

**A REMINISCENCE
OF
THE WAR OF THE REBELLION**

by
Mary Gemeny
(March 10, 1836 - January 10, 1937)

A True Story
Dated
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Authors Forward

At the very earnest request of my children, I will try to write a short history of my painful experiences during the War of the States, that they may have a correct knowledge of their father's troubles and the circumstances leading to his cruel imprisonment, he being a prisoner of War nearly two years. They have always been so interested in little recitals of our experience that I realize how satisfactory it will be to have this retrospect to refer to. I regret that I did not write it sooner while my faculties were brighter and before so much had passed out of my memory that I find it impossible to recall. But the main points and scenes are still vivid in my mind and enough to prove that God will never forsake them that put their trust in Him, however great the mistakes we make in life.

Mary Gemeny

August 14, 1913

In the spring of 1861, when the country was all in commotion over the election of Abraham Lincoln for President, we were living in Baltimore City where I was born and reared. My husband coming in there from Virginia when only seventeen had from that time made his home there. We were married in 1855 in Hartford Avenue Methodist Church of that city. There are some still living who will remember the occasion as it was quite an imposing scene, being a double wedding, my sister, Mrs. William Ashley being married at the same time.

At the time my story begins I had three children, Harry five years, Wilbur three, and Minnie, a babe of six months. It will not be necessary to repeat history; you have read of the exciting time we had there that spring, of the riot the day Lincoln passed through on his way to Washington, the bombarding of his train as they supposed (but you know he had eluded them). The excitement ran high, everything in a commotion for weeks, all business stopped and like hundreds of others my husband was out of employment. I had been very sick and was still in a very weak condition; they had cautiously kept me in ignorance of the conditions, at least the extent of it, but the doctor advised that I should be taken to the country or some place of quiet where I would regain strength.

The country home of the Gemeny's in Virginia where his mother and eldest brother lived was the place immediately decided on. My father, who had been a close observer of the growing troubles in his older and wiser judgment, saw that it was a wrong move, and protested strongly against it. Knowing Mr. Gemeny's strong Union sentiments, he advised him to keep out of Virginia. He knew he would find it a hotbed, but my husband could not believe that the old state that had given us so many illustrious men and the birthplace of the Father of our Country could ever secede. So with this firm fend hope inspiring him he proceeded with his arrangements and one beautiful afternoon the latter part of March or the first of April, I do not remember the date, found us sailing down the Chesapeake Bay. The afternoon was so pleasant that I was braced up with pillows in a big chair on deck looking over the waters taking in scenes that had become familiar to me; as I had taken the trip several times before; my husband very happy as he walked the deck with his two little boys, answering their numerous questions or sitting by my side enjoying with me the invigorating breeze, how could we see the maze this seemingly pleasant path was leading to! The following evening found us safely landed at the beautiful country home of the Gemeny's, "Pleasant View", but two miles from Kinsale in Westmoreland County, Virginia. It had been rightly named, a very inviting looking home as you approached by the long carriage drive lined on either side by locust trees and standing on a slight eminence commanding a fine view of the surrounding country. And from the observatory can be seen plainly the light house at Piney Point on the Maryland side - a home with all the comforts of city life inside, and outside all the enjoyments of country life. It was here we had spent the first year of married life, as he had a large contract for work that was a good paying proposition.

As we now walked those familiar paths, reminded of those happy days, how little I dreamed, that in a few short weeks I would walk those same paths alone, with an aching heart, and my little boys looking at my distress in astonishment and asking, "Where has my Papa gone? Can't we go to him, Ma!?"

It was not long before we discovered we had made a great mistake, had taken a wrong step, that my father knew what he was doing when he advised us not to go. Every member of the family and nearly every one he would meet were strongly in sympathy with the Southern movement; and with his strong, firm Union sentiments, he found himself very unpleasantly situated, and he had intended to retrace his steps homeward in a short time, but seeing I was being as greatly benefited in health was anxious to remain a little while.

Only a few weeks had passed, when, to our great astonishment, the war was proclaimed, and the blockade was put on. All travel between North and South at that point ceased, except a small sail boat or row boat that went over two or three times a week, to take parties that wished to go North. There were some days allowed for this exchange, but I do not now remember how many. The hotel was soon crowded with people wanting to go over, many of them merchants anxious to renew their stock while they could. We hastened to engage passage with them, and went down to the wharf many times, to find the seats all taken or crowded to a dangerous point. So we would have to return home disappointed. Thus from day to day we waited hoping the rush would cease. During this time the men of the place had been formed into a company of militia. Captain Sanford, the Captain of the company, was the family doctor, and an intimate friend. He advised my husband no to wait longer as it might cause him trouble, but to go with the crows and leave me and the children until the rush had subsided and we could go more safely, promising he would interest himself in giving what assistance he could. So, taking his advice, he went, and I returned to this mother's home with a sad heart.

While we could not see the sorrow and trouble to follow, yet we knew we were placing great uncertainties between us, as that was the last day of the armistice allowed, I would have to go with the blockade runner at night, making it a perilous trip, and enormously expensive; some paying as high as fifty dollars, when the case was urgent. One of the men had promised to be very reasonable with me in his charge, and would let me know when there would

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be room for me. Of course, they did not venture often, only on dark nights that were free of storm. Three long anxious weeks had passed and I had not yet succeeded in getting away. During this time the militia had been ordered from that point for general muster, and a strange company was sent there to guard that landing and the neighboring country, which proved a sad circumstance in our case.

At last I had received word that room would be reserved for me the following evening, and I was very busy making preparations for my departure, with mingled feelings of joy and fear, for I was exceedingly timid, and it was to me a fearful undertaking. While thus engaged I saw a servant man of one of the neighbors on horseback coming to the house in great haste. Ms. Gemeny went to the door to learn his errand. He was greatly excited and exclaimed:

"Missus, tell Marsa Benny's wife to come down to the landing; he is there in a big Yankee Gunboat, which has come to take him away. Tell her to come quick; everybody seems powerful scared, and pears like they is going to be some trouble."

I was greatly surprised and excited, for I knew he had not come in that formidable way from choice, but could not see through it. By all helping me we were soon ready and as the carriage was waiting at the door, we were not long in getting there. There was a stretch of woods that hid the wharf from view until a turn in the road a short distance from it brought it to our sight. Just before reaching this turn I saw the company of soldiers standing in groups and two soldiers with guns mounted, patrolling the road from side to side. As I approached they crossed their guns in the middle of the road and called to me to halt. The captain then stepped up to me and said, "Madam, we have held a council of war, the result of which is, you cannot pass this line. It is one of our oaths that we give no aid or help to the enemy and your husband had openly avowed himself our enemy by this act. We forbid you to pass this line to go to him at the penalty of death."

I tried to use persuasion, but could not move them. I then grew desperate and declared I would pass at any risk. Picking up my baby girl and telling my little boys to come on, I started. The officer rushed in front of me, then taking hold of me, held me firmly until my husband's brother, who had brought me down, and a friend came to me and pleaded with me not to attempt it. I then asked what they proposed doing. He said if I would write a note saying I would not come it would perhaps save hostilities between them; otherwise, there might be a skirmish in a short time. I told them I positively would not write those words. The whole neighborhood was in a state of alarm and many pleading with me to do or say something that would spare them, so after finding they would not yield to me, I wrote these lines.

"My dear husband, I cannot come."

The officer hesitated a long time, knowing they would understand, but when he found I was firm, dispatched a messenger with the note to the boat and hastened away not knowing what the result would be. My husband told me later, when explaining it all, that he had to plead with the captain as if pleading for life to keep them from firing on the place and insisted on bringing in more force the next day and taking me by force, but he had no desire to endanger life and property of friends and relatives living at that point and finally induced them to move out and take him back to the Maryland side to decide on some other course.

I can never forget that sad ride back home; it seemed more than I could bear, but it was only the beginning of the deep sorrows that I was to pass through. It was well I had learned the true source of help when all else faileth. To the great relief of the people in the vicinity the boat finally moved off quietly and order was restored, but no confidence, for they hourly expected that the boat would return prepared to take us by force.

We will now go back to the afternoon that Mr. Gemeny left me and follow him up to the present time and explain this apparently wrong step. They had a safe voyage across the waters, landing at Piney Point on the Maryland side. He secured a room at the Hotel where he remained very contentedly for some time, hoping each day would bring me to him. When day after day had passed and I had not come, his anxiety became unbearable and he began to plan some way to go for me. He went to the office of General Dix, Commander of the Flotilla on the Potomac and surrounding water, and asked permission to take a row boat from there and come for us, explaining his situation. The General advised him that that would be a very unsafe way, and refused that privilege. He said, "If it be true that you have a wife and children that you wish to get, we will get them for you any day that you will accept our methods. Until you do, we will hold you in suspicion."

He hesitated, knowing what he meant, and knowing also what a great excitement a gun-boat going down the Creek to the landing would make, but never dreamed of the warlike reception with which they were met. Seeing resistance was useless, he accepted the General's offer and the next day allowed them to take him on board this boat (the captain's name I have forgotten.) As they were nearing land his feeling of distress gave way to joy, thinking in a short time that we would be with him, and hoping he would be able to see someone to whom he could explain the situation and perhaps appease their wrath. The officers landed under a flag of truce, made know their business and

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requested that I be sent for. They paid the messenger to go and get me. After waiting three or more hours, they demanded an interview with me on the cause of the delay. They were then handed the note they had compelled me to write. The officers could see plainly that it was their refusal, not mine, and were so enraged they insisted on getting me by force. Mr. Gemeny had to plead with them not to use hostile means, as it might endanger our lives as well as many innocent friends. Condemning him for not allowing them to use force, and yet greatly sympathizing with him, they landed him again at Piney Point.

He was no longer looked upon with suspicion and patrolled the shores hour after hour, hoping some of his friends would venture to bring me over. After three days of suspense, unable to endure it any longer, he decided he would venture to come for me alone, as he was unable to get any one to assist him in his perilous trip. He secured a large rowboat, from a man that had them to rent and started about twilight. It was a dark night and the waters were rough, but his earnest purpose and fond hopes that we would succeed gave him strength and courage.

After several hours of hard rowing, he was nearing the shore at one of the landings on Kinsale Creek, when he heard the call, "Halt", and the command to land. He was then informed that he must consider himself their prisoner until morning; he would then be interviewed by an officer who would hear his statement. He was greatly surprised to find that he was in the hands of strange soldiers and realized that for the first time the change that had taken place, since he had left there a few weeks before. He was given a blanket, and placed in an empty building, and guards to watch him were stationed at each door. Early the next morning he was visited by the Officer of the Day, and the Captain of the Company, to whom he truthfully explained the whole affair, and imagined that he had their confidence and sympathy and hoped in a short time to be released, but how greatly deceived, you will soon learn.

While this was going on only two miles from me, I was unconsciously sleeping and resting, the first time since the terrible experience of three days previous. That morning I met with the family at breakfast feeling somewhat strengthened. While we were partaking of the meal in almost silence, as our hearts were too sad for much conversation, we saw a colored man coming in great haste to the house. Brother John stepped out to meet him, when he exclaimed, "Oh Massa John, I has bad news for youall, da done got poor Massa Benny down to Kinsale a prisoner, done catch him coming to shore in a row boat all alone. Talking about him being a spy, and I knew that means bad war times, sho thought young Missus ought to know. I am so sorry, mighty sorry for Massa Benny and young Missus."

By this time all were in tears but myself. I was too shocked for tears and I knew there was no time to waste in grief. I must know what it meant and see what could be done, so requesting his mother to prepare me a nice breakfast for him in a basket while his brother got the carriage ready, I hastened to my room to make some change in apparel, first falling on my knees to implore strength and help to bear up under this strange experience.

When we drew near we could see where they had him imprisoned, by the guards patrolling the grounds around the building. I went to the Hotel where the head officer was at breakfast, introduced myself, and asked if I could see my husband. I requested him to accompany me and be with us during the interview, that he might see that my husband's statements to be would perfectly agree with my husband's earlier explanation to him. I was sure there was nothing secret in the unfortunate affair. I asked him what he proposed doing with the case. He said that he had reported the explanation and the arrest to headquarters, and he would have to act now on their orders, but if I could bring in any proofs or recommendations, he would forward them, as it might be several days before his orders would arrive from Richmond. I took courage from this, thinking I could bring plenty of proofs and reference of character that would satisfy them, and in the short interview I tried to encourage my husband when he explained the mystery of the Gun boat affair to me, and his experience since the afternoon he left me. My appreciation of his great devotion, which had so blinded his better judgment, was so great, I felt that nothing in my power would be too large for me to undertake, and left him full of courage and determination with no suspicion of the treachery of that official.

I hastened home and after arranging for the care of my children for the day, started on my important business. My most important call was on Lawyer Mayo, considered the best lawyer and an old and tried friend of the family. It was a long drive to his home, but oh how much longer it seemed on this occasion. The old gentleman seemed pained to hear the sad news and sat with bowed head while I recited my story. Then expressing his deep regrets and rising hastily, he remarked that something must be done, and done quickly, and before I left, he had dispatched a messenger to Captain Sanford, the Captain of the Home Militia, who had first advised him to hasten away, hoping to get a statement from him in time and promising to meet me at Kinsale early next morning and do all in his power for us, advised me to return home as a pouring rain had set in. He tried to speak words of encouragement to me but I suspicioned a thought of doubt behind them. Had the report of the arrest not been sent to Richmond it could have been all straightened out and made plain and satisfactory no doubt. When I was leaving he expressed the deepest regret that such a great sorrow had come into our young lives so soon. I knew his mind was

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going back to the time when he first met me as a bride. My husband had introduced him to me as we steamed down to the Chesapeake Bay on the Old Columbia on my first trip to Virginia. Then one week later as a guest at our wedding reception, or feast I might term it, a very elaborate entertainment given us by Mother Gemeny, a real Virginia banquet that he could not soon forget. It was after dark when I reached home nearly exhausted, but with kind hands to assist me, my wet clothing was soon removed and being refreshed by a good warm supper and assured one had been sent down to our dear sufferer, I retired for rest.

Next morning, though scarcely able to raise my head from the pillow, yet strengthened by a false home, I arose, attended to my little children and prepared to go to the poor prisoner, the first prisoner of war I had ever know. His mother had prepared him a breakfast that she thought he would enjoy and with loving messages I started as early as I thought they would allow me to see him.

When I arrived in sight of the building in which he was confined, I could see there were not guards around it, and on coming nearer saw the door was open and no one was there. I was greatly surprised; then came a thought of joy. Perhaps he had been released. But then the query, "What had become of him?" Why had we not me him on the road?" I had the servant boy drive up to the nearest house and inquire if they knew what had been done with him. The lady informed me that about daylight she saw them put him in a carriage between two guards. She told how he had pleaded with them to wait until his wife got there, so that he might see me once more, but they would not yield to him as it would take all day to reach Richmond.

From that moment all was a blank to me for many days. I never knew just how they got me home, or anything that transpired for many days, as I lay balancing between life and death with brain fever. I can never forget the scene that haunted me continually through that spell. I thought I saw my poor husband in some dismal looking room, crouching in a corner with a frightened look on his face, calling, "Oh Mary, come to me quick." They said I begged them to untie me from the bed so I might go to him. When the fever had gone and consciousness returned, the joy of the family was unbounded that my life had been spared and my three little children would not be left orphans, as they had begun to fear. With good nursing and gentle care, I soon began to mend and gain strength, and when informed that a letter had been forwarded to Richmond immediately after his departure, that day requesting a stay of many proceedings in his case, as efforts would be made to prove him innocent of the charges against him. This, of course, gave me some hope and encouraged me to try in every way to regain health and strength, for I had determined, just as soon as I was able to go on, to try to secure his release.

About six weeks from the time he was taken, I ventured to start with my little family. I had various reasons for taking them, the principal one being the hope that if I secured his release I might get home from there. We had to travel by team over the country until we reached the Rappahannock River, a long ride, I do not remember how many miles, a five or six hours ride at least, and arrived too late to catch the little boat that plied between there and Fredericksburg. We then had to remain all night at a small hotel. I will just mention a little incident that occurred there that rather upset my nerves for a good night's rest.

They gave us the spare bedroom off from the parlor. The evening being a little cool, the lady sent a servant girl in to make a fire in the hearth. After she had a good fire burning, she still remained a long time on her knees before the fire looking very serious and thoughtful. Finally, I said to her, "As I shall not need any further attention to-night you had better go now; you might be needed." She looked up into my face and acted as if reluctant to go, and then said, "I was thinking that if you would let me I would bring in some lightard sticks (meaning light pine knots) and keep up a little blaze all night; I could bring my blanket and sleep all night on the floor." I asked her why she wished to do that. She said, "Well, lady, I allers heard that spirits don't come while de light burns and my dear ole Missus was buried from this room to-day. She was in a big black box with lots of silver on it. It was right there where you is. She was so good I know she has gone to Heaven, and maybe she won't want to come back here any mo."

To say that I felt uncomfortable would express it very mildly, but I talked to her telling her that that was only superstition; that she need never fear of seeing her again here; but if she would try to be a good girl and love God, she would meet her again in Heaven some day. She was a very attentive listener to all I said, and when leaving remarked, "I am so glad you come, lady, you is the bravest lady I ever see." Had she seen my lamp burning bright all night she might have doubted my bravery to some extent.

As the steamboat arrived in Fredericksburg too late for a daylight trip into Richmond, I went to a boarding house near the station for the night, as my train left at an early hour next morning. I requested the maid to come and call me and assist me with dressing the children. When all ready to start, and I had recompensed her for her assistance, I asked to whom I should pay my bill, She answered, "To me, madam," and told me how much. It was so enormous I was inclined to doubt it, knowing how tricky the slaves were sometimes, and inquired if I could see the landlady for a moment. She stepped to a door just opposite, knocked, and informed her mistress that a lady wished

to speak to her. I think I shall always remember the appearance of that woman, she so impressed me. A large portly dignified, elderly lady, very masculine features, a mass of snow-white curls about her forehead and her hair done up high on her head in some kind of a coiffure. She reminded me of paintings I had seen of the Colonial Days. After excusing myself I informed her that I had been her guest over night and would like to know her charge. She replied in a most haughty manner, "What my maid tells you will be correct." Then, in a loud angry tone, she said to her maid, "You should not have allowed this person to disturb me," and hastened to close the door very abruptly. I handed the girl the money and hurried out to the cab that was waiting, feeling deeply hurt. I thought if that was the kind of treatment I was to receive at the hand of strangers, it would require a bigger purse and more courage than I possessed to carry me through, but remembering I was not going forward in my own strength, my troubled feelings were soon calmed and composure restored.

When we reached Richmond, I required the cabman to take us to a nice boarding house. He recommended the Vernon house, in Mayo Street, which I found perfectly satisfactory. When the lady of the house came to make my acquaintance and ascertain my wants, I could see she was a very different person from the other creature I had encountered. That evening I had an interview with her, and explained my business in the city and hastily explained the case to her. She seemed to have a great sympathy for me and in a kind motherly way tried to give me encouragement. Through her I secured a little girl to take care of my little ones when I would be out on business, and next morning I started out on my painful errand to find the prison and try for an interview with my poor husband. I must see his dear face before I could have the courage to do anything. I found the building, and with my heart throbbing almost to suffocation, I entered. Mr. Staples, the keeper of the building, was a very kind gentlemen. He treated me very kindly and regretted that I did not have a permit. He said I might go in and visit my husband, if I thought I could endure it. He would take me to the door of the building, and I could talk with him through the grating. I consented, and in a few minutes, after he had gone to call him and prepare him for the surprise, (as he had been very sick and was very weak), I stood with my hand clasped in his through the bars, and Mr. Staple's fatherly arm supported me until I could overcome my grief. I regained my composure and strength after a long talk with him. After getting instructions from Mr. Staples as to how I could get a pass, I left for my boarding place, feeling unable to do any business that morning.

When I met the boarders at dinner, I thought it evident that the story of my trouble had been whispered around, because of the great kindness and attention shown to me by those near me. One of the guests, a doctor's wife, came to my room in the evening to make my acquaintance, and begged that I would let her know if there was any way that she could assist me. That was very pleasant of course, but I knew the less I had to say to strangers, the better it would be for me under the circumstances.

Next morning, as soon as my nurse girl had come and I had my little ones comfortable, I started on my great undertaking, and oh, what a great undertaking for me of my very timid nature. I often, even yet, wonder how I braved, for it was my first contact with public life. But the courage of woman's love has no bounds. I found my way to General Winder's office, having learned that he had full charge of all prisoners of War in the South. I found him deeply engaged in Official business, but was informed by his clerk that if I would wait he would see me when through. I took a seat in a remote part of the room to be as little observed as possible. As I sat there I was awed by the great commanding figure and the stern unbending manner of the General as he transacted business with Army men in all capacities. When he at last came forward to speak to me and deal with my case, I was greatly relieved by his gentlemanly and gracious manner, even a degree of kindness behind the rough exterior as I had observed it. I had a talk with him. He informed me that I would first have to go to the War Department and learn there just what the charges against the prisoner were, as the case was still held there without being acted upon and that he had received no orders in regard to the case. I then asked for a permit to visit him, which he gave me, allowing me to see him once a day if I so desired, the hours to be governed by the prison rules. I thanked him very sincerely and hastened on to find the War Department, praying for courage and strength for the task before me. I had no hope of seeing the Secretary in person (it was Mr. Benjamin, the first Secretary) so I requested to be shown to his clerk's office. I told him I had business with the secretary and asked if I would be allowed to see him in person, or would I have to prepare it in writing. He said he would ascertain. Here turned in a few minutes and informed me that he would give me a hearing if I could wait until he was through with official business.

He shoed me into a small private room where I waited a long time, but it was a happy wait at that time, for it gave me a chance to compose myself and prepare for the interview. I had waited perhaps an hour when the clerk came to inform me that Mr. Benjamin would receive me, and I was soon ushered into his presence. He politely offered me a chair by his side and gave me his earnest attention. I told him who I was, and asked that the charges were that had been sent in with my husband's arrest. He answered, "A Union Spy." I then asked permission to explain the case to him. He listened very attentively and, I think, he as convinced of the truth of my statement. He told me if it was in my power to prove him innocent and I should have all the time I needed to do so, that through

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letters received, the penalty had been staid and he would see that no action would be taken for a time. He gave me some points of suspicion that were mentioned in the complaint sent in, to help me, and said he hoped I would soon succeed in getting my husband's release. I thanked him for his kind attention and kind wishes from an overflowing heart, for I felt a strong hope that his life would be spared.

The accusations were all false statements, one that he had run away from the militia company, that he had been piloting gun boats into points along the river and creek; and was caught coming in a night in a row boat at the Kinsale landing. The last statement, of course, could be explained; the others I knew could be proven false. Before I had lain my head upon a pillow for rest that night, I had prepared a letter to Lawyer Mayo, and other that I wished to assist me in procuring all the proofs and statements that would be helpful in the case. The morning mail carried these letters, although a night's rest was sacrificed to accomplish it. I must now wait patiently the result, during which time I had visited my husband several times, taking him clean clothing and delicacies in food, and such medicine as I knew would help him. In a very short time, the change in him was wonderful. He had begun to look like himself again, and our meeting which at first were so painful under the terrible circumstances, we could now take some degree of comfort and pleasure in, as hope had revived in our hearts, and we were looking forward to relief soon.

But while there was some comfort in this direction, I was having a new trial to endure. I had been at my boarding place less than two weeks, when I noticed a difference in the manner of some of the boarders toward me, and soon learned the cause. One evening after I had put my little boys to bed, and was rocking and soothing my little girl to sleep, there was a knock on my door. When I answered, I saw it was the doctor's wife, and gave way for her to enter, as she had called in several times for a few minutes in the evening. But, in a haughty manner, she informed me that he had come to withdraw the acquaintance she had pressed upon me, as she had been entirely mistaken in the case. She had learned that he was a Yankee sympathizer, therefore, an enemy to their cause and as such, she had no particle of sympathy. I told her it was against those facts I was trying to bring proof, but as her good will nor ill will could make no difference in the case, she was at perfect liberty to use her own pleasure. I bid her good night, and closed the door before she could make a reply. I took up my babe and rocked her in silence, for I was too disturbed to resume the little lullaby that I had been singing to her.

After this occurrence, I did not feel comfortable in their midst and decided I would seek other quarters. I found the city full, all boarding places over-run and my means would not stand hotel prices. I was about to give up in despair when a lady of whom I had inquired, directed me to a private house where she said I might be accommodated. I applied, and to my great joy the gentleman invited me in, and calling his wife, they talked it over for some time and then he remarked that he would be pleased to have a pleasant boarder. They had plenty of house room and two servants of their own, and as he was often absent for days on business, a lady boarder would be company for his wife, and she would not object to the children. I had no fear on that score, for they had been taught perfect obedience. The price settled on for board was far below what I was paying, so I returned to my room with a much lighter heart than when I started out. So, as is often the case in life, good came out of apparent evil.

Next morning I settled up my bill at the Vernon, telling the landlady I had found a private home that I thought would suit me better. I found my new home exceedingly pleasant, a beautiful large room and everything to make me comfortable, and the food just perfect. I took my children to the dining room but once a day, at noon to lunch, their breakfast and supper I carried to them on a tray. The housemaid had a boy about ten years old, a very smart bright chap. His mother told me I could have him to look after the children, when I was absent or they wished to play out on the lawn, and I could give him what I liked in return, as that would be his spending money. Had I listened to my little boys I would have been very liberal with my tips, as they always got their share of his candy. The gentleman, Mr. D. I will call him (withholding the name for reasons I will give later), was a perfect gentleman in manners but very reticent which suited me well, for I dreaded to enter into much conversation, least I might betray Union sentiments and I had learned that as a Union sympathizer I need expect no quarters from the Confederates. I had told him what my business was to the city without going into minor details. He expressed deep sympathy for me and offered to assist me in any way he could. Mrs. D. seemed deeply interested and so glad she could be more comfort to me and also to the poor prisoner, as she would speak of him. She would have her cook make the nicest dinners and put them in a basket for me to take down to him, and often send papers, books, and little delicacies. I told her once it was amounting to almost a flirtation, but I did not care as he was the one benefited; and you may know I appreciate it, and repaid her by doing what sewing I could for her and her little daughter, as she was not as adept at dressmaking, her talent being music and art. The only unpleasant feature about this place was "From my back window I could see the enclosure and building where they kept the slaves imprisoned, who were to be sold. I had always know of the traffic and read about it, but it was the first time I had ever seen a human being put up on the block and sold like a horse or a piece of furniture at an auction." There would be sometimes heart-rendering scenes at these sales, a child clinging to a mother or mother to a child, that were being separated from each other. Once a man was clinging to a woman, who was going to the stand weeping, and making such loud demonstrations that the

crier rudely ordered him away. The poor fellow cried out, "Massa, I can't help it, if you kill me. I wish somebody would kill me, for you take her from me." If I had been somewhat in doubt about before, from this time on I was in favor of Abolition.

Sometimes when there would be a good number in the jail, they would hold religious meetings and I would enjoy hearing them sing, and often in heart join them in their worship.

The days dragged slowly by and I think two weeks had passed when I was surprised by a visit from a relative who brought me the papers I had sent for, thinking them too important to trust to the mails. They include a large package of Affidavits on the various points beside letters from several important persons. We hastened to the War Department with them and I gave them into the hands of Secretary Benjamin's head clerk, who said he would place them before him at the earliest moment and that I might learn the result at General Winder's office in two or three days, as he might not have time to give it immediate attention. When I went on the morning of the third day I found a letter awaiting me, informing me that all charges against my husband had been canceled, that he would be interviewed by an official and if not an enemy to their cause, would be released immediately.

With mingled feeling of joy and fear, I went to the prison to tell him the glad news. We rejoiced together that his life was saved, and hoped a few more days would need our trials. I did not express myself to him, but felt there was danger of disappointment, for I could see it was only by strategy and misrepresenting he could hope, and I knew what a poor hand he would be at that, with his strong union sentiments made stronger if possible by the treatment he had received, and his great abhorrence of their cause, I could not see how he could dissemble and guard his lips at an examination which might be any day. Two days later when I called he told me he suspected, he had been interviewed by an official, that a gentleman had called at that room, treated him to cigars and papers, and engaged him in conversation for a long time in a very social way. But not until he put some very pointed questions to him, did he suspicion his business. I learned from Mr. Staples that it was an official, Judge Baxter was the name, and he told me in what building I would find his office. I hastened there, hoping to have an interview with him before he had sent in his report, thinking I might influence him some perhaps. I found him, and learned that he was there to investigate the cause, and had already sent in his report. I asked if it was favorable and he said he thought him a good Union man, but would be harmless if given his freedom, which he had recommended. We naturally drifted into conversation, and I found he was formerly a Baltimorean, that his people and mine had been friends. As I was leaving he expressed regret that he had not met me before which I thought suggestive, but it was too late now to change his report. He told me to come to him for any advice I might need. If his recommendation failed in giving him release, in the meantime, he would have a confidential talk with General Winder and report me the outcome.

In a few days after this conversation, Mr. Baxter called on me at my boarding house to tell me there had been a consultation over my husband's case. General Winder had prepared papers for him to sign giving his parole of the city work, which, if he signed, would release him right away. I did not know or understand what the reports were, so of course, I was overjoyed at the prospect and thanked him most heartily for the interest he had taken in the case.

When I went again to the prison the paper was in his hands but he had not signed it. When I entered the room I saw the official-looking document lying on his table I explained, "Oh, it has come," and looking into his face was surprised to see the sad look when I expected he would be all smiles. I said, "Have you signed it?" He replied, "Read it, Mary." It read that he could have his immediate release and work given him in the Navy Yard at the highest wages and the full parole of the City by signing the Oath of Allegiance to the Confederate Government. When I looked up he was in tears and in a passionate outburst of grief he said, "O my dear wife, must I sign my name to that terrible oath of allegiance? I feel that it would disgrace my name for life, a blot on life's pages to hand down to my dear children but for you I would die first. O God, is there no other way?" The air castles I had built in the past two days of a nice little cottage, such as I had seen in my walks, with my little family united again, and my husband with ample means to provide for us, all vanished, and for a few minutes I was dumb. But my admiration for his noble character, my own courage and my own patriotism came to my aid; I was soon myself again, and tried to soothe his excited feelings into calmness. I said, "No, I see you are right, and if you can endure this, I can make my way outside until deliverance comes in some way." He begged me to return to his mother's home before my means all gave out. To comfort him I agreed to do so, but in my mind was planning to get some employment to support me there, where I could see him occasionally and make him more comfortable. I went home with a very sad heart, and was in no condition to appear in the dining room that evening. I dreaded to let Mr. D. know his decision as it was proof of his sentiments, and I knew his sympathy for him, and perhaps for me as well, would cease. In the evening Mrs. D. came to my room to see why I had not come down to dinner. I told her my sad disappointment; I was not afraid of her, for I had learned that her sympathy was on the Union side. I was surprised to hear her give vent to exclamations of approval and praise for his loyalty under such extreme circumstances, and she said she would go just as far as she dared to supply his comforts after I had gone. Her presence was like an Angel's visit to me that

A REMINISCENCE OF THE WAR OF THE REBELLION

By Mary Gemeny

night and I rested better for it. She explained to her husband that Mr. G. had refused to sign their papers as it only gave his parole of the city. He did not consider that his freedom, and he had no money to make his home there. He agreed with him in his opinions, and thought it a grand sham to treat him so, so I still had sympathy.

I went to General Winder to see if there was any hope, or what would be done with the case. He said unless he was willing to take the Oath he would be considered a prisoner of war until at some time in the future, when there might be an exchange of citizen prisoners. He expressed much sympathy for me, but none for my "Yank" as he termed him. In a few days Lawyer Baxter called me to offer his regrets for the turn the affair had taken, and kingly invited me to call on him if I was in need of any assistance. I told him I thought of getting employment in the city and remain near my husband. He said he had seen my writing, and thought I would make a good copyist, and would use his influence to secure me a desk at the Court House.

After considering the matter from all points I allowed my better judgment to rule my feelings and decided I would take my husband's advice and return home to his mother. His mind would be more at rest and I would be saved a great burden of care. It would have taken all I could earn to pay my way, as I would have to employ a woman nurse for the care of the children.

The cool days of November had come and I reluctantly began my preparations for my journey. I could not bear the thought of taking the little ones back without seeing their papa as he was so anxious to see them, but we had not thought it best to take them to such a scene as the prison would have been to them. So, by my earnest request, Mr. Staples said he would let him come to the office and visit us a short time, so on my last visit to him I took them with me. I will try not to describe that meeting and parting it was too painful to recall. I have often wondered how I endured it with nothing to look forward to; but the close of the War or release by death. We were both young (only twenty-five at this time) and I very frail in health, but my faith in God was strong, and surely His All-Supporting Arm was about me on this occasion. I had an affectionate parting with the family and a very pressing invitation to make their house my home if I should come again to Richmond.

We had a long and tedious, but uneventful journey home and found a hearty welcome awaiting us. I passed a quiet winter, taking great comfort in his letters, which came almost every week for a long time. I have one at hand which I will insert here to give you an idea how he passed the time there during his unjust confinement.

My dear, dear wife,

Your very welcome letter has been received. O how eager I am to grasp them when I see Mr. Staples coming with the mail. As he tears it open and glances over it, which he is compelled to do, I tell him you are afraid to write long letters lest he should tire of reading them over. He said that I should tell you to write all you wished, as he did not trouble to read them, but only glanced over them to carry out the rule. So you can give me longer ones now as they are such a comfort to me. I am very sorry Mother worries over my troubles. Tell her to cheer up, there may be brighter days in store for us yet.

I am so glad to hear that Papa's little girl is getting well, I pray that none of the children will be taken from us, and that we may be a united family again some day, I am so glad that John can be at home. How little did he think when he took that boy to raise that he would be a substitute for him in the war.

Yes, dear one, I am still trusting in Jesus and deriving great comfort in trying to work for His cause. There are twelve men in this side of the building now, and I get them together every Sunday afternoon and once during the week, to hold religious service. I read the Bible and talk as best I can, and I am surprised at my ability. There are two of the men that I can call on to pray, and there are several of fine voices for singing, so we make these dismal old walls ring with the old familiar hymns, and it is very refreshing to my soul. I am reminded of the hymn, "A prison a palace may prove, if Jesus but dwells with me there." I am keeping well; Mrs. D. sent me two nice warm shirts when the cold weather came on; I receive magazines and papers from some one now and then, that helps pass the time. Let us try to keep up heart, my precious wife, for I feel that we will live through this, by God's help and be happy again some time. May God hasten the day. Kiss the children for me, I was so amused at Wilbur's prayer. Papa will have to explain that to him some day, and tell him and Harry to keep on praying for me and papa will come some day. Kiss my mother for me, and join me in my Sunday service when you can and now, my dear one, Good-Night".

I will explain what he meant by Wilbur's prayer. One night, when he had finished his little prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep", etc., I noticed he was adding something more to it, and listened carefully. He was saying, "Please God take good care of my papa and don't let them bad men kill him, and when I am a big man, I'll make them Yankees jump up Joe, I bet. Amen." He was our second child, three and a half years old.

The substitute he referred to, was a young man his brother John had taken out of the home friendless, in Baltimore, when a small boy, and who had been brought up in the home as one of the family. He was then eighteen and insisted on substituting for John, in the Army, and was killed in one of the early engagements.

At the beginning of the War the only school for many miles around the country had been closed as the teachers were all from the North. This was the case with many of the institutions of learning in the South. Knowing the great demand for a school in the neighborhood, I decided I would try to get up one as it would help me pass away the unhappy time, and to replenish my means that were nearly gone. As soon as the pleasant days of Spring came, I rented a vacant building and advertised I would open a private school. In a very short time the room was filled with girls and boys, of all sizes and grades but I had been preparing for it some during the Winter, so was pretty well prepared to take hold and make quite a success of it, and it was a great help to me. I must assume a cheerful appearance in the presence of the scholars to make myself agreeable however great the effort.

In May sometime, just before the big fight near Richmond, the prisoners were all removed further South To Salisbury, N.C. After that I received no more letters. I learned from Mr. Staples he had been sent with the other prisoners, but knew nothing more. How anxiously I looked forward to that battle before Richmond, for I knew it was considered by many the deciding struggle. It was the general fear that our Army would enter Richmond and I knew with their Capital gone, their courage might fail and the struggle end. And, as history tells us, it might have been but for the General's mistake that day. I continued to teach through the summer months, still trying to hope against fear. By the first of October my feelings were such I could endure it no longer, and I decided to make another trip to Richmond and try to find out if he was living or dead, and if living make another effort for his release. I saw by the papers the Secretary and some other official had been changed. So, closing my school I began preparing for my journey. Mother and brother both about as anxious as I was, promised to furnish me with means when my own purse gave out. It would have been folly to think of trying to take the children on this uncertain trip, the northern troops had so invaded the country through which I must go, that all regular modes of traveling had been given up. I would have to go all the way by a team of some kind. And now a new trial faced me; I had never been separated from my children a night and how was I going to endure this indefinite absence? I shall never forget the night before I was to leave, the great struggle I passed through. I had prayed for strength for this hour, and thought I was going to be brave. But when I looked at the three beautiful little faces lying asleep and remembered how tenderly they were cared for and how they would miss me, my courage would fail me and in agony of mind I walked the floor crying, "O what shall I do?" Then love and duty on the other side would seem to be calling me so strong that by morning I had grown calm and resolved in the strength of God I would venture. By nine o'clock I was on the way, Brother John taking me as far as the Rappahannock River where I would have to cross in the rowboat over to Tappahannock village. The wind had risen during the day and was blowing a gale when we got to the ferry. The old colored man that ran the boat thought the river too rough to venture over; it was almost like a sea. It would be some miles back to any house where I could stop and I knew how frightened Ma Gemeny would be if John did not return that night, so after much deliberation I told the man I would venture if he would take me. He said, "Well, you is brave little lady, but if anybody can take you over safe ole Uncle Simon kin" and called to his son, a young man, to bring two more cars and go with us to assist him saying we must not let this little lady back us down. After I was seated in the boat I turned to say good-bye again to John and he was weeping like a child. He told me when next we

met that he felt as if that was the last of Mary and Ben, as he called his brother, for he had feared he was dead or we would have had some word from him in all three months that had passed in silence.

The river is very wide at that point, I do not remember now just how wide, but the distance was greatly increased by the waves beating the boat out of its course for a long distance, at time the carsmen had all they could do. One man never could have managed it. When we got out into the roughest water and the boat was riding up one wave and down another, or they would break and splash into the boat, I began to feel frightened. I realized it was so much worse than I expected, but I remembered how the Savior had calmed the waves and that that same Savior was right there with me. While he might not calm the waves, He would take care of me and I believed would bring me safe to shore. In a short time my extreme fear seemed to leave me. Both my fears and the waves seemed to calm to some extent and I shall not soon forget the enjoyable sensation as we glided over the smallest waves as we were nearing the shore. I look upon that as one of God's special providence's over me and you will note many as I proceed.

With the sweat oozing from every pore, the old man at length pushed the boat up on the sand exclaiming, "Dar, praise de Lord, I'se done got you here safe." "Yes," I said, "Uncle, He is the one to praised. While you were doing the rowing, I was doing the praying." "I knew you was," he answered and it heartened me up most powerful too. I paid him very liberal and hastened up to the hotel to find it unoccupied, save by a servant and his family, left in charge of the house. The village was deserted, almost as many others were near the border line. I learned at the hotel that the mail would start from there that evening, and be taken by team a few miles where they would put up for the night. The carrier would have supper there. I engaged supper also, and had no trouble in securing seat beside him in his vehicle of some kind.

It was a moonlight night, a fine team, and a good road, so it did not take long to reach the hotel where I would rest for the night. The mail was carried from this point into the city also by team, a light wagon and two swift horses. I was so fortunate as to secure passage with this gentleman. I had expected I would have to hire a team at a great expense. It turned very hot in the middle of the day, and we had not protection from the sun but a large umbrella. So I was most grateful for one hour's rest at noon when he stopped at a hotel for dinner and to change team. We reached Richmond about six o'clock, and I had him take me to my old boarding place, as would be very natural after having such a pressing invitation. I was received by the housemaid who was delighted to see me, and she ushered me into my room and proceeded to give me all kinds of attention. When I inquired for Mrs. D. she informed me that she was absent on a visit South, but might be back any day. After I was refreshed and rested a little, I went down to the dining room where I met a very kind reception from Mr. D. and his little daughter Dora. I excused myself for intruding in Mrs. D.'s absence and remarked that I would find a boarding place as early as possible. However, he would not hear of it. He said with their two servants everything went on as usual and one more would make no difference in any way, only to make it brighter.

My long ride in the hot sun proved to be too much for my strength. I was seized with a violent pain in my head during the night, which grew worse from hour to hour. A high fever set in during the day and I was quite ill. The family doctor was called in, and Betty was ordered to stay by me constantly to see that every care was given to me. The doctor was successful in breaking up the fever in a few days, so by the end of the week I was myself again. Although very weak, I summoned up all the strength and courage possible, and started out to seek information about my husband. General Winder could only inform me that his name was on the list of prisoners sent to Salisbury, N.C. in May. I then went to the War Department and found his name was still there, proving that he was living a few days previous to that time. I requested a permit to visit him, which was granted me, for I felt that I must see his face before I could take any action in the matter.

In a few days, when a little stronger, I started for Salisbury. The train arrived there early in the morning. I inquire the way to the prison grounds. When in sight of the gate, I saw on a door a sign "Boarding", so I went in, engaged a room for a night, washed and straightened out, had breakfast and then had a talk with the lady of the house, telling her my business in the city. When I started to go, she said she was going to the gate with me; that she was not a stranger, and her visits were very frequent, she would explain later. Showing my pass I requested the guard to take me to headquarters as I had business with the officer of the day who was in charge. He received me very politely, and when I showed the permit he showed me into his private room and told me to make myself comfortable, and said he would have my husband brought to me in a little while. I saw him coming, walking between two guards. He was so thin and pale I did not recognize him until he was quite near the building. I could not wait for him to enter, but rushed out to meet him. He was so rejoiced to see me, but I had to do nearly all the talking, because he seemed to have grown weak in body and mind. I do not think he would have lived many weeks longer under the existing circumstances. Hiding my fears, I tried to comfort and cheer him. When it was noon, I told the officer I would allow them to take him to dinner. I said I would go out, if he would allow me to come again in the afternoon. He replied, "Just remain here, Madam, and I will have a dinner sent in from the hotel, where I take

my meals, for both of you." Then locking the door and placing a guard around the quarters, he left us. So I was a real prisoner for one hour. When he returned, he was accompanied by a waiter bearing aloft a large tray, which he brought in and placed on a table before us. When I remonstrated with him for going to so much trouble, he said he was enjoying it almost as much as we were. We enjoyed our nice dinner together so much, it was the first good appetizing meal he had since he left Richmond and for a long time before, as they had become so strict Mrs. D did not dare to send anything for months.

The shades of evening had fallen before I realized it. We talked and planned, and I encouraged him by telling him I was going to make another effort for his release; so when I left him I could see he had taken on a little hope again which helped us in parting. This kind officer promised me that while he should remain there, he would see that my letters were delivered and that my husband's name would be placed on the list of men having the parole of the grounds around the prison, a walled enclosure. I was glad I had gone; beside the pleasure of seeing him, I had interested at least two persons in his case that might be some comfort to him. The lady, with whom I had stopped, a Mrs. Johnson, formerly of New York City, was a strong Union woman. I soon learned they were people of means and influence and widely known for charity and kindness. I suppose it was this fame that opened the way for her to show kindness to the Union prisoners that she knew were suffering only a block from her house. She would take them oranges, lemons, bananas and crackers and all kinds of things quite often. She knew one of the prisoners, and would call for him at the gate and give him charge of her favors to distribute for her. She promised she would take special interest in my husband hereafter. I can never forget the kind motherly treatment I received from her nor the prayer at evening devotion. How she prayed for the young stranger that had been led by providence to her door, and I felt it was truly so.

When leaving the next day she refused to accept any pay for my entertainment and even accompanied me to the train, bidding me an affectionate farewell. How my heart has always gone out to that woman whenever she has come to my mind. I rested a few days after returning to Richmond to collect my thoughts and formulate my plans for my next undertaking. On the third day I went to the Post Office to see if there was a letter from home, anxious to hear from my children. When a letter was handed me that I immediately saw was from my husband. He informed me that two days after my visit there had called an official from Washington to get the names of all the men that wished to be exchanged, as they were negotiating for a general exchange. He had joyfully accepted the chance and added his name to the list and advised me to go to work on a pass from the lines and permission to go on the exchange behalf. I called on General Winder and learned that General Hill was the official negotiating with the Commissioner from Washington (the name I could not recall) I called at his home and waited his return from business, as I did not know where his office was.

I learned that the statement was correct and if my husband's name was on the list he would surely be exchanged in about two weeks, he thought. After hearing my story he said he would secure me a permit and passage on the exchange boat if I could be there in time. The very unexpected turn in affairs was quite a shock to me. I was so weak I could scarcely walk home and between joy and anxiety about my children, did not sleep much that night, planning a hasty trip for the children, and was ready and waiting next morning when the stage came that would take me ten miles on my journey. At this point I secured a team for another ten or twelve miles where there was a hotel, and there took up lodging for the night; requesting the clerk to let me know if there was any chance to proceed on my journey in the morning. He informed me that during the night a gentleman with a fine team had stopped with him; and if I felt that I could trust a stranger, he would speak to him for me. I told him I would go into the office and speak to him and would then decide. I found him very much of a gentleman, to all appearances, and did not hesitate to make my request. He expressed himself as highly pleased to have company on the long lonely ride, and, after a nice breakfast, we were soon off, being favored with a fine morning.

It was a very swift team and for hours we were sailing over the country at a rapid speed, and for once I enjoyed it. It was so much in keeping with my feelings of haste at that time.

I found him very much of a gentleman. He was a Lieutenant, in the Confederate Army, and was off on a furlough to visit a sick mother living at Tappahannock, or near there. I told him all about our troubles and where I passed through, and what I must still accomplish, that he might know what my business was traveling over the country in such perilous times. We arrived at Tappahannock about sunset. He took me to the deserted hotel and put me in charge of the servant woman; telling her to get me a nice supper and take good care of me for the night. I had only time to clean up and rest a little, when she came and invited me down to supper. Oh, how I did enjoy that elegant meal, and the company of that old black woman with the spotless white apron, and white turban on her head. She had fixed all up to do honor and entertain me. We had returned to my room and after seeing that all my wants were supplied, were bidding good-night, when we were surprised by a noise in the street, the sound of tramping feet, and loud talking and soon we heard them entering the hall below. She put out the light, looked out of the window and saw that they were soldiers. She thought, of course, it was a Yankee raid on the town. We were both frightened,

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but I comforted myself, that they would not suspicion there was anyone in the house, seeing it vacated and almost empty. We locked the door and sat listening in silence. Very soon they all became perfectly quiet and the woman's husband came to tell us, that a company of Confederate soldiers going to some point to join the regiment, had come in and rolled themselves up in their blankets to rest for a few hours, and assured me, that there was no fear of harm. I begged Auntie to stay with me, but she had a very sick child in her cabin and was compelled to go. She went over to one of the rooms, and came back bringing a great long case, containing a shooter of some kind, and said, "I brought you master's gun. If anybody comes to your door, just give them this dose." I told her to take it out of the case and place it on a chair near the bed. I think if she had seen me climbing into bed from the foot of it to avoid coming in contact with that chair, she would have thought I was about as much afraid of the revolver as I was of the men. I had never touched one in my life.

I was so fatigued from my long ride that after I had resigned myself into my Heavenly Father's keeping, I soon was sleeping. I was so dead in sleep that I heard nothing of the noise and commotion of the soldiers going out at daybreak. When I awoke and saw the bright sun streaming in through my window and knew that I was safe, the "Thank God" that escaped my lips, I know reached His ear -- it came from so deep down in my heart. When Auntie came to take me to breakfast, (in slave days all old colored people were termed Uncle and Auntie), she informed me that the gentleman that brought me was waiting to eat breakfast with me. When I entered the dining room he extended his hand and remarked that he was glad to see his charge looking so well this morning.

He then informed me that when he heard the commotion down in the village, he had come down to see what it was, and when he learned that the soldiers were going to stay in the hotel all night, he felt concerned for my safety. There was certainly a lot of kindness in this world for me it seemed. He had taken a room near mine and had kept guard until after midnight, feeling sure that I was safe before going to bed. I expressed my gratefulness, and related the revolver incident to his great amusement. I remembered this gentleman's name a long time, but cannot recall it now. He was a man past middle life, and had never been married, owing to a sad disappointment in his love affairs in his earlier life. He walked with me to the landing where I intended taking the boat, as my valise was heavy. When I bade him good-bye, and thanked him for his kindness, he remarked that all he would ask in return was that I would pray for his safety in battle, and if permitted to return, he might find a good wife with a love as pure and strong as mine. I told him there were plenty of them, that they were the rule and not the exception, as he was disposed to think. Old Uncle Simon was on hand with his boat and "powerful glad to see me again." It was quite a quiet morning and the rowing fine, so it did not take long to reach the other side of the river. At the nearest house I secured a team and was soon on my way home. It was late in the evening when I arrived and gave them a joyful surprise, and oh what happy meeting with my little darlings. With what a thankful heart I gathered them to me resolved that I would never be separated from them again and I never was for an hour, until during the next year it pleased God to take the two youngest to his fold above, both dying the same day of diphtheria, but I will not speak further of that now.

With happy hearts the family all assisted in getting me ready for my final trip, but it was some days before I felt able to undertake it. Inside of the week we started, all feeling so happy that the end of our trouble seemed so near. It was too late to cross the river when we arrived there, so took lodging at the nearest house and the only one near I learned to my great discomfort had a case of measles in the house, but I was given a room so far from the patient, the lady thought there would be no danger. The carriage had gone, so there was no other way but to remain and run the risk.

We were taken to the ferry very early next morning, as I wanted to catch the mail wagon out if possible. The old man was waiting and with two oarsmen we were soon landed safely on the other side and Oh, the relief and thankfulness that I would never have to take very dangerous trips again. I bid good-bye to the old man and told him it was not likely he would ever see me again. He answered, "I will sure think of you; there is a picture up in my head of a little lady sitting in a boat a praying and a rowing for life, guess it is up there to stay. This ole darkey has thought heaps about God since that day my good lady."

Lucky for us the mail was carried in a small covered wagon that day. They used all kinds of strategy in carrying the mail through the country, fearing Yankee interception on the way. I jokingly told the gentleman that he was safe from strikes that day, as they would never think of mail being in the wagon with a woman and three children and her baggage. He said, "Yes, he felt quite safe for that trip." He took me to the point where I could get the stage to take me on to the city. We reached there about dark, almost exhausted and as I had pressing invitation when I left, to return, I gladly went to the home I left. I was grieved to find the lady of the house still absent (detained by her father's illness, I was informed.) Dear good Betsy soon made us all comfortable and brought us supper in our room as I felt too tired to go to the dining room, and it was a Providence I did not. As I rested in a most elegant bed with my little ones all safe and sleeping sweetly near me, no wonder tears of joy and thankfulness flowed freely. Only a few more days, perhaps even hours and this long strain, this great sorrow would be over. My

mind was taking a rest as well as the body and I had a most refreshing night's sleep in blissful ignorance of the disappointment awaiting me.

Next morning when I went to the dining room I was received cordially by Mr. D. as usual, and after some little conversation he asked me if I had seen the Richmond paper of the previous day. I said, "No", and looking up I could see he had some unpleasant news for me. He then told me the paper stated that there had been a large number of prisoners brought in from the South and lodged in Libby prison to await exchange, but the Commissioner from Washington there to negotiate the exchange had been recalled for official reasons before the negotiations were completed and the men would be held in Libby. I did not fully realize what it meant; supposed it meant simply a delay and hastened to the residence of General Hill before he left for his office to ascertain the true facts. He said, "Yes," the statement was true and explained to me something about the nature of the failure. I do not remember now. I think history mentions it. I asked if he thought another commissioner would be send, he said he feared they would not right away, but "in time it would be done" was all the comfort he could give. I was too shocked and grieved to speak or move for some minutes, then the tears came to my relief and it was some time before I could control myself. While the paroxysm of grief lasted he walked the floor, seemingly feeling deeply moved. When I arise to go, he extended his hands saying, "Madam I regret exceedingly the turn in affairs. I am truly sorry for you, and if you need assistance at any time let me know. "Oh! What shall I do? What could I do? I found myself exclaiming aloud as I slowly went back to the house. I would not see my poor husband that day, and let him see how hopeless I felt. I must wait until I could speak some words of cheer and comfort to him. Weak and exhausted I finally reached home, and clasping my eldest boy to my breast, I told him of our sad disappointment, and we wept together. At last he said, "Dear Ma, do not cry, or you know you might get sick and die, then what would we do for a Mamma?" I knew there was truth in his words and I promised him I would try. Oh, what a hard struggle I had that night, how very dark the way appeared. Promise, after promise, precious words of comfort would come to my mind, but I felt too rebellious to accept them. I wanted my own way; it seemed the only way, but after a long struggle with myself, and as if overcome by the Savior's arguments to my soul I feel to my knees, and told Him I would accept his precious promises of strength and support in my hour of need, and I would still trust Him. After that, wonderful peace came to me, and sleep, the sweet restorer, came to my aid.

So in a few hours morning found still calm and hope coming back to me, and in this condition of mind, I set out to find the prison. It was an old tobacco warehouse down near the James River in this building thousands of men were packed without any regard for sanitary conditions. A Mr. Turner was then in charge. I introduced myself and asked if I could see my husband. He took me to the grated door and had him called. He gave me a chair on the outside, and without being able to even clasp hands, and in the presence of hundreds of men we talked a long time. I found he had heard of his disappointment and was bowed in deep grief over it, for his condition now was worse than when he had left. I bravely fought my own feeling and tried to speak words of comfort and hope. I told him I had made up my mind to make another effort for his release, and that I felt somehow that I was going to succeed. He advised me wait a few weeks, as they might possibly renew the treaty for exchange as there were some quite noted men on the list, Chaplain McCabe was one of the number in Libby prison. He was later made Bishop in our church. He is now exalted to higher honors in the Mansions above.

I obtained permission from Mr. Turner to visit my husband any day at a certain hour, so I went often and keep him supplied with clean linen and often I took him a nice dinner. Sometimes Turner would allow him to come out in the hall and admit me inside the door so we could sit down and visit instead of standing, but not often. I concluded I would take his advice and wait a short time before taking further steps, but was laying my plan and preparing for the siege.

As he had openly expressed his sentiments by placing his name on the list, it would be useless to use further efforts at dissembling or strategy. I must acknowledge ourselves alien enemies and plead for his release and permission to go home. I was driven to such a state of desperation I felt that I had the courage to do anything. So I had determined to get to the highest powers of the Government with my plea first. I had seen President Davis and he looked as if he might have a kind heart and I felt that I could venture to talk to him if I could gain admittance to his presence. But fearing I might not, I went right to work on a letter to him, explaining the whole circumstances, his false arrest, his long imprisonment, the failure of the exchange, his ill health, and finally my destitute condition with three little children in their city among strangers. I prepared it very carefully and got it ready in case I should need to use it.

One week after my arrival my oldest boy came down with the measles, then a little later the next one as I had feared they might after exposure. With the advice and help of a good motherly neighbor and Aunt Polly, the cook, I got them through it very nicely and the bag did not take it all. Mr. D. was all kindness, sending them fruit and all sorts of nice things. I never met him, only at dinner and sometimes at breakfast, as he was gone all day to his office. I would hand him my board money each week. But after he learned that my means were rather limited, he

By Mary Gemeny

would contrive all sorts of ways to return it or most of it, sometimes in an envelope slipped under the door, or in a present to my son, and once through the post office signed "a friend," He would be so persistent in innocence that I was helpless. You may know there was never a stitch needed in his apparel that I did not attend to and I had the maid bring to my room all Dora's clothing that was badly in need of repair and I put them in perfect order. I had told Mr. D. of my plans and showed him the letter, as he expressed a wish to see it. One morning, later, I was out in the laundry room washing out some articles for the children. When I passed through to the kitchen, he stood and looked for a moment then exclaimed, "Well, what kind of a woman are you anyway, one day writing to the President and the next day into the wash tub? He seemed to think that a good joke.

I was careful not to tell papa the children were sick until after they were all well as he was having enough to endure. He felt so anxious to see the children and we would not let them see him in such a place, so I arranged for him to come to a window, overlooking the street, and I would bring them down and walk with them on the opposite side. I walked up and down the block twice and then waved good-bye. The windows were full of faces as they always were. One of the prisoners, a gentleman from New York, called his attention to us, remarking, "There are three of the nicest looking children I have seen since I left home." Papa said, "That is my wife and children. She is walking there that I may see them." He replied, "Well, Pard, that is certainly hard," and turned away with tears in his eyes.

Six long weeks had passed, and still no change in the situation, and all hope of an exchange seemed vain; so I decided to wait no longer. One morning, praying for strength to carry out my great undertaking, I started for the President's mansion. As I neared the house my heart beat wildly, but I never faltered. My mind was fully made up to go though with it. The bell was answered by a man servant, who showed me into the private reception room, I informed him that my business was with President Davis, if it was possible to see him. He bowed out, and in a short time Col. Joe Davis, the President's Aid-de-Camp, came in, introduced himself, and requested to know my business. I asked if it would be possible to talk with the President a few minutes. He said the President was sick and unable to leave his room, but he would report to him any business or request I had to make. I then produced my letter and told him that if I could not see him, this letter contained my statement and request, and begged that he would place it before the President for consideration as soon as possible. He kindly promised he would do so, and thought I might call in three days for an answer or possibly an interview.

On the morning of the fourth day I called again. I had waited in the reception room but a few minutes when Mrs. Davis came in to say that Colonel Davis was engaged, but would see me at liberty. Her very kind, friendly manner made me feel quite at ease with her, and we had a very agreeable visit together. She had been in Baltimore and Washington and knew all the points of interest there. She expressed deep regret for the troubles that had been brought on the country. I thought it was evident my case had been talked of in her presence form questions she would ask, and I told her some of my experiences. She was a very interested listener and appeared sorry when interrupted by the entrance of Colonel Davis. He brought me a letter from "Jeff" Davis, worded very kindly, but declining to take the entire responsibility of the release, as it was an act that might crown him with hundreds of cases that he could not give attention; but he would recommend the case for clemency to his officials with whom he thought I would succeed; that was the substance of it, if not the words. Colonel Davis then showed me the letter of recommendation and said he would walk with me to the official. I forget his name too, and deliver it himself, as it would insure it an early hearing by the Secretary. This person questioned me in regard to the nature of my business and then advised me to prepare a paper or letter, explaining all and make my request to Secretary Randolph as he might get it before him earlier than he would see me in person, and assured me my case would receive attention. So the next two days were spent preparing my statement, as it must be done so judiciously. On the third day at the hour appointed, I was there with my paper. The gentleman requested me to be seated, as I might have to wait some time, and taking my letter, left me alone. Oh, the earnest prayer that followed the letter. He was gone but a short time it seemed, when he returned and to my great astonishment said that Secretary Randolph would see me in person, and that he would show me into his private office. He received me very kindly and gave me a seat beside him and said he would like to hear my statement verbally.

He was very attentive, heard me through very patiently at times seemed quite interested asking numerous questions. He continued the conversation a long time; after I spoke of our home in Baltimore he told me he too was from there. We had both been born and reared there. Perhaps this fact helped some in his interest in me, for he was surely very kind in his manner toward me. He remarked that "it was very sad indeed that one so young should have such deep trouble and other sympathetic remarks." He then told me he would give the case early consideration and would send his decision to the outside office where I might call in two or three days and get it. I ventured to take on some hope, and returned home with a much lighter heart than I had before going. When I visited my husband next day, I told him what I had done. He begged me not to allow myself to hope so strongly, for he expected no quarter from them, as he was an acknowledged enemy to their cause. Only the day before, an old gentleman had been

carried out of the prison dead. He had been confined there several months for merely expressing Union sentiments. I think he was a Richmond citizen.

I could tell you of numerous cases of cruelty that came under my notice, but it would make my little paper too long. On the afternoon of the third day I started again for the War Department to learn my doom. As I neared the building I felt so excited and nervous I had to walk back and forth several times before I could control myself enough to enter. I thought, if this should fail my last chance was gone, and then what should I do? There was not another effort I could make, there would be nothing but wait the indefinite time of exchange, and if that should be long I knew his health would not stand it with such surroundings. I finally got up courage and walked in. The same gentleman was in the office and transacting business with two officers of the Army. He told the page to show me a seat in the reception room, and told me he would wait on me as soon as at liberty. It was a long wait, and when he finally came in I was quite composed.

He came in with a large official-looking envelope in his hand, and smile on his face, and taking a seat near me, he read, "Mrs. B. Gemeny, that is for you, I presume?" I said "Yes, that is for me." He said it is a message from the Secretary to be handed to general Winder. I will read it to you. He then read the order to Winder and Turner of Libby to consider Benjamin Gemeny, a prisoner at Libby prison, from that date, released, and with his wife and children be allowed to go out with the first boat load of exchanged soldiers to be provided transportation and entertainment free. Signed, Secretary Randolph.

Before he had finished, the tears of joy were falling fast, and without realizing I was exclaiming, "Oh, thank God, - Oh, thank God, it is over at last." I said I would love to kiss the hand that penned those lines, and asked if I might go to the desk and write him a note of thanks and a prayer for God's blessings on him. I asked the gentleman if he would give it into his hands for me. He said he would surely do so. He wanted to send someone with me to General Winder's office to deliver the paper, but I declined. I felt the letter was too precious to allow it out of my grasp. When I had regained entire composure I thanked him for his courteous treatment; I then hastened to General Winder's office. When I handed the letter he read it, then read it over again aloud, and then with a smile on his face (a thing very unusual) he said, "All right, you will start in five days. I am truly glad for your sake, Madam. You surely deserve all the happiness that can come to you. We will miss the little sad-faced woman that has haunted us around here. I hope your hard-headed Yankee husband is worthy of such a wife." He was referring to his refusal to sign the "oath of Allegiance" the year before when it was offered him. I knew that he had regarded him in that light since. He shook hands and wished me a safe trip home, and I thanked him also for his courteous treatment to me at various times.

He said he would see Turner and deliver the message next day. I knew it was too late to see my husband, but I could not rest until he knew the joyful news, and hastened to the prison. Entering the office, I stepped up to the desk and requested Captain Turner to give me a piece of paper to write a few lines to my husband. I wrote, "It is too late to see you, but could not rest without you sharing my happiness. Tomorrow you will be free; papers for release in hand. I will see you tomorrow and explain and arrange for your departure," then handed it to Captain Turner without folding it, that he might read. He glanced over it, then looked as surprised; I thought he was the only one who showed a cold indifference in his case. He promised to deliver it at once, so I hurried home to tell the good news to the children, and Oh, what rejoicing there was. Harry was dancing around the room calling out "Three cheers for Papa," when of a sudden he stopped, came to me and laid his head on my breast and said "Mama, we must not forget to thank God." I replied, "No, I am not forgetting, but we will all kneel down and thank him together, and pray that nothing will happen to interfere with our happiness."

It did not take long for the news to spread through the house; the servants both came up to congratulate me and Polly said she knew they were coming. She had it told her in a dream, the nurse boy looked sad, and said he would soon have no Master Harry, to tell him funny stories, and I have no doubt Harry was sorry to part with him for they had become fast friends. When I went down to dinner Mr. D. was profuse in his congratulations and well wishes. It was a very pleasant dinner hour. I could enjoy the food now, for if my husband did not have so good, (a thought that would always come to me) it would be but a short time now until he too would be faring well. I had done so much walking that afternoon, I was very tired and hungry and how delicious the various articles of food did taste to me. I retired early that evening but I was too happy to sleep for some time. I would find myself exclaiming aloud, "Can it be possible that it is over at last?" I felt like a new being with that great cloud lifted.

When I returned to our room after breakfast next morning, I found there had been a fairy visit in my absence. A nice suit of clothes, a hat, tie, collars and cuffs, a big bundle of underwear, and a good overcoat which had been but little worn -- all lay on the bed. He heard me say I must take him a whole outfit, as I would not allow him to bring one article out of the prison. A note attached advised me to have the servant boy carry them for me when I went down. During the afternoon I took them and stopped on my way to purchase a pair of shoes for him. I

paid in Confederate Money \$18.00 for a pair of common work shoes, and six dollars for a pair for the little girl, such as I had often bought for seventy-five cents in Baltimore.

Mr. Turner was very gracious, and allowed him to come out to the private office to visit with me, without a guard, as he was no longer a prisoner, only a guest, you might say, for a few hours. I explained everything to him, but the poor soul seemed afraid to rejoice. He had had so many disappointments. I sat with him until dark, then leaving him, told him to be all fixed up in his very best when I came for him with a hack to go off in style Thursday morning.

The next two days were very busy ones, writing farewell letters home, giving little finishing touches to articles of children's clothing, and finishing a piece of fancy work I had begun for Mrs. D. so much engaged me that the time passed swiftly. It was my last night in Richmond. My little ones were prepared for bed, but they were too excited to sleep. They talked about tomorrow when a hack would come and take them to see papa, then get on a big Steamboat and sail on a big water. Finally a great contention arose about who would get the first kiss from Papa when little Minnie who we had thought was asleep but had taken it all in quietly, called out, "Oh me, me," and I guess she did, as he had never seen her, since the first year I was there, and then, they finally settled down to sleep. After making sure that everything was in perfect readiness for morning, I retired also. My brain was so excited that it was a long time before sleep came to overpower me, but with happy thoughts my sleep was sweet and refreshing. We were up and ready for breakfast when the boy came to call us. The cook had prepared us an elegant breakfast and a box of lunch to take with us. I had prepared a remembrance for each one, for they surely deserved it for extra attention and kindness shown us during our stay in the house. In thanking Mr. D. for all his kindness I have him a pressing invitation to bring his wife and to make us a visit in Baltimore. When the Stars and Stripes waved again over Richmond. We had quite a little badinage upon the subject for I was at liberty to express my sentiments now.

At nine o'clock the hack was at the door and in a few minutes we were at Libby Prison. The soldiers were lined up on the street in front of the building. There were three hundred and something, I forget the exact number. We drove to the rear of the line; I got out and made my way through the crowd to the office, and there sat my gentleman waiting for me. I told him he looked more like a preacher than a Yankee Prisoner. We walked down the line to the hack and I shall not soon forget the cheering as he passed. Cheer after cheer went up and at the same time handkerchiefs waved from the upper windows filled with sad faces, the men of his crowd who, like himself, had been brought up for exchange from the South. The boys were rejoiced to see Pap, but the little girl had to get better acquainted before she would go to him. As the line moved on, and we were passing the building, we looked back and he exclaimed, "Thank God, that is the last look at Libby prison." Oh, the feeling of relief and joy of that hour I cannot express it. Why it seemed worthwhile all I had passed through, the joy of that hour. I think it will be so when we get to Heaven. They that have suffered most here will feel the greater joy there, and best of all it will never end, while earthly joys have their interruptions to life's end.

Our trip to Annapolis was uneventful except at Fortress Monroe where we changed boats, and left the Confederate for a United States steamer. Oh the cheering and yelling of those men when they saw the Stars and Stripes again waving over them. They crowded the deck and all joined in the singing of the Star Spangled Banner. I was the only woman on board except the chamber maid, but I stepped out and joined them with my whole heart, you may be sure. We were invited to the first seating at the table for supper. Mr. Gemeny introduced me to some of the gentlemen that he had become well acquainted with and knew to be gentlemen. They knew that it was through my efforts alone, my husband had been released and, of course, were profuse in words of praise and compliments for my bravery and perseverance. I told my husband I knew he was proud of his little wife for once at least.

When we arrived next morning at Annapolis we were in rather a plight. I did not have a cent of U.S. money --- had several confederate bills, but the whole roll would not bring five cents --- he had one gold dollar that he had clung to during all his imprisonment. It would take about three to pay for a ticket to Baltimore, our "hometown."

I leave you to imagine the surprise and delight of my father and mother and others of the family who had been grieving over us in such suspense, having never received but the first letter stating he had been taken prisoner and I was with his mother. Well, we were so happy I do not think it ever occurred to our minds that we did not have one dollar to our names, having spent the one he had for lunch in the station that morning in Annapolis, and hack hire to take us from the station home when we arrived in Baltimore.

After a few days of rest and enjoyment he looked around and found work at his trade at good pay and we began life all over again happy in each other's love and in the love of our Heavenly Father, who had sustained us and brought us safely through such a great trial.

I was so interested in my story that I lost sight of an experience Mr. Gemeny had the first year of his imprisonment, early in the Spring of that year, after one of the battles. There were so many prisoners that they had

A REMINISCENCE OF THE WAR OF THE REBELLION

By Mary Gemeny

taken one of the old tobacco warehouses for a prison, the former Libby prison and all the war prisoners were taken from the City jail and placed there. Those on the lower floor had access to the cellar and used it for a laundry room. From the window they saw it was only a short distance to the river bank, so they conceived the idea they might dig through and make their escape. With desperation they set to work with one broken handle fire shovel and pieces of broken dishes and table knives to dig the famous tunnel you read about in the history of the war. There were over fifty men into the secret and would take their turns in digging. One would dig, another, with a box pushed in front of him would shovel up the dirt and back out pulling the box after him. Then one would raise a loosened plank in the floor and empty it, the hole being hid by a large box that was set there through the day. In this way they worked nearly two months when they were awarded with success. They carefully gathered brush and trash into the opening to hide it from view until the following night, it was reported around among them and it was planned for as many as could crawl through the first night, before light, the last one to secure the hole from sight, the balance the next night. There were forty got out that night and Mr. Gemeny was one of them. He traveled two days with nothing to eat but some crackers he had put in his pockets; in the evening of the second day he was so exhausted he was compelled to rest and as a rain had set in he could not sleep outdoors, so he stopped at a farm house he was passing and asked for a night's lodging. They kindly took him in, gave him a good supper, and a good bed and he slept soundly through the night all unconscious that he was again a prisoner.

Shortly after he had gone up to bed another stranger had called, this time a Confederate detective, to inquire if they had seen men or company of men passing. The man told him he had a stranger lodger; of course, Mr. Gemeny left his overcoat hanging in the hall thinking there was nothing in the pockets, but they had searched it and found and read an old letter I had written him while he had been in prison.

When he went down stairs next morning and saw the man in Confederate uniform he understood the situation in a moment. The old farmer invited them to breakfast and as they were leaving said to him privately, "Mr. Gemeny is your name I see, if I had seen that letter before that officer saw it you would be a free man. Yet I can assure you that I knew nothing of the jail break until he informed me, you have my earnest sympathy."

In a few hours he was again in Libby as they had a good team and knew the short route. I think the number of men recaptured was nine. But you can refer to history for that information. I knew at the time, but it has passed out of my mind now. The poor men were not censured for their effort for freedom but were confined to the one floor after that.

Original - August 14, 1913

Written by Mary Gemeny. (100 years old March 10th, 1935)

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Xeroxed - May 1990 - (W. Gordon Gemeny)

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