

An Incident in the Civil War



After the battle of Murfreesboro, in the Civil War, I was serving as chaplain stationed in the hospital. For two nights I had been unable to get any rest, and being really worn out, on the third night I had lain down to sleep. About midnight I was called to see a wounded soldier who was very low. At first I tried to put the messenger off, but he told me that if I waited it might be too late in the morning. I went to the ward where I had been directed, and found the man who had sent for me. I shall never forget his face as I saw it that night in the dim, uncertain candle-light. I asked what I could do for him, and he said that he wanted me to "help him die." I told him I would bear him in my arms into the kingdom of God if I could, but I couldn't; and then I tried to preach the Gospel.

He only shook his head and said— "He can't save me; I have sinned all my life."

My thoughts went back to his loved ones in the North, and I thought that even then his mother might be praying for her boy. I repeated promise after promise, and prayed with the dying man; but nothing I said seemed to help him. Then I said that I wanted to read to him an account of an interview which Christ had one night while here on earth with a man who was anxious about his eternal welfare, and I read the 3rd chapter of John, how Nicodemus came to the Master. As I read on, his eyes became riveted upon me, and he seemed to drink in every syllable. When I came to the words, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life," he stopped me and asked—

"Is that there?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well," he said, "I never knew that was in the Bible. Read it again."

Leaning his elbows on the side of the cot he brought his hands together in a firm grasp, and when I finished he exclaimed—

"That's good. Won't you read it again?"

Slowly I repeated the passage the third time. When I finished, I saw that his eyes were closed, and the troubled expression on his face had given way to a peaceful smile. His lips moved, and I bent over him to catch what he was saying, and heard in a faint whisper, "'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' "

He opened his eyes and said, "That's enough; don't read any more."

Early next morning I again came to his cot, but it was empty. The attendant in charge told me the young man had died peacefully, and said that after my visit he had rested quietly, repeating to himself, now and then, that glorious proclamation, "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

—*Anecdotes, Incidents and Illustrations*