

THE CRUTCH.

Charles Boswell, - - - - - Publisher

U. S. GEN'L HOSPITAL, DIV. 1, SATURDAY, DEC. 3, 1864

The Prisoners.

Last week, was one of unprecedented activity and interest in our Hospital. Twenty-eight hundred paroled men were landed at the wharves, amid cheers, the waving of flags, martial music, and the enthusiastic welcome of hundreds, who had been looking anxiously for some days, for the fleet bearing our long-promised sufferers.

For the credit of humanity, be it said, there were men in this pitiable crowd of hungry, naked, and dying ones, with sufficient spirit and vitality left to permit them to demonstrate their unbounded joy and thankfulness as the impulse of the moment suggested. The first man who touched the wharf drew in a long breath, gave a shrill whistle, and a little leap into the air;—then he gave a look into the sky, but said not a word. The sudden gleam in his eyes, spoke for him;—a new creed was his;—he believed in a beneficent God, and happiness.—The sun was pouring life out of that bright, beautiful sky, and as he cast his hollow eye over the well-clad, well-fed denizens of "Godsland," hope and joy, strangers as they had been to those wan features, suffused them anew, with warmth, and he went on his way rejoicing and alone, not knowing or caring whither, since he was free, and the old protecting flag was just above him, nodding and waving consent to his fervent hopes, and wildest wishes! Directly on his steps, came the victims of twelve, thirteen and eighteen month's imprisonment, in the most loathsome pens Southern ingenuity, and cruelty could devise!—their skins discolored, their uncovered hair faded and worn, their long fleshless limbs purple, trembling, and calloused from exposure; their faces void of hope, grief, or perception! For them, there were but few hours in "Godsland;" a breath of its clear air—a glance at the green sward—a benediction of sunshine, while passing from boat to ward—a kind word of welcome from strangers, whose hands are filled with plenty—a mutual sorrowful recognition—and the doomed one is gone! His last journey is smooth and certain;—no storms can delay, or seas divide the spirit's flight. The flag he has dreamed of day and night, clings lovingly around him now, and the saddest, sweetest music echoes to unknown spheres, the requiem of the loyal dead; loyal, through pinching cold, knowing hunger, taunts, threats, heart-breakings, and the haunting thought of a prison-grave! Can the world match such heroism?—can any other cause boast such martyrdom?

"This is a 'bully' turnout!" said a young, hatless, shoeless, soldier, as he wended his way along with the procession, moving slowly from the boat;—"Say, is this fourth of July comrade?" On being answered that it was about Thanksgiving time, he said—"All right, I knowed it was *something*!" "No! you needn't look at my beard with ser much envy strangers," said a long rollicking Hoosier, with a fresh cud of tobacco in his cheek, and a dingy grey blanket thrown over his shoulders. "It looks purty rough, but I swore the rebs shouldn't have a hair on it; its only a year an' a half old, an' I've got all t' belongs to me, think I haint?" No one of the bystanders, who saw the long, red, shaggy mane, had any desire to dispute the owner's right of possession; and he went on, chuckling over this strange trophy of his long-exile, as if he had found a prize!

While many steps grew elastic and quickened with the excitement of the hour, others became feeble, and many, too weak to accomplish the long desired walk on free-land, sank down on the first resting place, while the spirit was as blithe as a bird. Going up to one of these, whose face could scarcely be distinguished from the heaps of rags in which he was half enveloped, we asked how he felt, now he was released? "Well,—an' I fear my mind is clean gone, for sure I'm in Godsland, and still I'm loath to believe it," was the simple reply. In an hour he was in the still "better land" where the weary are at rest." * * * * * In every lot of prisoners we have seen, are more or less, boy-soldiers, mere children, whose condition never fails to excite the

liveliest sympathy; they are always brave, evince wonderful powers of endurance, and are sensitively alive to the magic word "Mother," when every other means have failed to elicit notice, or reply. The boy-soldier wrestles with death, as with a bitter foe; he glories in the flag, and clings to it with the ardor of a veteran;—but, after weeks of racking pains, inward trials, miserable defections of hope, follows a sweet insanity, in which he recalls home and mother, and the deep delight of warm glad summers, or the fitful firelight playing on faces that still star his dimmed vision, like angels.—We trust there is consolation for the bereaved mothers throughout this wide land, in the thought that there are willing hearts and hands here, that seek tenderly to alleviate the needs and wants of these unfortunates, as soon as known; and, that the whole country may feel confident that Maryland never welcomed to her shores more grateful visitors than the paroled prisoners of whose advent here, we have given but a feeble, and brief picture.

For the Crutch.

Be Kind to Each Other.

"Be kind to each other through weal and through woe,
For there's many a sorrow for hearts here below;
The storms of this life beat around us in vain,
If we're kind to each other in pleasure and pain."

The light that glimmers in the far off distance, as we wander through the forest, lost and overtaken by the shades of night, awakens the most cheering emotions. The flower, the last bloom of summer perhaps, just peering above the thickly scattered autumnal leaves, attracts us, and by the absence of all others, excites our admiration. Thus, by these two instances, where solitude reigns, we would illustrate the effect of kindness towards each other in this world of jarring interests, of trials, of disappointments, of wars, of blighted hopes, and broken hearts. That light that we descry in the distance, is not so gladdening to the heart, nor that lone flower, so beautiful among the sear and yellow leaf, as one, a gentle spirit, all glowing with goodness, and bent on purposes of mercy and love, who meets you in the hour of adversity. Such a spirit is born of Heaven.—The example of the Great Benefactor, who "went about doing good," is imitated and portrayed, in the whispers of sympathy, in the deeds of charity, and in the kind and gentle disposition, shown to the sorrowing and suffering heart. We are all one family. We are all the offspring of our common parentage. And if the life of one has been checkered with scenes of sorrow and disappointment, we, who have escaped these, are not free from all interest in their condition. Our province is to comfort, cheer, and relieve their moments of sadness. This celestial spirit should find a home in every bosom. We should be kind to each other. For we have the same eternal Father—the same loving, merciful Saviour—the same blissful, eternal home, for which we are striving. What a world it would be, if we all felt and realized the truth that we were one family. And are we not one family? Certainly we are. Humanity is one. We are one brotherhood. And when we are kind to each other, we approach nearer to Him, who became a brother with us, and who assumed our nature for the good of all the race. Does one of this family err? Have they fallen? Has temptation beset them? And has it been too strong for weak and frail nature? Ah! well, we may not cast them off. Who does not err? Who does not give way to temptation? Our faults and failings may not be so glaring, but it is ours to pity, to mourn, that one of the same humanity has fallen. Gentle words act as a lever to raise up the fallen; but harsh speech, unkind words, crush the spirits, and sink the erring one to a lower degree in vice. In many things that occur around us we may learn the value of kindness. What objects do we most admire—or what excites the most soothing and pleasant feelings? Always those which are clothed with an air of gentleness. The unchained hurricane inspires feelings of terror. But it is the soft breeze which soothes the sinking invalid, and calms and sustains the man of toil, that we most love. True, the dashing and foaming torrent is grand; but the waters that pass on and form themselves into the river, flowing quietly and placidly from the scene of noise and confusion, and winding

On the thirteenth of November we started for Richmond, Va., via Columbia, S. C. Fifty of us were crowded into a dirty, filthy box car, where we were kept day and night, without egress from the car, notwithstanding many of our men were suffering from chronic diarrhoea. After four days in this condition, we reached Richmond, the great rebel capitol. Here I was put into the famous Libby prison. In a few days we were shipped to Danville, Va., where we remained till the middle of April. Here seven hundred of us were crowded into a large brick building formerly used as a tobacco warehouse. We had just barely room to lay down on the floor. The room was open and cold, and we were without blankets. The rebels had stripped us of all the warm clothing that we had, leaving many of us barefooted and bareheaded. We remained in this condition all winter without fire, having but one meal per day. It consisted of eight ounces of cold corn bread, without sifting and without salt,—the corn and cob all being ground up together; about two ounces of meat and one table-spoonful of black beans, our bean soup always being covered with black bugs, and sometimes we have been one and two days at a time without a mouthful. I have often eaten my little ration of meat when it was nearly half worms, and so rotten that man could not eat it except in a starving condition. I have eat my beans and soup when a fourth was bugs and worms, and these were common accessories. Mr. Gardener, an acquaintance of mine from Louisville, Kentucky, got hold of the eyes which the rebels had cut out of a beef's head and thrown away. He put them into a tin cup, passed them to the rebel guard who boiled them for him. They then passed them back to Mr. Gardener. I saw him sit down and eat them. Many of our boys perished from cold and hunger. Scores of them were swept away by fevers, small-pox, and other diseases. To-day I am the only man living out of the sixteen who were vaccinated on the 15th of December, 1863. Some of the men had their arms amputated, but it did not save their lives. Mr. Parker, a young man from New York, belonging to the 16th Regulars, and myself, lived to reach here, but Parker, poor fellow, has since died.

I have been six months in this hospital under medical treatment, and my arm is not well yet. I was paroled on the 2nd of May last, and brought to this hospital. I had been reduced by starvation until I weighed only one hundred and eight pounds. I now weigh one hundred and sixty. My arm is improving. I don't know that I will ever be fit for the field again, but if I am I have no greater desire nor higher ambition than to return to the strife and help punish and bring to justice these demons in the shape of human beings. I hope the loyal people of our once happy and prosperous country will be awake to their interest this fall and aid Gen. Grant in striking the finishing blow to the Confederacy, by electing Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, for the coming four years.

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FRENCH.—When the French papers do set out wonders in natural history, they beat the English out of sight. One of them tells that a hare was recently surrounded by inundation, and had no means of safety but climbing up a willow tree, and perching like a bird, on the topmost bough. A countryman discovered it, took a boat, and rowed on an expedition against the life of poor puss. He reached the asylum, pushed his vessel to the shore, and began to ascend the tree. It was no time for a hare to hesitate; with infinite promptitude, as if about to be seized for high treason, our furry friend took one leap into the boat, and loosening it from the bank, sailed to the neighboring coast, where it disembarked and escaped. Meanwhile the invader was compelled to wear the willow, and seek his own preservation by occupying the hare's abandoned seat till at last he was rescued by his friends.

A GOOD SIGN.—A lady that would please herself in marrying, was warned that her intended, although a very good sort of a man, was very singular. "Well," replied the lady, "if he is very much unlike other men, he is much more likely to make a good husband."