

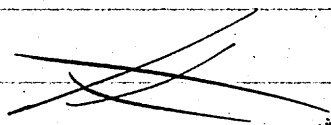
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Chapter XXXI.

The Sisters of Mercy, New York

The Sisters of the Houston Street Convent in ^{the} hospitals -
 Their services in New Bern - ^{sufferings} ~~hardships~~ of the
 patients before the arrival of the Sisters - Strong religious
 prejudices against them at first - The Sisters ^{offer} ~~first~~
 landing - Strange surmises as to who and what
 they were - Touching ^{low} ~~things~~ changed - Touching instances
 of love and confidence - The grief of the
 patients and nurses at the departure
 of the Sisters



The Sisters of Mercy were among the first to offer
 their services to attend the sick and wounded in
 the various hospitals during the late war. Trained
 up to visit the poor and afflicted, their minds were
 in some measure prepared for the sufferings endured
 by the victims of war. Their training and the precepts
 of Charity and self-denial inculcated by their religious
 vows had prepared them for their mission, and
 therefore, their attentions and ministrations to the
 sick and wounded were useful from the ^{very} start.
 No one undervalued this more readily than

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The doctors, of whom, it must be justly said, that they allowed no religious prejudices to interfere with whatever tended most to the comfort and of their patients. After a little time, when they had come to fully appreciate the devoted attention and nice care bestowed by the Sisters on their charges, Protestant doctors were just as anxious to secure their services in hospitals, as the Catholic doctors themselves.

Among the houses that sent forth its inmates on their work of love and mercy was that of St. Catherine's Convent, Manton Street, New York, over which the good and pious Mother Augustine presides. These Sisters were sent to ~~St. Catherine's~~ ~~Convent~~ were welcomed by General Foster, and the following general order was issued by him:

Head Quarters Department North Carolina
New Bern July 22nd 1862.

Special order No 17

*5 D^r Upham., Post Surgeon at Beaufort will put the Sisters of Mercy, lately arrived from New York, in charge of the hospital at Beaufort under his supervision, and assign to them the sole ~~sup~~ charge of each department as he may deem necessary, and they will be obeyed and respected accordingly.

By Command of Maj Gen L. J. Foster
Southard Hoffman Asst. Adjt. General

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soon after the capture of Fort Mifflin to
 General Burnside and Forts, a large hotel on
 the mainland, opposite the Island on which
 the fort stands, ~~which it stands~~, was converted into an hospital,
 but not until it had been completely rifled
 by its Captors, and used, or rather abused,
 as their Barracks. There, many of the survivors
 of that long damp night watch at Red Bank
 came to linger out life's remnant in Consump-
 -tion or ~~The~~ Chills; there the brave men who
 had ~~assaulted~~ ^{besieged} New Berne and taken it,
~~so unaccountably~~ came to await the healing
 of their wounds; some of them disabled for
 life by the super-human labor of dragging
 Cannon into position after the horses had been
 shot down; there, in fine, came numbers of
 these young conscripts, who in the zeal of
 their patriotism, had abandoned the fasci-
 nations of College life, or had given up
 the comforts of a happy, perhaps of a luxurious
 home, to endure the effects of Marsh water,
 Malaria, and hard tack ~~and butter~~.

Now These poor fellows were their own
 nurses, and were forced to improvise
 both means and methods of performing their
 functions as such.

The Department ~~as yet~~ ^{was then} was scarcely organized,
 and the necessary supplies so difficult to
 be obtained that those whose duty it was
 to make the requisitions were disgusted and
 discouraged.

The patients were almost to a man, thrifty New Englanders accustomed to order and comfort and so felt the more keenly the total absence of both. In July the heat became most so intense that even the all sufficing sea was not enough to cool the atmosphere, and the filth so accumulated that the waves, which swept against the building on three sides, and even beneath it, were soiled and even discolored ~~like the scavenger~~ ~~whose office they performed~~.

Sickness was raging and misery had reached the extreme edge of endurance. Just at this time the brave and generous noble hearted General Foster, in command of the Department, visited the hospital and announced to its inmates that he had succeeded in inducing a band of Religious, from New York to take charge of it, and promised that every necessary should be finished.

Notwithstanding all they were enduring, the men shrank from the idea of being relieved by Catholics, by Nuns, creatures whose imperious lives and unimagined aims are so wildly misrepresented in that sort of literature in which many of them were well read.

The most injurious opinions were formed with regard to the promised succour and every

sort of suspicious whispered concerning ^{them} ~~the~~.

Very soon the religious arrived and it must be confessed that their first appearance was calculated to make impressions semi-tragedy.

~~Let me invite you to witness it.~~

Imagine a diminutive steamer of southern build, exhibiting the most nonchalant absence of design, and the most abetment application of paint, approaching a low projecting wharf, in a dense rain; ~~now it is~~ ~~more~~ sullen barolismus smut.

Negro and ~~chew~~ Yankee have united their efforts to secure it, a gangway of the simplest construction is laid down, and a band of inscrutable women make their appearance — Two, Four, Six — nay Seven of those unfathomable veils —

What is hidden behind them? "Widows in search of the mortal remains of their husbands," answered the astounded "Nigger" Chief mourners over the country's peace and happiness, said the unconsciously poetical ex-
Collegian; "jesuits" sneered the bigots; "female jesuits" carrying all the craft and subtlety of their tribe under those ominous black surroundings —

Unaware of these and still more extravagant surmises the sisters made their way

quietly over an unsafe causeway and entered the hospital.

Little preparation had been made to receive them and no welcome was afforded them.

The Doctor, a man of refined sensibilities, felt so much his inability to afford them even the most ordinary hospitality that he kept out of sight, and the horrors were done by an old Mulatto woman, good Aunt Charissey. —

I ~~have since~~ ^{afterwards} learned from some of the best men in the establishment, that they watched the new comers most narrowly, expecting every day to make some wonderful discovery, to find them develop some scheme, either of proselytism or of self-aggrandizement. — Some proof that they formed part and parcel of the very ~~implies~~ ^{implication} of iniquity itself.

When it is added that the place resounded every Wednesday night with Methodist Canticles and Methodist Manifestations of ~~the spirit and Methodist rap-sodies~~, delivered now by white and now by colored orators, the position of the "Sisters of Mercy" may be imagined. How did they fill it?

Simply by endeavoring to do their duty to minister to the comforts of the wretched sufferers around them,

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with woman's adroitness and woman's tenderness as well as with the gravity and reserve of the religious; by keeping strictly within the enclosure of their rules and observances and no doubt by praying earnestly for the accomplishment of the design of Providence, both in themselves and in the poor sufferers. Confided to their cure.

They preached no gospel, They questioned no un-Catholic Conscience, they inaugurated no crusade against heresy or heretics. ~~They lived and died by the rules of their order and as good Catholics.~~

Immediately after the Sisters arrived a general order was issued by Major General Foster, placing the hospital under their charge.

They very soon discovered that the poor officials were so wearied in their arduous and tiresome employment that they would be glad to co-operate with any one, willing to relieve them, and that quartermasters, purveyors, and Commissaries were ready enough to afford supplies when the order of the General in Command backed the requisitions. In a little time, therefore, the whole place had undergone a thorough house cleaning and was furnished with what was really necessary.

The face of affairs brightened up, the first cargo of ice arrived and the very heat was ameliorated.

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By degrees, the unacknowledged influence of the church, ~~was~~^{now} represented by the humble and unpretending Sisters, was seen and felt.

Disorderly conduct was given up, habits of cleanliness and even of politeness were restored, and at last, heretics of the truest blue began to consult the Sisters about their little affairs, to confide to them their family sorrows, and to look to them for sympathy and consolation.

~~This following is a touching~~ ~~instance of that confidence;~~ ~~which was soon forgotten~~ ~~is~~ touching instance of that confidence. A Sister entered one of the wards one morning and at once perceived that the hand of death was laid heavily on one of her patients; an elderly man, quiet and uncomplaining, a Bostonian, and of course not a Catholic. She took her place at his bed side and wiped the death drops from his brow; a grateful look of recognition passed over his face and on making an expiring effort, he took an old pocket book from beneath his pillow, and placed it in her hand, significantly yet silently, for his last word had been spoken. She was understood. She assured him it should be forwarded to his wife, and with it an account of his illness. She smiled gratefully but she had hardly recommended his soul to God when he breathed his last. Another instance of this complete confidence was that of a poor young

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quartermaster, who had worn himself out in the discharge of his onerous duties. He was brought to the hospital he had helped to get up, in fever, and sunk rapidly. He was a gentle, well disposed, moral young man, although unbaptized and unbelieving, yet, when death came nothing soothed him but the prayers of the Sisters and the sight of the crucifix.

He had in his possession a quantity of papers which he said no mortal eye should ever see, not even his mother's, and he entrusted them to the Sisters that she might destroy them. Poor ~~boy~~ he died peacefully after a short busy life with the new grace of baptism whitening his soul.---

There was one poor fellow home sick and sad hearted, who had no less than four likenesses of his wife under his pillow, and was constantly engaged in the contemplation of one or other of them. The Doctors scolded him and his comrades laughed at him, so he flew for consolation to the sister in charge of his ward and flinging all his prejudices to the winds, he declared that she had raised his thoughts to better things, and that he would never say a word against a Catholic as long as he lived. Thus was prejudice overcome, and charity and good feeling took its place —

"The Sister," said a poor young officer as he took his leave after a tedious convalescence

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"I hate my self when I think of the false impressions I was under with regard to religion women and of the way in which I shrank from you at first. But I know better now, and I believe that the religion that inspires such indiscriminate charity must come from God, no matter what men say" —

But why multiply instances. The universal grief of the patients when the Sisters were recalled to the Mother house, some of them broke down completely, and one ^{was} actually ~~was~~ despaired of by the Doctors. — are the best proofs.

The poor expatriated Catholics who were scattered here and there among the patients, and the converts recently baptised and full of their ^{people's} fervour did not ~~feel~~ seem to feel more than the honest Massachusetts men, who declared that they would respect the habit of ~~the habit~~ of a Sister wherever they might see it, for sake of those who nursed them with so much care.

But I have left the poor Negroes out of my sketch. Who can forget their sorrow? Child-like and affectionate creatures, their whole hearts were taken captive by the kindness which so astonished them; they were ready to go with the Sisters anywhere, and it seems had a crude idea that they would surely be taken. It was sad to see the big tears rolling over those poor ~~brown~~ ^{plushy} faces

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and to know that they were likely to be succeeded by others more burning, more heart warming. ~~But I have done.~~

The Sisters left and so great was the respect and almost veneration paid to their very memory that the wing of the building they had occupied was left uninhabited for many months, because the men could not bear to see it filled with the sick and wounded —

Hundreds of patients had passed through the hospital during the stay of the Sisters, yet no one instance of any rudeness or want of respect could be recalled by any of them; not an angry word, not a curse, had ever been spoken in their presence. Time will produce the harvest that was then sown, it is to be hoped, by proving the better state of feeling between those who differ in religion. by checking the current of prejudice and by preserving Catholics, from many of the insults it would have produced.