

**MEMOIR OF EMILY
ELIZABETH
PARSONS**

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Memoir of Emily Elizabeth Parsons by Emily Elizabeth Parsons & Theophilus Parsons

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EMILY ELIZABETH PARSONS & THEOPHILUS PARSONS

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OF
EMILY ELIZABETH PARSONS.
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PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF
THE CAMBRIDGE HOSPITAL.

BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN, AND CO.
1880.

NOTE.

DURING the late war, my daughter served in the military hospitals of Fort Schuyler in New York; Lawson Hospital in St. Louis; on a hospital steamer on the Mississippi, from St. Louis to Vicksburg; and in Benton Barracks Hospital in St. Louis,—from October, 1862, to August, 1864. This Memoir consists mainly of letters which she wrote from those places. It was prepared only for private distribution among her friends, with no intention of sale or publication. But the letters contain many details of hospital life, and of incidents of the war connected with them; and they who have read them think the book may have some interest beyond that which arises from a personal regard for the writer of the letters. An earnest effort is about to be made to establish, upon a permanent foundation, the Cambridge Hospital, instituted by her in 1867; and I have been urged, by those whose opinions I am bound to respect, and who are foremost in that effort, to permit the publication of the book for the benefit of the Hospital.

THEOPHILUS PARSONS.

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MEMOIR
OF
EMILY ELIZABETH PARSONS.

NOTHING could be farther from the wishes, the tastes or habits of my daughter Emily, than an effort to magnify the events of her life into undue importance, or to found upon them claims for unusual regard. But she had some peculiar traits of character, and some unusual opportunities for usefulness, in connection with the civil war, of which this brief and simple record may be interesting to the friends for whom alone it is intended.

She was born March 8, 1824, and died May 19, 1880.

From her childhood she manifested more than common energy, and a disposition to earnest and persistent activity. But this natural tendency was combated and suppressed, to a large extent, by

many physical hindrances. These were so oppressive that they who knew best what she did, and under what disadvantages she labored, could not but be surprised that she was able to accomplish so much. But she never seemed to yield to dispiriting circumstances; or, indeed, to obstacles which it was possible to overcome.

When about five years old she ran a sharp pair of scissors into the pupil of her right eye. The wound soon healed, but the iris and the lenses were badly torn, and the eye, though not much disfigured, was so much injured that she was entirely unable to make any use of it. A sympathy with the wounded eye, or, perhaps, the extra work thrown upon the other eye, weakened it, so that she never had that unimpeded sight that they have who possess healthy organs.

When seven years old, she was extremely ill with scarlet-fever. The disease left her totally deaf. From this she gradually recovered, and in adult life was able to hear whatever was distinctly addressed to her, but could not join freely in general conversation.

When about twenty-five years old, she injured an ankle very severely, breaking some of the cords. It was exceedingly painful, and for some

time she made no use of her foot. It gradually grew better, but never entirely well; and she was under medical treatment for it at brief intervals during her life. She could and did walk a great deal, seldom complaining, although the pain and weakness sometimes compelled entire rest. But she suffered much from lameness, and when obliged to stand or walk for a long time continuously, the pain compelled a temporary abstinence from all use of the foot. But as long as it was possible to discharge her duties, she did so, regardless of the suffering, and yielding to it only upon strict compulsion.

None of these hindrances, nor all of them together, prevented her from doing all in her power to relieve the suffering of any whom she could reach. This seemed to be her prevailing purpose. She had only the opportunities which offer themselves to unmarried women who seek for them, until in 1861 the war of the Rebellion broke out. She at once declared her desire to enlist in the army as a nurse. I confess that I yielded to her wishes with great reluctance; for it seemed to me that her blindness, deafness and lameness, offered obstacles to her usefulness as a hospital nurse which could not be overcome. But her wishes were too

strong to be resisted. She knew the difficulties under which she labored, but earnestly desired to make the effort and do as much as she could. She was advised by those who knew, that there was an abundance of willing but uninstructed service of this kind offering; and she attended the Massachusetts Hospital, in Boston, as a volunteer nurse, sleeping at home, but passing her days in the hospital. There she was kindly received by the whole medical staff, and carefully instructed in such work as might be required of her in the duty she proposed to undertake. She remained more than a year, — until she was assured that she was entirely competent to do useful work as a nurse in a military hospital. Then she volunteered in that capacity.

She was at once appointed to the hospital at Fort Schuyler, near New York, and left home for that hospital Oct. 15, 1862. Under the labor and exposure of the post, her health broke down, and in the beginning of 1863 she went to New York, visiting a friend. In a few weeks she was summoned, somewhat urgently, to St. Louis. Without any delay, she went at once from New York to St. Louis, and reached that city on Jan. 26, 1863. The hospital there, called