

A Sketch of Life During the War Between the States

by Mrs. Anna Cureton Stevens

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What a blessing it is to us that God, our Heavenly Father, has so ordered it that time softens our sorrows. When a great grief comes to us, it seems as if it is more than we can bear, and so it would be if the pain continued as sharp as we first feel it. But time, while it cannot obliterate our troubles from our memories, rubs off the sharp points that are so painful at first. As the shadows of the evening subdue the fierce rays of the noonday sun, and give us the soft, beautiful glow of twilight, so the events of our lives, if we live submissive to God's will, soften the pangs of grief and make our lives as beautiful as the light at eventide.

Living now in peace and prosperity, the time of trial and peril through which we passed during the Civil War seems like a troubled dream, from which we have slowly awakened. Time has softened our grief for the loss of dear ones who gave their precious lives for the Cause so dear to every true son and daughter of our loved Southland, and we can now see how merciful God has been to us through it all.

At the beginning of the war, in 1861, both of my brothers volunteered, which left my mother and myself alone on our farm. It was very lonely for us, but the Cause was so dear to us that we were willing to make any sacrifice. But little did we think then, when we bade them good-bye, that it would be four long years of anxiety before they would live in the old home again. Many of the leading men of the South thought the war would not last more than six months or a year; some of our more thoughtful statesmen read the future better, and predicted a long and bloody contest. The South only thought of establishing her rights, or dying in the struggle.

My mother, being almost and invalid, the whole care of the farm, as well as most of the housekeeping, devolved on me. I managed the farm, with a great deal of worry; but had it not been for the faithful negroes, I could not have done it. We made not only an abundance of food for ourselves, negroes and stock, but, at the close of the war, had \$1,800 worth of cotton. We welcomed to our home sick and wounded soldiers. We gave them all the dainties we could make, tenderly nursed them, and, as far as we could, replenished their wardrobes. We had yarn spun, and cloth woven, to make them clothes. I knitted undervests of homespun yarn, also sock and comforters.

In the summer of 1861, I asked the mothers and sisters whose sons and brothers belonged to the **Waxhaw Jackson Grey's company – Company B, Twenty-sixth North Carolina Regiment** – to assist me in getting a flag for the company. We got a beautiful silk flag, and I was selected to present it to the company

July 4, 1861. My brother belonged to this company. The first year of the war, we had not learned what war meant to a country, nor what a soldier's life was. When we sent our loved ones to the army, we thought that they must have all the luxuries of home except the house, so we packed trunks with everything we could put in, that we thought a gentleman going on a pleasure camping trip ought to have; and as we could not put a servant in a trunk, we sent him outside, to look after the trunk and its master. The last two years of the struggle, we learned what war meant, and how a soldier lived. One was considered well equipped who had shoes and clothing, though they were threadbare, or well patched, and not ragged; a blanket, gun, and a canteen.

My brother, Thomas Cureton, who was captain of Company B, Twenty-sixth North Carolina regiment, was wounded four times during the war. Once he was disabled for five months, and he was with us most of the time during his sickness, and what a comfort it was! My younger brother, Taylor Cureton, took fever at Petersburg, Va., and was at one time very ill. I heard of his sickness one Saturday night. The next day, I went twenty-five miles alone in a carriage, with a colored man driving, to my uncle's plantation, to get him to go with me to my brother. We didn't get to Petersburg until Wednesday. Oh! the dreadful suspense of those three days no one can ever realize unless they have had a similar experience! I knew the regiment had left Petersburg, and my poor, sick brother left alone among strangers. It seemed that I would never get to him. I brought him home and nursed him for weeks. Long ere he was well, he would return to his regiment. It was always so with the Confederate soldiers; they felt that every man was needed at the front, and many died from returning to the army before they were well enough to bear the hardships and exposures of camp life.

Thus the days, months and years passed wearily by, the remnant of our brave army fighting overwhelming numbers to protect us, and we praying, with hearts full of trouble and anxiety, and busy hands, trying to make food for the army and keep homes for those dear ones who would come to us when the cruel war would end. In February, 1865, came news that struck terror to every woman's heart, viz.: that Sherman, a cowardly monster in human form, was coming through our State. The few, very few, men (for the Yankees said we robbed the cradle and the grave to fight them) too old to join the army, tried to protect us by moving us out of that portion of the State through which he was passing. It was sad indeed to see frail women and little children camping out in cold, wet weather, risking their lives rather than meet the bluecoated fiends of Sherman's army. I was persuaded to start with a few friends, leaving my mother at home, as we then thought, with very devoted and faithful servants. In a few hours, I grew so uneasy about mother that I could not go any farther. I got a horse and rode twelve miles alone to get back home. That was a ride of terror to me. I was

afraid to look before, for fear I should see a bluecoat. The joy that came into my mother's face when she saw me ride up to the door, I shall never forget. It more than repaid me for that dreadful ride.

The life of the Confederacy was now drawing to a close. We still hoped, but it really seemed in vain to do so. I cannot describe my feelings when the news of Lee's surrender reached me. Our cause was right, just, and noble. For it was not the question of slavery for which the brave men of the South poured out their life blood on the battlefields of Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and the States of the West. It was the right given us by our forefathers, in the Constitution of the United States of America, of separate State action. How reluctantly the Yankees acknowledged this!

Our fathers and brothers were brave patriots, fighting for their rights. This is the truth that every Southern mother should instill into the hearts and minds of her children, as did Jochebed teach the little Moses to love the Hebrew people and give his life for their freedom. God bless the memory of our dead Southern heroes, and may it ever be kept fresh in the hearts of their children in all the coming years.

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