

THE NATIONAL HOMESTEAD FOR SOLDIERS' ORPHANS

from the Philadelphia Times of June 7

The Gettysburg Soldiers' Orphans--School without a Teacher For Two Years--The Matron Convicted of Cruelty.

Soon after the Battle of Gettysburg some kind-hearted and well-disposed people conceived the idea of founding near the battlefield a home for the maintenance and education of needy children of the men who had fallen in that battle in defence of the Union. The project meeting with ready support, proper buildings were soon erected and the institution established under the name and title of the National Homestead for Soldiers' Orphans, at Gettysburg. In a little time over a hundred fatherless children were gathered under its roof, and with proper management, the institution prospered, doing great good. It must not be confounded with our State soldiers' orphans schools, which have reflected such credit upon Penna. and which are supported annually by appropriations from the State Treasury. It is not under the control of the school department, or it would have been closed long since. It was founded as a home, not only for the children of our State, but for the children of men from the various states, who, as before stated, fell at Gettysburg. It has been supported by contributions from charitable persons and collections taken up in our Sunday Schools. Bishop Simpson was at one time the nominal president, and he and others of our most esteemed citizens gave it the influence of their names. However, of late years, the sole management has been allowed to drift into the hands of a man styling himself as Dr. Bourns (his own brother spells his name plain Burns), who has an office on Walnut Street. He is secretary, treasurer and manager. He has installed as matron a certain Mrs. Carmichael, who has since won some notoriety in the criminal court. The evil nature of this woman soon drove away the last remaining teacher, and for the past two years there has been no school in the institution. Her brutality to the children attracted the attention of the citizens of the town, and so general was the complaint that General Stewart and Major D.B. Nevin, who were on the Board of Trustees, made a personal examination of the wrongs complained of and became satisfied that the institution had better be closed. But Bourns was not to be disposed of in this manner and he was equal to the occasion. He voted them and their associated out and voted in a new board, among whom were Mr. Dell Noblit, Mr. Thackara and other reputable gentlemen. This new board, finding there was another

associated

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board in existence, refused to act except in cooperation. So the matter stands. In the meantime affairs at the "Homestead" have gone from bad to worse. The cruelties practiced by Mrs. Carmichael upon the helpless children became so outrageous that Corporal Shelly, Post No. 9 Grand Army of the Republic, at Gettysburg, had the matron arrested and indicted in the Court of Adams County. She was tried and convicted in November last (1876), but in consideration of her sex the court only sentenced her to pay a fine of \$20 and the costs of the prosecution. This sentence has made her worse, until the abuses in the institution have made it a stench in the nostrils of the community, and the people justly demand that some decided and prompt action shall be taken by the proper authorities. She has as task-master a brutal boy of about nineteen years of age, who was once an inmate of the home. He beats and kicks in the most cruel manner little children of tender age, and does it to the apparent delight of the matron and with her certain approval. The night before Christmas, in the bitter cold, she had a little boy of between four and five years of age penned in the out-house, from which he was released at midnight through the intercession of a neighbor and gentlemen passing, both of whom had been attracted to the spot by the piteous screams of the little fellow, who was scared almost out of his senses. In another instance, she had a little girl stand upon a desk in one position till she had to be lifted down, exhausted and helpless.

A little bright-eyed girl, Bella Hunter, was some years ago picked up in the streets of Philadelphia, friendless and homeless and sent to the Gettysburg Homestead, by Burns. No one would recognize her in the miserable, broken-spirited girl who is now the slave of Mrs. Carmichael. Under her supervision, and watched by the heartless boy, she is compelled to do the most menial work, and when her task is done she is locked in her room. She has been beaten and kicked until the whole community know of her hard fate, and yet there are none, it would seem, to intercede for her. Little girls can be seen running around in boys' clothes. On Decoration Day the children of the Homestead were compelled to look from the enclosure out into the National Cemetery adjoining, where are buried the fathers of some of them, while other happy children dropped upon their graves their sweet floral tributes. The matron refused to allow them to participate in the ceremonies. These are only a few of the abuses and cruelties practiced in this place. Are they to be allowed to continue? There are now about thirty children in the house, eighteen of whom are soldier's orphans. All these children can be provided with places where they will receive at least humane treatment. Can such a place continue to receive the support of philanthropic people and our little Sunday-School children; to be a home for Mrs. Carmichael and a summer resort of Dr. Bourns, where he is waited upon by the little inmates, whose fathers sleep in the adjoining

cemetery. What say General Stewart, Major Nevin, Mr. Noblit, Mr. Thackara and other trustees? What say the authorities, whose intercession can close the institution? What say The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children? Must it be left to the Grand Army of the Republic to intercede in behalf of the helpless inmates and abolish this nuisance?

G.A.R.  
Star-Sentinel  
June 14, 1877

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REPLY OF MRS. ROSA J. CARMICHAEL

from Phila. Times of June 8

Many readers of the communication "G.A.R." which you have published may consider a reply called for, both in vindication of myself and of the institution with which I hold connection, and an extended answer might be proper at once, for the sake of humanity, truth and justice; but I have called upon the reputed author, Mr. Vanderslice, and he has assured me, with an air of no little menace and self-gratulation, that I have "waked up the wrong party" in regard to my defense, and that he has still further charges to make public. I therefore prefer to await the further charges, simply pronouncing those already published to be substantially false as they are slanderous, without, however, accusing him with have doing me wilful wrong.

June 7, 1877

Mrs. Carmichael

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