

Chapter XXX

The Sisters of Mercy
St Louis

Their convent and school - The hospitals
 crowded with sick and wounded during the war -
 prisoners and refugees - One priest captured
 over five hundred prisoners - Liberality of
 the citizens - Instructing soldiers in the
 principles of religion - Soldiers asking to be
 baptized in the Sisters' religion - Many they
 supplied the soldiers with books -
 Physicians anxious to learn the names of
 the Sisters. The soldiers grateful
 to the Sisters - Their humility and obedience -
 An interesting present -

There are several religious institutions
 in St Louis ^{Missouri} and though we have known
 since that the Sisters, in general,
 took displayed a laudable and active
 zeal in visiting the hospitals, nursing
 the sick and wounded and supplying
 to them the luxuries, in both food and
 clothing, procured by the liberal donations
 of the charitable and humane; the
 writer must confine himself, owing
 to the want of more general information,
 to the lives of the Sisters of Mercy.
 The Convent of this ~~Sister~~ Community numbers
 about twenty-five Sisters, Sister M. Ignatius
 Walker, Superior, and has a school
 attended by about four hundred

Children. It also provides employment for about one thousand persons annually, and reforms and trains to useful employments a number of young women.

During the war the hospitals of St. Louis were crowded with the sick and wounded, besides, the city was a great depot for Confederate prisoners and fugitives. There was a wide field for the charity and Christian zeal of the Sisters, and nobly did they fulfill their mission.

It is impossible to give an exact account of the number and circumstances of these unfortunates who were attended by the Sisters and priests. There was no regular Chaplain appointed either to the hospitals or prisoners, but, almost all the priests of the city attended daily without pay and did all in their power to console, aid, and render spiritual assistance to the unfortunates who were brought there under such afflictive circumstances.

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one priest alone baptized over five hundred prisoners, and as priests were not always on the spot, the Sisters baptized several hundreds on urgent occasions. The benevolent Citizens of St Louis, forgetting party spirit, when human suffering called forth their charity, largely aided the Sisters, by their generous bounty, to ameliorate, as much as possible, the dreary lot of the poor Captives and patients, to whom the Sisters, almost daily, distributed nutritious food, articles of clothing and other little necessities.

They made no distinction, but treated all alike irrespective of Country, Religion or politics; the most distressed and suffering invariably calling forth their greatest sympathy. They found hundreds of Soldiers, Federal and Confederate, ignorant of the simplest truths of Religion and when asked, they instructed them in the principles of Religion,

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And if they demanded it, when the opportunity offered, they brought their Chaplains of other denominations.

This, though, was seldom the case for the devotion of the Sisters to their wants and their quiet unobtrusive manner made such expression upon them that invariably, when asked if they wished to be baptized ~~to~~ replied - "We wish to be instructed and baptized in your religious sister; it must be the true religion, else, you who profess it would not be so good and kind to us, strangers to you?"

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most be the true religion, ~~do you who prefer it would not be what you~~
~~are to us.~~ In illness, the poor soldiers used to fancy that anything
the Sisters would ~~do~~ ^{might} give them would cure them. They were most grateful
for whatever was done for them - if ~~they~~ ^{any} gave them only a few
spoonful of preserves or a piece of cake, or something still more
trifling, they would thank ~~us~~ ^{them} warmly, never omitting to add
however, that ~~their~~ ^{the} presence was more agreeable than anything
else ~~they~~ ^{we} could confer. "If you never have anything for us,
Sister," they would say, "be sure you come see us, we like
you to talk to us." It was heartrending for ~~us~~ ^{the good Sisters} to go among them -
sometimes they were half-frenzied. The poor fellows who were
from time to time shot in retaliation, were a most pitiable
spectacle, crying and sobbing like children. Every one of them
asked to be received into the Catholic Church, and thus received
the only consolations remaining to them. Some of the Southerners showed
great bigotry at first, but it always wore away in a few days,
and these used to show most attachment to ~~us~~ ^{the Sisters} after. The St. Vincent
de Paul Society aided ~~us~~ to keep the prisoners in reading matter - Mr
John Gorett used to send ~~us~~ over a hundred dollars worth of books
at a time. Mr Barry, also an officer of the Society, frequently ^{has} helped
~~them~~ ^{us} in this way. In fact all the books and catechisms ~~they~~ ^{they} asked of
these gentlemen, ^{of the Society} were immediately sent ~~us~~ ^{them}. ~~They~~ ^{They} chose entertaining
works, and books calculated to increase and foster brotherly love among
them. For those who desired to become Catholics ~~we~~ ^{they} had all the standard
instruction books. These had the charm of novelty for most of them,
and they were so delighted with the information imparted that they
often asked ~~us~~ to let them keep the books not only as a memento
of ~~us~~, but also that they might read them for their friends and families
if ever they should reach home. The influence which Catholic priests

Convent of Mercy, St. Louis, Mo.
Dec. 12 1868

D. Bingham, Esq
Sir

Some time ago we received from you a communication asking for items for the work you are preparing to issue. I regret that we were unable in consequence of our multifarious duties to keep any regular journal or diary during the period in which we were employed in visiting the patients, prisoners, and refugees that crowded this city in war time, - it would be impossible for us to give you an exact account of the number and circumstances of these unfortunates, whom we relieved and consoled in thousands and tens of thousands. One priest alone baptized ^{here} five hundred prisoners. But as priests could not be always on the spot in urgent cases, we baptized many. There was no Catholic chaplain appointed either to the prisons or hospitals devoted to the ~~secessionists~~ ^{or confederals} in this city, but almost all the priests attended daily, without pay, and did all in their power to relieve and console the poor strangers who were brought here ^{under} such unhappy circumstances. The benevolent citizens of St. Louis enabled us by their bounty to ameliorate as much as possible the dreary lot of the poor captives and patients, to whom we almost daily distributed some nutritious food, and such articles of clothing as they required, doing them every little service in our power, irrespective of country, creed or politics, except that we endeavored to do most for the most really needy, our sympathies being chiefly with the ~~unfortunate~~ ^{unfortunate}; as is our invariable custom wherever we are established. Hundreds of soldiers on both sides we found wholly ignorant of the simplest truths of religion - we instructed them whenever we found them desirous of instruction, which was in nearly every case, sooner or later. When asked whether they wished to be baptized and what their motives were for becoming Catholics, their almost invariable reply was "We wish to be instructed and baptized in your religion, Sister, it

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and Sisters had over them was quite wonderful. It was owing in a great measure to the fact, that they came in the name of religion, and assisted the miserable, whether of north or south, Catholic or non-Catholic. You might see convalescents fall upon the neck of the priest on leaving the hospital, and weep most passionately. Often when an exchange of prisoners took place, the men were in tears as they left. Sometimes strangers would watch ~~me~~ ^{the Sisters} to see whether ~~we~~ ^{they} were as attentive to secessionists as to unionists, to Catholics as to Protestants or Infidels - not perceiving the slightest difference, they would question ~~us~~ ^{them}, and when ~~we~~ ^{the Sisters} ~~are~~ ^{then} informed, that ~~their~~ ^{their} religion commanded ~~us~~ ^{them} to serve everyone to the utmost of ~~our~~ ^{his} power, regarding all as children of the same Father and ~~one~~ ^{brothers} in Jesus Christ, and refusing to look upon human being as an enemy, - some would ask to be farther instructed, and others would say: "If ever I profess any religion, I'll go in for yours."

So far as I have been able to ~~experience or to learn~~, all non-Catholic ladies and ministers who endeavored to help the soldiers, required in their similarity of political platform, and that they would need such religious books or tracts as they supplied, - some would not help a Northerner, others would not converse with a Secessionist; except ~~the women~~ ^{that} helping one of ~~the~~ Sisters, who spent four years in the Military Hospitals, chiefly in Mississippi, gives it as her experience, that Protestants of any denomination whatever had no influence on the soldiers. As nurses &c. the soldiers had no confidence in them, saying they committed at abuses, &c. as they were generally paid by Government or otherwise - when patients were neglected, when keepers of military stores &c. neglected to forward necessaries, &c. when physicians neglected ^{their} duty, when under-nurses became intemperate - and all these abuses frequently occurred - ~~some~~ ^{paid} officials, and notably a certain Protestant Society of Ladies, remained silent for fear of losing their places - while Quakers and other Catholic ladies, who took no pay for their services, immediately made

known to the authorities any serious breach of discipline that came under their observation, and insisted on having as far as possible what was allowed for those under their charge, and on the removal of officials who would not perform their duty to the patients. Hence conscientious physicians were always delighted to procure the assistance of the Sisters - an eminent ^{Protestant} physician of this city remarks that as a general rule, the only volunteer nurses of any use were the Sisters. Habits of subordination and of working in concert being totally wanting to "Christian Commission" women, &c. The medical staff often dreaded to see them enter, as it was impossible for all to be rulers, while scarcely any would act in subordination even to the head physician - Nothing could exceed the politeness of the soldiers &c. to us. In no instance that has come to my knowledge did they commit the smallest depredation on our property in any part of the country - so that when sucking towns and villages were being sacked, the inhabitants were accustomed to secrete their daughters and part of their property in our convents. When the war was at its height, our Sisters could travel freely and cross the lines whenever they pleased. In 1861 when the rail-roads were torn up in places, as for instance, on the route between St. Augustine & Columbus, Ga., whenever the Sisters of St. Augustine had occasion to travel to Columbus, the Union Soldiers used to escort them to the Confederate lines, through the woods, and the Confederates bring them to their destination. It was very pleasant on those occasions to see the good feeling manifested between the soldiers of the rival armies - how they gave each other cigars, clothes, &c. and shook hands as friendly as possible - poor fellows they seemed to know but little of the ^{cause of} quarrel which cost so many of them their lives. Both sides vied with each other in showing respect and attention to the Sisters, and doing them every possible service, and the soldiers have endeavored themselves as much to those of us who have been among them as the Crimean soldiers did to our Sisters in Europe in '54, '55, & '56.

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known to the authorities any serious breach of discipline that came under their observation and insisted that those under their charge should get what was allowed to them, and even some ~~officer~~ culpable officials were discharged on their representations.

On this account conscientious physicians were always anxious to procure the services of the Sisters. Even one eminent Protestant physician of the City remarked to us that as a general rule the only volunteer nurses of any use, were the Sisters. Trained to habits of subordination and discipline they always worked with unanimity and harmony. While, among the volunteer nurses of other denominations, the desire to be considered the heads, and other little petty jealousies often led to much insubordination and trouble. Nothing could exceed the gratitude of the soldiers for the Sisters. In no instance that has come to my knowledge, and they commit the smallest depredations on their property throughout the country, for there was always among them, some men

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who remembered and were grateful for the kindness and services they had received at their hands, who were able to restrain their less scrupulous comrades. In Charleston, Columbia, and other places where their convents were destroyed, ~~the act~~ it was not through mistake, but from the abundance of shells or burning houses. ~~It~~ So fully sensible were the people of the South of this, that on the advance of the Federal army, they were accustomed to ~~cross~~ ^{hide} their valuables ~~in the convents~~ and daughters in the convents. When the war was at its height, the Sisters were allowed to cross the lines and never were molested either by an official letter de cache or by the most hardened soldiers. As an instance, the Sisters of St. Augustine had occasion to go to Columbus, the railroad were torn up, so, they had to make the journey as best they could. The Federal soldiers escorted them through their lines, through forest and jungle, until they saw them safely within the Confederate lines, while the latter escorted them to their

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Destitution It was consoling on those occasions to find the horrors of war softened by such kindly acts and to witness the good feeling that existed between the rival soldiers when they met. They shook hands, inquired about old friends and acquaintances and exchanged tobacco, coffee and the like. Poor fellows! They seemed to trouble themselves little about the course of the great quarrel, which was deluging the country with blood. Here they met as friends and brothers, though in a few days they were arrayed against one another as implacable enemies.

They cared little for one another in showing respect and attention to the Sisters tending them any possible little service in their power, and thus endeared themselves to the Sisters who have been among them, or attended them in hospitals, or in prison, as ~~soon~~ the Crimean soldiers did to the Sisters and nurses who attended them during their weary and ~~lengthy~~ ^{lengthy} campaigns.

I will ⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾ add a few ⁴⁴⁴¹⁵¹ anecdotes to ~~what~~ the information already ⁽¹⁰⁾ given. One young man in hospital, dying of typhoid fever, was suffering intensely and seemed in wretchedly low spirits. Being asked whether he belonged to any particular Church or had ever been baptized, he replied somewhat as follows: "No, Sister, I have ^{been} a bad man, but I would ~~would~~ repent and be baptized, if I thought it would be any use for me to do so, but it is now too late." The Sister spoke to him of the sufferings and death of Our Lord, borne for sinners, and the example of the penitent thief who was pardoned at the last hour - while she enlarged on these consoling truths, tears flowed down the poor patient's cheeks, and on receiving some instructions, he asked to be baptized, having previously made with her some short aspirations, including acts of faith, hope & charity. Told his case admitted of no delay, ^{the} Sister baptized him before she left, and he died that night in great sentiments of contrition.

Another young man who became a Catholic, and ^{was for} some time the only Catholic in his ward, on being asked ^{by the Sisters} some days after his baptism whether there was any point on which he would like more information, or anything in the Catholic religion ^{to which} ~~that~~ he was not quite reconciled, replied with great simplicity that only one thing troubled him, and that was his own pride. "I know," said he, "that it is wrong to be proud, but I cannot help being proud of my religion, I'm so glad to ~~myself~~ for becoming a Catholic." After his first Communion for which he prayed ^{and} prepared most fervently, he left hospital to join his regiment. As it was going to battle, he often said that he repined, for he hoped he might be among the fallen, and thus get straight to heaven with his baptismal innocence. & Another soldier, who was weakly from recent illness was recommended by the Sisters to say his prayers sitting or lying down, lest he should overtax his returning strength. But he insisted on kneeling down to pray morning & evening, and used daily retire to a corner of the ward - he being the only Catholic in it - to pray and recite the rosary on his knees. & An old man who had been baptized when

apparently in danger of death, without receiving the whole of the usual instructions, lingered, without any prospect of recovery, for over three months, during which the Sisters having taught him to say the Lord's Prayer and make the Sign of the Cross, ^{he} began to grow better and was soon able to leave. Before being discharged he asked ^{to} take the Catechism with him that he might as soon as he got home teach his wife and children to become Catholics. + A young man dying of consumption, but under sentence of being shot in case he recovered, was baptized and received the Last Sacraments. He became so much attached to the Sisters that he did not wish to take food from any one else. The Doctor kindly humored the poor fellow in this, and desired the Sisters to give him chicken soup and anything else he might fancy, as he imagined anything given him by them would do him good. Among the children ^{the latest} ~~we~~ were permitted to transfer from the Ladies' Prison to the Convent Asylum were two girls, one of whom brought the measles with her, and died soon ^{after Baptism}. The other ^{was} taught to read, and after expressing a wish to become a Catholic, ^{was} instructed and prepared for the Sacraments. The war being over, her father came to gather together his scattered family, but this was the only one alive. Though greatly attached to her father and delighted to see him, she refused to return with him till he ^{had} promised to place her with ^{the} Sisters at school, in the town in Arkansas to which he was going. A young man assisted the Sisters to bring him a pocket book and period to while away the time - they were all accustomed to ask ^{the} ~~for~~ ^{the} ~~for~~ ^{for} whatever they might fancy - Next day ^{they} ~~we~~ complied with his request, but as he was asleep, ^{and} laid ~~at~~ under his pillow. On finding it he ~~found~~ ^{found} it had come and gone, and was very angry with the Sisters for not awaking while ^{they} ~~we~~ were in the ward - ~~These little anecdotes could be multiplied to thousands, but no doubt I have given enough for your purpose. I trust what I have here set down will be of use to you.~~

Wishing you every success in your most laudable undertaking,
I remain
Respectfully yours -
John M. Ignatius

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apparently in danger of death, without leaving the whole of the ~~Lawrence's~~ usual instructions, hungered, without any prospect of recovery, for over three months, during which the Sisters having taught him to say the Lord's Prayer and make the sign of the cross, began to get better and was soon able to leave, fully impressed that it was on account of his acts of devotion and through the prayers of the Sisters, he recovered. Before being discharged he asked leave to take the Commission with him that he might instruct his wife and children to become Catholics. A young man under sentence of death for desertion, was dying of consumption, he asked to be baptized and instructed in the religion of the Sisters. He became very religious and frequently said that he hoped God in his mercy would take him to himself by sufficiency and spare him the horrors of being shot like a traitor. He did not wish to take food from any one but the Sisters and the doctor kindly humored him and ordered the Sisters to give him whatever he desired. The poor fellow's prayer was finally granted and

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he died ^{in prison} having just received the Sacrament.
The Sisters were allowed to transfer from the
prison for women, to the Convent Asylum,
two girls suffering from measles.
One of them died having received Baptism;
The other was taught to read and expressed
in great wish to become a Catholic.

The war being over her father came to
collect her scattered family, but found this
the only one alive. Though greatly attached
to her father and overjoyed to see him, she
would not go until he had to promise
that he would send her to the Sisters School,
in the town in Arkansas where he lived.
There are but a few of the numerous
instances of the reverential attachment
of parents ~~toward~~ the Sisters. It was
not confined to boys but strong men,
who never quailed in the storm of battle,
were as obedient and submissive as
children in the presence of the Sisters.

It is safe to say that ~~thousands~~ recovered, that
would otherwise have died, owing to their holy
influence; and thousands, who knew not what obedience was,
did happy deaths owing to their pious ~~instruct~~ ^{instruct}.