

**THE STORY OF
AUNT BECKY'S
ARMY-LIFE**

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The story of Aunt Becky's army-life by S. A. Palmer

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P R E F A C E.

IN presenting the following unpretending story of the hospital-labors of Mrs. Sarah A. Palmer to the public, it was thought best to give it the autobiographical form, as it was found in her diary of three months, and in repeated and extended conversations with her almost daily during the period of its writing.

A full diary had been kept up to the occupation of City Point as a hospital-base, but was lost with a trunk of clothing, and never recovered.

She relies on memory for the date of many incidents, and should they be found incorrect, begs it to be remembered in extenuation of the errors, that her mind was so filled with the anxiety, and her body so wearied at times with watching, that it would be strange if everything was laid away in its proper niche in Memory's store-house.

There is no gild of fiction over this plain story; the events are related as they occurred, and hundreds will attest to their truthfulness.

That "Aunt Becky" was well beloved by the soldiers of the Ninth Corps, numerous and unobjectionable testimonials have been received. Said one soldier, who served three years in his regiment, "I never knew a woman so much thought of as she was by the boys—she never showed any partiality—we all got the same attention—officers no more than privates."

Said another, when asked if he ever knew a matron called "Aunt Becky," in the Army Hospital; "Know her—I guess I did—she saved my life;" and forthwith all business was dropped for the time, while he hastened to find her home.

With no thought of publishing her hospital life, it was suggested to her that she should do so, as a duty to herself, that through its sale some provision might be made for her future comfort.

With health broken by exposure, and spirit saddened by the many scenes of death which she witnessed, and the constant sight of painful wounds, she returned home, weary and worn, feeling, as she expressed it, "As though she had not had sleep enough for years." Not even allowing herself a week for rest, she went to hard and unremitting toil again.

It was talked of amongst the members of the One Hundred and Ninth Regiment, that a memorial should be presented to Congress, stating what her services had been, and asking an appropriation of

two thousand dollars with which to purchase her a home. The "Story" had been thought of in the meantime, and her reply was, "Let those who would help me buy a book, and then they will get the worth of their money. If I have done anything for my country's soldiers, I am glad of it; but Congress has enough of its own little bills to pay."

Now, with a heart too large for the slender frame which holds it, no weariness is brought up as an excuse when a sufferer calls for aid, and her readiness to watch by the bedside of the sick and dying is widely known, and many drafts are made and honored upon the broad humanity which, although "the feet were worn through till blood wet the shoe soles," has not withheld its hand from those who asked and needed help.

It was an undertaking from which many shrank, because the cry was loud, "It is no place for women," and although many dared to brave the tide, few held to post longer or more faithfully than she. Some swept with silken trains through the well-kept hospitals, ordering what should be done, and one, as she held up her sumptuous riding-habit with her jewelled hand, looking scornfully on the humbly-apparelled woman who was dressing a painful amputation, said, "That is no work for you."

But *her* heart said anything was her work which

would soothe one throb of pain, and she quietly kept on with her task.

There is no high-sounding record of what those women did, who, in plain, hoopless dress, recognized as army nurses, on a pay of twelve dollars a month, stood by the beds of death-struck soldiers—combing out locks of matted hair, binding up their wounds, and smoothing out the pillow when in the delirium of pain they called for mother, wife, or sister.

Here was a hand which shrank from no festering wound, which recoiled not when the blood and dirt of the deadly trenches bespattered the torn uniform—she washed away the grime of battle smoke from faces unrecognizable through the mask surrounded with the locks of tangled and scorched hair. Her hand fed with pitying gentleness many a one whose good right arm, mangled by shot or shell, lay food for the worms. Surely a reward should be due her for this faithful toil, even if the pages of her story failed to bring an interest to those whose hearts have bled, and been well-nigh broken before the stroke of battle.

Many were "Unknown" who were brought into those hospitals—perhaps it was her hand which closed the eyes of him for whom *you* mourn—perhaps it was her hand which helped to make decent the shroud in which your noble one was brought home to you