

The
United States Christian Commission.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." — *Mat. xxv: 40.*



A T

G E T T Y S B U R G

(USAMHI)

home. I promised to do so. He did not even refer to it again, but passed away in triumph.

It was in the morning at eleven o'clock that he died. At five in the afternoon his body was sent to the embalmers. Late that night, as I was busy writing letters from memoranda taken through the day, there was a knock at the door. In stepped a man inquiring for Captain Billings. What a question for us to meet! I thought of the home link.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am his brother; I have his wife with me! I have kept her up all the way with the hope that we would find the Captain in good condition. Where is he, sir?"

"You have not brought the Captain's wife out here to-night?" The Corps hospital was four miles from Gettysburg.

"No, I left her in town until the morning."

"That was well. The body of your brother was sent to the embalmers this afternoon."

"Oh," said he, "I cannot tell her. I cannot trust myself to try to tell her, or even to see her again to-night;"—the poor man broke down in his grief,—*"I have brought her on all the way to Gettysburg for this, and now you must—you must tell her all."*

And so our duty was to see the bereaved wife, and deliver to her the messages and tokens of the dying love of her husband, and to speak to her words of comfort in the name of the Lord.

Perhaps no incident of the war became so widely known and excited such deep sympathy as the story of the Humiston children. The main facts of the narrative are these:



"THE HUMISTON CHILDREN."

(An exact copy of the original picture.)

Dr. J. Francis Bourns, of Philadelphia, was crossing the mountains on his way to Gettysburg, as a volunteer Surgeon and Delegate of the Commission. An accident to his vehicle forced him, with three fellow-travellers on the same errand, to halt at Graefenberg Springs. Mr. Schriver, the proprietor, exhibited to them a beautiful ferrotype of three lovely children, which had been found clasped in the hands of a soldier dead on the battle-field. The picture was so held that it must

*A Father's
Last Look.*

have met his dying gaze. No other memoranda, relics, or even equipments were found on the body, so that identification was impossible. Dr. Bourns obtained the ferrotype, with the intention, when his Delegate work was over, of using it to discover the little fatherless ones. He persevered until all the obstacles in the way of obtaining a salable picture were overcome by some Philadelphia artists; and then furnished to the press all he knew of the story, simultaneously with the publication of the photograph, since so well known. Week after week passed; still the mystery of the dead soldier was unsolved; inquiries poured in, but there was no identification. Dr. Bourns began to despair. A copy of the *American Presbyterian*, containing a description of the picture, found its way to a little town on the Alleghany river, in Western New York. The affecting tale was rehearsed through the village for several days, exciting the warmest sympathy. A lady carried the paper to a friend who had not heard from her husband since the battle. The narrative recalled, with dread accuracy, a picture which the wife had sent her husband just before Gettysburg. The fact was communicated to Dr. Bourns, who sent a copy of the picture in reply. It was the first news that she had that her children were fatherless, and she a widow. The name of the unknown soldier was thus found to be Amos Humiston, Sergeant, 154th N. Y. S. Vols., of Portville, N. Y. The sale of copies of the picture was afterwards made the means of great good.¹

¹ Dr. Bourns informs us (March 1868), that "The founding of the 'National Orphan Homestead' at Gettysburg, is the sequel to the story of the Humiston children. About seventy soldiers' orphans have been received into the institution, and there are many more fatherless little ones who are awaiting its enlargement of accommodations." The Humiston children are living at the "Homestead" with their mother, who is an under-matron. The morning after the children came to the institution, it was found that they had gone out quietly and decked their father's grave with beautiful flowers.

No result of the ministrations after this battle was more marked than that manifested in the altered feeling among the Rebel prisoners. The Delegates allude to this constantly in their reports. We can present but a few of the numerous instances at command. Mr. De-
mond says:¹

A Delegate passing around among the wounded, giving sympathy and aid, came to an officer from South Carolina. Said he—

"Colonel, can I do anything for you?"

"No," was the reply, with stubborn defiance. "Devils" and

He passed on. By and bye he came round again, "Angels."
made a similar inquiry, and was again refused. Yet he came again the third time. The air had become offensive from heat and wounds; he was putting cologne on the handkerchiefs of one and another as he passed:

"Colonel, let me put some of this on your handkerchief?"

The wounded and suffering man burst into tears, and said, "I have no handkerchief."

"Well, you shall have one," and wetting his own with cologne, he gave it to him. The Colonel was now ready to talk:

"I can't understand you Yankees; you fight us like devils, and then you treat us like angels. I am sorry I entered this war."

Mr. John Patterson² tells the following rather amusing little colloquy between some soldiers, Union and Confederate, and himself:

Quite a number of us had been busy aiding the Surgeons, who had attended to about two hundred cases of amputation during the day. When the men were washed and dressed, at supper they began bragging about our good butter.

"Let us see, boys," said I, "which of you can make the best wish for the old lady who made the butter." A Trio of
Good Wishes.

"An' shure," replied an Irishman, "may iv'ry hair of her hid be a wax candle to loight her into glory,"—a kind of beatified Gorgon, one would say. Then came another Irishman's wish:

"May she be in hivin two wakes before the divil knows she's did."

The third and last was from a son of the Emerald Isle likewise; it was addressed to myself:

"An' troth, sir, I hope God 'll take a loikin' to yursilf."