

# A WOMAN'S DIARY OF THE SIEGE OF VICKSBURG

*The Diary - Preface by Geo. W. Cable - 1885*

*Just a quarter of a century ago a young lady of New Orleans found herself an alien and an enemy to the sentiments of the community about her. Surrounded by friends and social companions, she was nevertheless painfully alone. In her enforced silence she began a diary intended solely for her own eye. A betrothed lover came suddenly from a neighboring State, claimed her hand in haste, and bore her away, a happy bride. Happy, yet anxious. The war was now fairly upon the land, and her husband, like herself, cherished sympathies whose discovery would have brought jeopardy of life, ruin, and exile. In the South, those days, all life was romantic. Theirs was full of adventure. At length they were shut up in Vicksburg. I hope some day to publish the whole diary; but the following portion is specially appropriate to the great panorama of battle in which a nation of readers is just now so interested. I shall not delay the reader to tell how I came by the manuscript, but only to say that I have not molested its original text. The name of the writer is withheld at her own request.*

April 28th. - I never understood before the full force of those questions - What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed? We have no prophet of the Lord at whose prayer the meal and oil will not waste. Such minute attention must be given the wardrobe to preserve it that I have learned to darn like an artist. Making shoes is another accomplishment. Mine were in tatters. H\_ came across a moth-eaten pair that he bought me, giving ten dollars, I think and they fell into rags when I tried to wear them; but the soles were good, and that has helped me to make shoes. A pair of old coat-sleeves saved - nothing is thrown away - was in my trunk. I cut an exact pattern from my old shoes, laid it on the sleeves, [sic] and cut out thus good uppers, and sewed them carefully; then soaked the soles and sewed the cloth to them. I am so proud of these home-made shoes, think I'll put them in a glass case when the war is over, as an heirloom. H\_ says he has come to have an abiding faith that everything he needs to wear will come out of that trunk while the war lasts. It is like a fairy-casket. I have but a dozen pins remaining, so many I gave away. Every time these are used they are straightened and kept from rust. All these curious labors are performed while the shells are leisurely screaming through the air; but as long as we are out of range, we don't worry. For many nights we have had but little sleep, because the Federal gun-boats have been running past the batteries. The uproar when this is happening is phenomenal. The first night the thundering artillery burst the bars of sleep, we thought it an attack by the river. To get into garments and rush upstairs was the work of a moment. From the upper gallery we have a fine view of the river, and soon a red glare lit up the scene and showed a small boat towing two large barges, gliding by. The Confederates had set fire to a house near the bank. Another night, eight boats ran by, throwing a shower of shot, and two burning houses made the river clear as day. One of the batteries has a remarkable gun they call "Whistling Dick," because of the screeching, whistling sound it gives, and certainly it does sound like a tortured thing. Added to all this is the indescribable Confederate yell, which is a soul-harrowing sound to hear. I have gained respect for the mechanism of the human ear, which stands it all without injury. The streets are seldom quiet at night; even the dragging about of cannon makes a din in these echoing gullies. The other night we were on the gallery till the last of the eight boats got by. Next day a friend said to H\_, "It was a wonder you didn't

have your heads taken off last night. I passed and saw them stretched over the gallery, and grape-shot were whizzing up the street just on a level with you." The double roar of batteries and boats was so great, we never noticed the whizzing. Yesterday the Cincinnati attempted to go by n daylight, but was disabled and sunk. It was a pitiful sight; we could not see the finale, though we saw her rendered helpless.

May 28th. - Since that day the regular siege has continued. We are utterly cut off from the world, surrounded by a circle of fire. Would it be wise like the scorpion to sting ourselves to death? The fiery shower of shells goes on day and night. H\_'s occupation, of course, is gone, his office closed. Every man has to carry a pass in his pocket. People do nothing but eat what they can get, sleep when they can, and dodge the shells. There are three intervals when the shelling stops, either for the guns to cool or for the gunner's meals, I suppose, - about eight in the morning, and the same in the evening, and at noon. In that time we have both to prepare and eat ours. Clothing cannot be washed or anything else done. On the 19th and 22d, when the assaults were made on the lines, I watched the soldiers cooking on the green opposite. The half-spent balls coming all the way from those lines were flying so thick that they were obliged to dodge at every turn. At all the caves I could see from my high perch, people were sitting, eating their poor suppers at the cave doors, ready to plunge in again. As the first shell again flew they dived, and not a human being was visible. The sharp crackle of musketry-firing was a strong contrast to the scream of the bombs. I think all the dogs and cats must be killed, or starved, we don't see any more pitiful animals prowling around. \* \* \* The cellar is so damp and musty the bedding has to be carried out and laid in the sun every day, with the forecast that it may be demolished at any moment. The confinement is dreadful. To sit and listen as if waiting for death in a horrible manner would drive me insane. I don't know what others do, but we read when I am not scribbling in this. H\_ borrowed somewhere a lot of Dickens's novels, and we reread them by the dim light in the cellar. When the shelling abates H\_ goes to walk about a little or get the "Daily Citizen," which is still issuing a tiny sheet at twenty-five and fifty cents a copy. It is, of course, but a rehash of speculations which amuses a half hour. To-day he heard while out that expert swimmers are crossing the Mississippi on logs at night to bring and carry news to Johnston. I am so tired of corn-bread, which I never liked, which I eat it with tears in my eyes. We are lucky to get a quart of milk daily frma family near who have a cow they hourly expect to be killed. I send five dollars to market each morning, and it buys a small piece of mule-meat. Rice and milk is my main food; I can't eat the mule-meat. We boil the rice and eat it cold with milk for supper. Martha runs the gauntlet to buy the meat and milk once a day in a perfect terror. The shells seem to have many different names; I hear the soldiers say, "That's a mortar-shell. There goes a Parrott. That's a rifle-shell." They are all equally terrible. A pair of chimney-swallows have built in the parlor chimney. The concussion of the house often sends down parts of their nest, which they patiently pick up and reascend [sic] with.