle raged, couriers were continually bringing in reports,—now that the Union forces were advancing, and again that they were retreating. At length news came that they had been routed with great slaughter, and that the Confederate army had gained a great and decisive victory. This news was received with great excitement, but not with the unfeigned rejoicing with which the news of the battle of Manassas was received in Mississippi, July, 1861. It was publicly said that the majority of the people in Richmond were inwardly mourning over the defeat of the "Yankees," and that they were vainly striving to conceal their true sentiments.

People from different rebel States flocked into Richmond, in search of their friends who had been killed or wounded in battle. Ladies who, at the commencement of the war, hated anything that reminded them of a "Yankee," and who practiced shooting for the avowed purpose of shooting the Yankees themselves in case the men were defeated, were completely subdued when they found that their sick and wounded friends, who fell into the hands of the Yankees, were more kindly cared for than those who were at the hospitals in Richmond, or any place with their own men; and as I sympathized with them, and wept with some of them over their dead and dying, my Northern accent was no longer displeasing.

One lady from Alabama, to whom I had rendered aid, and with whom I had sympathized and wept over her dead son, voluntarily acknowledged, with much feeling and regret, that if she had met me in her neighborhood at the commencement of the war, she

would have shunned me. "But," said she, "we have long since learned that our leaders do not care for us; that they are cruel to our sick and wounded, while those who fall into the hands of the Yankees are kindly treated."

The people then turned their attention to the wounded soldiers, who were brought into the city by hundreds, and even by thousands. The public buildings, tobacco factories, and some of the stores, were taken for hospitals. For a time the mortality among the soldiers was so great, that it was difficult to procure decent burial for the dead. In the vicinity of the soldiers' burying-ground, which is, perhaps, a mile from Richmond, the air for some distance around was so bad, that it was very unpleasant to pass.

I walked out towards the burying-ground several times, but found it so unpleasant that I did not go very near, excepting on one occasion. That was late in the fall, the mortality had somewhat subsided, but even then I found it so unpleasant, that I only walked through a corner of the ground, and then hurried away. At several places there were men digging graves, and coffins containing dead bodies were piled one on top of the other.

Their usual manner of conveying the bodies of dead soldiers to the grave, was in lumber wagons with the coffins filled up like ordinary boxes of goods. For example, a man who was employed for that business, would drive up to a hospital and take all the dead from the dead-house, providing he could pile them in his wagon.

The Union soldiers who were brought in during, and soon after the great battles before Richmond, were almost entirely uncared for.

One day, towards evening, I was told that a train of Union soldiers, wounded, had been brought to the Richmond and York River Depot, in open freight cars, and that they had been left all day in the broiling sun with their wounds undressed, and with no one to give them so much as a drink of cold water. I went to the depot with a gentleman who was at that time assistant surgeon in one of the hospitals. During the day one of the soldiers had died, and I noticed several who seemed to be suffering the most intense agony. I made a move to go near and speak to one of

them, but was motioned back by one of the guards. I then turned to the doctor and asked him if those men were going to be left there to die without even so much as a drink of cold water. He inquired of the guard, who told him that some bread and water had been sent for.

We waited until it came, and I saw the water as well as the bread sold to the prisoners. I then turned away, wishing in my heart that the world would come to an end so that all this dreadful suffering might be ended at once.

About this time a squad of Louisianians captured twenty Union soldiers in the vicinity of Richmond, and brought only three of them to the city. It was said that the remaining seventeen had been murdered by their captors. And this was related as a praiseworthy act.

Such was the reign of terror in Richmond that many who in their hearts were loyal to the Union, were actually forced to speak of things of that kind indifferently, but I could detect in their tones disapproval and horror of such barbarity.

I tried to comfort myself with the thought that these poor boys who had been so cruelly murdered were then beyond the reach of suffering. But their graves were unmarked. Their names were unknown. And I wept when I thought of their friends at home, who would probably never learn their fate, and who would anxiously, and wearily, and oh! vainly wait for them to return!

The first of February, 1863, my son was conscripted, and as he refused to enter the rebel service, he was put into the conscript prison known by the name of Castle Thunder.

There were men who had been imprisoned many months, for no crimes but refusing to rebel against their government, and to fight against their own country.

I wrote to Jeff. Davis, Senator Wigfall, and others, and I called upon them many times, and implored them to let me keep my son. I contended that we had always abided by the law, and that we intended to respect the laws of whatever country we resided in; but we were both of us conscientiously opposed to fighting. That my son had never voted. That we knew nothing about



politics or war, and that we wanted to know nothing about them. We only wanted to live peaceably in the world where God had placed us.

In one of my letters to Jeff. Davis, I told him that my only son, who was the only near relation I had in the world, had been wrested from me and confined in prison like a criminal, and I asked to know of what crimes he was guilty, and what law he had violated.

After calling upon Jeff. Davis several times I was at last permitted to see him. He received me very graciously, and appeared very much inclined to reason, but the reason was all on his own side. He said he was surprised that I wanted to keep my son out of the army. Other mothers were obliged to let their sons go, and I must see that he had no right to make an exception in my case. He would be glad to give an order for my son's release, but he could not do so upon any conditions excepting that he should go to the company to which he had been assigned, and be a good soldier. This my son refused to do, consequently he was retained in prison.

The rations of the prisoners consisted of bread and meat in quantities not as much as it would require to feed me, hence many were actually obliged to join the army to keep from starving.

The meat which they had was very poor. My son was under impression that it was neither beef, mutton nor pork, and that it had not been killed in the usual way of killing meat, and therefore he did not draw any, but instead he drew a double allowance of bread, which was nearly as much as he needed, excepting on Mondays. Saturdays they drew a double allowance, but would always eat it up before Monday, and they could get nothing more until Monday evening. Every morning I carried my son a quart of milk, for which I paid fifty cents, and almost every morning a piece of meat, which was generally given to me by some kind friend. Occasionally I would buy ham, eggs, vegetables, fruit, &c., for him. For a small slice of ham, not as much as a hearty person would require for one meal, I would be obliged to pay fifty cents. Eggs, one dollar and fifty cents a dozen. For a small

chicken, two dollars and fifty cents. For blackberries, I paid not over one dollar, nor less than fifty cents a quart. For tomatoes and potatoes I paid the same, but I have seen potatoes sold for two dollars a quart. Muskmelons, three dollars each. Watermelons, five dollars. Beets, twenty-five cents. Apples, twenty-five cents. For soap, I paid from one dollar to one dollar and fifty cents per pound.

Sometimes, in compliance with my son's request, I would buy vegetables, fruit, meat, &c., only once or twice a week, and then get a sufficient quantity for him to share with his room mates. Sometimes things would be given to me for my son, and then I would be able to furnish them quite a good dinner.

The prison was crowded to its utmost capacity, and most of the time there were seven men in the small room with my son. Among his room mates there were, at different times, a Yankee lieutenant, a rebel captain, a rebel major and several inferior officers. At one time there was quite a celebrated lawyer in the room. Men of this class were generally not retained very long. They would manage some way to get released. In two instances large sums of money were to my certain knowledge, paid into General Winder's office to avoid court martials and to procure releases.

The Yankee lieutenant, who had been a paroled prisoner of war and had broke his parole, and a lawyer who had been conscripted, were in the room with my son most of the time he was confined.

The rebel captain and the major had also been conscripted, but upon being conscripted they pretended to enter the rebel service willingly. For some reason they were not sent off to a company as the mass of rebel conscripts were, but they were employed to go about the country to muster men for the service. One of them, as soon as he had mustered a sufficient number of men for a company, was made captain. The other was so successful that he soon mustered several companies, and he was made major of the united companies, which formed a battalion.

Finally a charge was brought against the captain for mustering men into his company whom he knew had deserted from other com-

panies. The major was charged with the same crime, and in addition to that he was charged with having assisted deserters through the the rebel lines.

I need not tell you these men had much influence. Their object was to avoid a court martial. This they did avoid by paying large sums of money into General Winder's office. And they were released.

Thus months wearily dragged along. Old comrades had been released, and new ones came in to take their places. Still my son was held in prison for no crime, but that of being faithful to his own country, *our Glorious Union*.

Plan after plan had been concerted for the escape of himself and comrades, only to fail. Hope after hope had been cherished, only to be blighted, and I then learned in stern reality "how much the heart can bear."

It really seemed to me that the Union troops did not half try to take the city, and that many of the people in the North, as well as the mass in the South, had through fear of the tyrants in Richmond, become blinded to their own interest. I wondered why the Union people in the North did not unite and determine to take Richmond, if for no cause but to release the prisoners who were perishing for want of the ordinary necessaries of life.

Last May, 1863, it was reported that the Union cavalry had made a raid within the fortifications, only one mile and a half from Richmond; that the Union army was near at hand; that the Confederate troops were away in different sections of the country, and that the city would surely be taken.

Jeff. Davis was at his house, sick from fright, occasioned by the bread riot which had taken place only a few weeks before. Some were so bold as to say that he would be caught in his lair. Then in order to conceal their true sentiments, they censured him because he had sent the troops away and left the city undefended.

The alarm was sounded through the streets. Every man and boy who was able to carry a gun, was, without respect to age, marched off to the Capitol Square, where the long roll was being sounded, formed into companies and sent to the fortifications.

The horses were taken from the street cars, and all the horses in the city were pressed into the service. All the men who were employed on public works, and the convalescents in hospitals were formed into companies, and sent to assist in defending the city. New inducements were offered to the conscripts in Castle Thunder, and one full company was raised from that place. The Union soldiers on Belle Island made an effort to overpower the guard and effect their escape, and several of them were shot.

The Union troops were hourly expected to be seen marching into the city. The next day an alarm was given, and it was said that they were coming up Main street, from the direction of Williamsburg. I rushed to my room and locked myself up, fearing that this would prove as false as other similar alarms had been, and that I would, in my excitement, betray myself. My window opened toward the Capitol Square, which was only a few yards distant, and in the direction from which it was said the "Yankees" were coming. Women and children were thronging the streets and the Square, on the tiptoe of excitement, with distended eyes and open mouths, to catch a glimpse of the "Yankees." I looked eagerly for the flag, and commenced singing the "Star Spangled Banner."

Soon I heard martial music, but the air was not familiar to me. It was not the "Star Spangled Banner:" it was not "Yankee Doodle;" it was not the spirited music I expected to hear from the Union troops, marching into Richmond. Presently I saw the head of the column. There they were, dressed in blue as I had never seen rebel soldiers dressed. It surely must be them! But their march is forced and weary. I am breathless with suspense! I do not see the flag! Is that it? Yes, there it is! But I can scarcely see it in the distance, it is carried so low. Now I see it! But what do I see? Alas! it is the vile, dirty rag of secession!

During all this excitement I was not permitted to see my son. I wrote to him every day, but I knew that my letters must be read by the captain commanding the prison before they could be handed to him. All the men in his room had left, excepting the Yankee lieutenant, the lawyer, and himself. They were locked up

in close confinement until the excitement subsided. It was truly affecting to witness the sympathy of these boys for each other, in connection with their long suffering. The little they had, they gladly shared in common with each other. The "Yankee," as he was termed at the prison, made friends even of some of the officers of the prison, in spite of his being a "Yankee," and frequently things were given to him. I was paying out my salary of forty dollars a month faster than I received it; and I did everything in my power to keep up their spirits, and to induce them to continue to hope. Often did my heart sink, when I saw the hope vanish which I myself had inspired and entertained; and as the warm weather advanced, and I saw that my son was gradually losing his health and spirits, I began to despair of ever getting him released.

Finally, towards the last of July, 1863, a plan was concerted by some rebel officers, who had themselves been forced into the service, by which he was enabled to get out of prison, and to make his escape through the rebel lines. That night, and more especially the exact hour in which I knew that my son would attempt to escape from prison, I prayed as I had never prayed before.

If I could tell the exact manner of his escape, it would, doubtless, be interesting; but this I cannot do, as it might possibly bring serious trouble upon those who assisted him. When he escaped from prison, a carriage was near by, waiting to drive him to a place of concealment, a few miles from Richmond. At this place there were nearly or quite a hundred men. Some of them had been in Castle Thunder; some of them had been sentenced to be shot; many of them were anxiously waiting opportunity to pass the lines; others, who had families and property in the South, were trying to remain, and keep out of danger.

The last time I saw my son, was at this place of concealment. He seemed more disheartened than I had ever known him before. If he escaped the detective officers, there was danger of his falling into the hands of the pickets; and he knew very well that if he was caught, no earthly power could save him. I assure you I did

not then put my trust in any power that belonged to earth, and I did not cease to pray.

About this time the Union forces were advancing towards Culpepper. My son, with others, went to Culpepper, and I soon received a letter assuring me that they were safe. As time passed away and I heard nothing more, I began to feel confident that they were safe. But my son had admonished me not to leave Richmond before getting word from himself, and knowing positively that he had succeeded in passing the pickets.

He was confident that he could, in some way, manage to get a letter to me, very soon after reaching the North; and I did not feel quite sure of his safety until the last of October, when I received a letter from him, dated Washington, D. C., August 3d. Then, just as soon as I possibly could manage to leave the place where I was teaching without exciting suspicion, I went to Culpepper. There a man had been previously engaged to pilot me through the rebel lines. For this he was paid one hundred and twenty dollars in Confederate money.

I had heard of so many outrageous deeds of cruelty and violence being perpetrated, by furious demons, upon persons of intelligence and refinement; I had seen such terrible suffering, caused by the blind, thoughtless, groundless, and foolish hatred which the rebels cherished towards the Yankees, not only as a nation, but as individuals; and I had suffered such tortures, that I loathed the rebel country in my very soul, and I longed to see my own dear native hills once more.

With my mental vision, I saw the incomparable scenery of the Hudson, the Genesee River, and the Niagara Falls, as I had seen them in the days of my youth and prosperity. Then the sad, but subdued and softening vision of the dear departed friends who had cherished and directed me in those halcyon days, passed before me. And then I saw the dreadful change which had swept over our country within the last four years. I longed to see the Star Spangled Banner; to hear our good old national airs: and, above all, I longed to see my own dear son in the land where he was then free, and where I hoped to have some influence with the people,

and even with the Government, which might have a tendency to induce them to be more united, vigorous, and determined in their efforts to put down the rebellion, and to send relief to those poor boys whom I had left starving and withering in prison.

While witnessing the sufferings of the prisoners and of the conscripts in Richmond, and more especially while the plan was being concerted for my son to escape, I invoked the aid of Almighty God, and I solemnly vowed that I would, during the remainder of my days, exert all the power he would grant me, to assist in relieving those who were in distress. I have never been permitted to speak to any of the Union prisoners of war, but I have frequently seen them brought into Richmond; I have also seen them on Belle Isle, in the James River. I have many times passed by the Libby prison; and I have seen and learned enough to know that their sufferings, from cruel treatment, hunger, and cold, are more terrible than I have yet heard them described.

While my son was in prison, some few persons in authority were favorably inclined towards him. One who was high in power was in favor of making an exception in his case. One of the surgeons who examined him was also in favor of making an exception. He was reported by this surgeon to be a delicately-constituted youth, by no means fit for field service, but to possess good business qualifications. This, with a letter which was given me, did in process of time procure me the privilege of calling at Jeff. Davis' office. I called many times. Several times I found the aids engaged in excited and spirited conversation. At one time, one of the men, whom I took to be one of the aids, was advocating the hoisting of the "black flag." I had frequently heard it advocated by ignorant, hot-headed secessionists, but I had always believed that persons high in power possessed, at least, a little common sense and refinement. But I found this secession bear blowing away at a terrible rate because Jeff. Davis had not prosecuted the war with more vigor, and with more cruelty to the "Yankees." He called the Yankees "cowardly dogs;" and he said that if the President had made it known, when the war first commenced, that

every Yankee who was found on the Southern soil should be either shot or hung, the war would have ended long ago.

On one occasion, a prisoner of some note had been brought in ; and in one of my calls a violent discussion was being held, quite a number of the "chivalry" advocating a summary process of shooting, without even the apology of a court martial. Whether this was adopted, I did not learn.

In the early part of November, 1863, before I left Richmond provisions had become so high, and the prices were advancing so rapidly, that a law was passed fixing the prices of provisions. Then commissioners were sent out into the country to search the farms, and compel persons having produce to bring it to market. These commissioners returned with reports, stating that the farmers had not a sufficient quantity of provisions to subsist themselves through the winter.

A law was also passed about this time, making it a penitentiary offence to trade Confederate for Federal money ; or for selling goods any cheaper for Federal than for Confederate money. The people were asking themselves, "where is the freedom for which we have been so desperately struggling?"

Public opinion has changed in the South since the commencement of the war. Within the last few months, it has changed rapidly, and when I left Richmond it was a common saying, "the Confederacy is about played out."

Great precaution is taken by the rebel authorities to keep the people in ignorance. When I left Richmond it was generally believed that all rebel deserters were forced into the Union army, as soon as they reached the North.

In the spring of 1863, a few weeks before the Union cavalry raid within the fortifications, the famous bread riot occurred. It is said that some of the most respectable women of the city were among its leaders. At first they were only about twenty in number, and they went only to provision stores and took what they needed, saying their children were perishing for the want of food. But their number was soon increased to several hundred, and those who fell in went into stores and shops and seized whatever



was most convenient. Thus the rioters rapidly increased. The city authorities were in a great dilemma.

Order could not be restored by resorting to violent measures, because the rioters were the wives, mothers, sisters, &c., of the men who belonged to the city battalions, and in case of any violent treatment to them, that battalion would be turned against the city. Finally, after a few hours of disorder, and lively excitement, the authorities by assuring the rioters that they should hereafter be abundantly supplied with food, succeeded in persuading them to disperse and go to their homes.

Since that time the families of soldiers who are not able to buy food, have drawn rations from the government. As soon as the rioters dispersed, the authorities, in violation of their pledge, had some of the leaders arrested and confined in prison. Some of them were in prison when I left.

On the eve of my departure from Richmond, I concluded that I would make an attempt to find myself a pair of shoes suitable for walking, as I feared the possibility of my being obliged to walk a long distance, and of my shoes giving out entirely before I could get through the lines. I knew just where I could get them for fifty dollars a pair, but I was going to try to get a pair for less than fifty dollars.

Accordingly I commenced my search, which however, was not very extensive, as there were only a few stores in the city.

I first went to the stores on Main street. Any ladies' shoes? No. Any boys' shoes? No. Finally I at last found a pair of rough looking, ill shaped, but soft leather shoes, about two sizes too large for me, at the low price of thirty dollars. I had them bundled up, paid for and was off in good spirits, thanking my stars because I had been so fortunate as to be able to find a pair of shoes for thirty dollars.

On my way from Culpepper, I met with several hindrances, but with no real difficulty. I rode all the way in a small one-horse wagon. At the Rappahannock river, I came near falling into the hands of the rebel pickets. Had I done so I would have been

taken back to Richmond and would, doubtless, have been kept in prison during the war.

I came into the Union lines at Berlin, Maryland. Reported at the Provost Marshal's office, and was sent to headquarters at Harper's Ferry. There I was released from custody and permitted to come on to Washington. At Washington I learned that my son had been sent to Philadelphia. From Philadelphia he went to Boston. He there joined the Union army, and is now with his company in New Orleans.

I have thus, ladies and gentlemen, endeavored in my very imperfect manner, to depict to you my observations and sufferings during a residence of four years in Seecessia. And I can only add my testimony to that of all who have had the opportunity of personally viewing the rise and progress of this ill-starred rebellion. It is emphatically a rebellion of aspirants—tyrants—men who are determined to rule or ruin. The mass of the people are not with them,—at least those who are refined or intellectual.

True it is, and 'tis pity 'tis true, there is great need of the school master here. But I am confident that the people of the South are now rapidly awakening from the delusion forced upon them by their ambitious leaders, and the day is not far distant when we shall, as of yore, rejoice in one Country—one Union—one Flag!

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## TESTIMONIALS.

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The following is a copy of a letter from Rev. Samuel Aaron, Baptist Clergyman in Mount Holly :

The bearer of this is Mrs. E. C. Kent, a native of the State of New York, a resident for several years in Mississippi, and recently a refugee from Richmond. She is a lady of refinement and education, and in connection with her son has suffered much on account of her attachment to human liberty and the Union.

Last evening she read in the Baptist Meeting House, very effectively, to two hundred persons, the most intelligent in this place, a well written and touching narrative of the adventures and sufferings of herself and son.

He escaped last August, from the thralldom of a Richmond prison, and she some months afterwards. He has enlisted in the Union army, and she wishes to see him in New Orleans, and to resume, in that place, her avocation as a teacher of youth.

If you think it best to aid her in getting a public hearing in your town, you will find her worthy of your help.

She sits and reads with much propriety, and her whole deportment is, in my opinion, lady-like. She has good vouchers of character and standing.

Your friend, very truly,

SAMUEL AARON.

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BURLINGTON, Feb. 16th, 1864.

*To whom it may concern :*

The bearer of this is Mrs. E. C. Kent, a native of the State of New York. Mrs. Kent is a recent refugee from Richmond. She read a lecture in the Baptist Church in this place last evening, embodying a narrative of her adventures in, and escape from the South, and also of the imprisonment of her son in Castle Thunder, whence he subsequently escaped, and is now in the Union army.

Mrs. Kent's narrative is well written, and was so well read that all present were very much pleased with it. She is a lady of intelligence, and has good vouchers of character and standing.

KELSEY WALLING, Pastor.

EDWARD HAAS, Principal,

Of Public Schools

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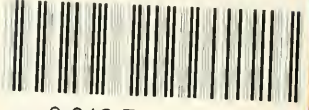
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