THE LIFE AND WORK OF CLARA BARTON

BY IDA HUSTED HARPER

On April 12th there passed away at the age of ninety-one one who is justly entitled to an honored place among America's great women—Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross in the United States. All her life after she reached maturity was a preparation for this, its crowning achievement, and biographical history has no more eloquent record of self-sacrifice, courage, and devotion to noble causes than that of this brave, tender, and true woman.

Clara Barton was a Christmas gift, in 1821, to her parents, Captain Stephen and Dolly (Stone) Barton, who resided in North Oxford, Massachusetts. She came of "fighting stock," for her father was a valiant soldier under "Mad Anthony" Wayne in 1812, just a century ago, and her maternal grandfather was one of the heroes of Bennington in the Revolutionary War. It is a beautiful antithesis that, while the ancestors helped to carry on war, their descendant gave her life to mitigating its horrors. Girls had few opportunities for education eighty years ago, but she made the best of these, and at sixteen was herself a teacher. She was ambitious, however, and carefully saved her small earnings until she had enough to take a course at Clinton, New Jersey, which had one of the best seminaries of that time for young women. Going from here to Hightstown, New Jersey, she taught for some time with much success in a private school. Later she went to Bordentown, and in the face of much opposition carried out a cherished plan of founding a free public school, which was almost the first in that State. In one year she saw it increase from six to six hundred pupils and secured the building of a new school-house costing four thousand dollars.

After a few years Miss Barton's health, never very robust, suffered under the strain, and in 1854 she went to Washington to find a milder climate. At this time there was much confusion in the United States Patent Office; clerks had betrayed the secrets of inventors and there was a general lack of confidence. The Commissioner of Patents, who knew Miss Barton personally, persuaded her to take the position of confidential secretary. She was the first woman publicly employed in a government department, and the male clerks were highly indignant. They were rude and insubordinate, insulted and slandered her, and tried in every way to drive her out of the office, but they did not know her firm and dauntless spirit. With remarkable executive ability she brought order out of chaos, and eventually raised the standard of honor and loyalty in the department to a point it had never before attained. The Republican party came into power about this time, and the antislavery question was growing very acute. Miss Barton, a Massachusetts woman, naturally felt a strong interest in this new party, which she did not hesitate to express, and for this she was discharged from her position by President Buchanan, but her services had become so necessary that finally she was recalled.

At last, in 1861, the Civil War began and Miss Barton's sole thought became, "How can I best serve my country?" The first wounded soldiers, forty men of the Sixth Massachusetts Volunteers, injured in the Baltimore attack of April 19th, were brought to Washington, and she hastened to their relief. She saw at once the great need of woman's help in nursing, feeding, and caring for the sick and wounded, and from that moment she consecrated herself to this work as long as the war should last. Women never had been permitted in hospitals, camps, or on battle-fields, and officials, military and civil, declined her services, really not knowing how to accept them. In her own unequaled manner she succeeded in gaining the confidence of the commanding officers, and finally made her way to the front, where the situation was terrible. As soon as it was known she was there supplies sent to her care poured into Washington, first from her own State and then from many others. Her wonderful work under the most distressing conditions in a short time gained for her the name "Angel of the Battle-field." By her quiet self-reliance and her prompt decision she obtained so large and complete a recognition that camp and hospital

supplies, a corps of assistants, and even military trains were placed at her service. During the four years of the war she was present on sixteen battle-fields, including those of Cedar Mountain, Fort Wagner, Petersburg, the second Bull Run, the Wilderness, and Antietam, for a long time in the hospitals about Richmond, and eight months at the siege of Charleston. She was always calm, cheerful, well poised, and philosophical, but strict, firm, and unflinching in maintaining authority.

The close of the war did not end Miss Barton's labors. During the long years of its excitement and confusion many of the soldiers who died in the battles and the prisons had been placed in unmarked graves. Thousands of agonized letters from distracted relatives flooded the War Department, but as it had no information to give they remained unanswered. This situation aroused in Miss Barton not only a feeling of deepest pity, but a sense of great injustice that men had been called by their Government, patriotically given up by their families, and then no response made to the inquiry as to what it had done with them. Of these 80,000 were on the rolls simply as " missing." Miss Barton carried personally to President Lincoln her request that she might be allowed to receive and reply officially to these letters. He answered by announcing to the country that she would do this and directing that all such correspondence be addressed to her. This resulted in what is known historically as " The Search for the Missing Men."

A bureau was at once established by Miss Barton and lists were carefully compiled from the hospital and prison rolls. Among the most noted of these prisons was that at Andersonville, Georgia, where 13,000 died in one year. The keeping of the daily record of the dead had been assigned by the Confederate authorities to a young Union prisoner, Dorance Atwiler, of Connecticut, who had been wise enough to preserve a copy of these records on scraps of paper which he had managed to secure, and these were of invaluable assistance. As the bodies had been placed in shallow trenches, it was necessary that the work of disinterment and identification should be done before the fall rains began. Secretary Stanton detailed a force of men to accompany her, and on a little steamer loaded with head-markers Miss Barton set out for Andersonville. Here she spent the hot summer of 1865, living in a tent, and, under her supervision,

13,000 bodies were located and each placed in a grave four feet deep with a marker at the head. And then 400 graves of the Confederate dead were also carefully marked. In describing this work a few years ago at a patriotic gathering Miss Barton said: "When all was finished I pulled the rope which raised the Stars and Stripes above the place for the first time—and I never have seen Andersonville since!"

For four years, in the seasons when the weather permitted, Miss Barton continued this most trying task, and by her skill in following clues she located and marked the graves of over 20,000 Union soldiers, whose last resting-place, but for her brave and devoted service, would have forever remained unknown. For this she did not hesitate to use her own private funds, as there were no others available, and out of these she maintained an office in Washington and a force of twelve men. Finally Congress began to make some inquiries, and one day a delegation came to see her—Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs and afterward Vice-President; Colfax of Indiana, Speaker of the House; Senator Wade of Ohio; Senator Grimes of Iowa; and young Representative Allison, later the well-known Senator. They found Miss Barton surrounded by thousands of letters and records, conducting the work according to her own simple but accurate system. They learned that she had already expended $8,000 of her own money and had not yet reached the end of her great undertaking. As they realized what this quiet, unassuming woman had done and was doing they could not keep back the tears.

When the Thirty-seventh Congress assembled it passed the following resolution:

"*Whereas,* Miss Clara Barton has expended from her own resources large sums of money in endeavoring to discover missing soldiers of the U. S. Army, and in communicating intelligence to their relatives, therefore

"*Resolved,* by the Senate and House of Representatives that the sum of $15,000 be appropriated to reimburse Miss Barton and to aid in the further prosecution of the search; and that the printing necessary for the furtherance of this object shall be done by the public printer."

This, therefore, was not recompense for services, it was reimbursement for money expended by a private citizen for public uses. It was without solicitation on Miss Barton's

part, who never asked for remuneration and never desired pay for her work for humanity.

Miss Barton's fame had become national, and everywhere the people, whose hearts were filled with grateful appreciation, were so anxious to hear of her experiences that at last she engaged with a lecture bureau, and for three years, during the winter months, she spoke throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands came to listen, to weep, and to applaud. She was among the most highly paid lecturers of that time, including John B. Gough, Wendell Phillips, Mrs. Livermore, Mrs. Stanton, and others. Her profits enabled her to lay aside about $25,000, which she found very useful in her later work.

It is not surprising that by the autumn of 1869 Miss Barton was almost worn out. Her physicians, feeling that she never would cease work if she remained in this country, sent her to Europe for a complete rest. She went to Geneva, Switzerland, and from that visit dates the beginning of the Red Cross in the United States.

Ten years previous the agitation had begun for some means of mitigating the dreadful suffering of sick and wounded soldiers, as terrible a result of war as the actual deaths in battle. A book written by Henri Dunant, of Geneva, describing the awful conditions on the field of Solferino, had stirred the civilized world. Meetings were called, committees formed, conferences held, and finally a great convention was arranged to assemble in Geneva in 1864 to learn the results of the investigations made by humanitarians in many lands, and Switzerland officially invited all governments to send representatives. At this most important convocation, known as the "Convention of Geneva," almost every government was represented except the United States; but this country was then in the midst of one of the most fearful wars in history, which left no thought for occurrences in other parts of the world.

As a consensus of the wisdom and humanity of many nations ten articles of agreement were adopted to be known for all time as "The Treaty of Geneva for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Soldiers." Twelve governments affixed their official signatures to this document August 22, 1864. This treaty, to express it briefly, provides that all wounded or sick soldiers, all surgeons and nurses attending them, all hospitals and their supplies, shall be held neutral by both

armies and shall not be captured by either; that citizens properly authorized shall be permitted to go on the field of battle, carry provisions and other relief, and work as they would among suffering people elsewhere; that badly wounded men shall not be held as prisoners, but must be sent back to their own army; that inhabitants of the place where a battle is fought may bring help to the wounded without being molested, nor shall their homes be disturbed if such soldiers are being cared for in them; that injured soldiers must not be regarded as enemies, but all must be attended to alike.

As a distinguishing badge would be necessary, it was decided that out of compliment to Switzerland, the principal factor in creating this organization, her flag should be adopted with the colors reversed, and thus the red cross on a white field became the sign of the greatest humanitarian association the world has ever known. All other hospital flags were given up, and now any building over which it flies, any train or ambulance with this sign on its side, any doctor or nurse, any sick or wounded man with a Red Cross on the arm is absolutely sacred and must receive the protection of friends and foes alike. This badge can be issued only by the military authorities. Every army now is closely followed by the Red Cross with everything which long experience has shown will be needed when the emergency comes. Each country has its own central committee, and men and women work together, in some places men, in others women, taking the lead.

This, in brief, is the history of the Red Cross. In a few years practically every nation had its society with one exception; that was the United States! Why did this great, unselfish, charitable country, ahead of all others in humane practices, occupy this strange and anomalous position? The principal reason, as has been stated, was because when the society was organized it was in the throes of a long war and for years afterward was trying to recover from its effects. The proceedings of the Geneva convention were sent over here in a foreign language and in the stress and hurry of the time were not translated and published in the newspapers. In 1866 the Rev. Dr. Henry Bellows, who was at the head of the relief work during the war, endeavored to interest the Government, but failed. The feeling seemed to be that never again would there be a war in this country,

but, should one occur, it could organize sanitary commissions and other associations as had been done in the last conflict. After frequent efforts the International Committee became discouraged and made no further attempts to enlist the co-operation of the United States.

This was the situation when Clara Barton went to Geneva in September, 1869. She found her fame had preceded her and at once the International Committee of Geneva called on her to ask why her country had not entered the Red Cross. She told them that, like herself, the people were ignorant concerning it. They begged her to make herself acquainted with it, and as she continued her tour of Europe she studied its publications in French. The next summer she returned to Switzerland and was in Berne when war was declared between France and Germany. The International Committee urged her to go into the field and see the practical working of the Red Cross in time of war. Although she had by no means recovered her health, she could not resist this appeal, and she was present during nearly all the battles of this fiercely fought war — at Hagenau, Metz, Strasbourg, Belfort, Woerth, in the Baden hospitals, at Montbelard, and then through the long Siege of Paris and the dreadful days of the Commune. During these two years she saw in all its grandeur the beneficent work of the Red Cross and the Treaty of Geneva, and she pledged herself to the nations of Europe that she would devote the rest of her life, if necessary, to introducing and carrying forward this great institution in the United States.

Miss Barton, however, had to pay the penalty for overtaxing nature and for several years was an almost helpless invalid. She did not fully recover her strength until 1877, and then her first effort was to carry out her pledge. She presented to President Hayes an eloquent letter from President Moynier, of the International Committee, entreating that he would take the necessary steps to unite this country with the others in the sacred bonds of the Red Cross. It proved impossible to secure any action by this administration and she had to content herself with patient, tactful, and untiring measures to interest persons of influence and power. Soon after President Garfield's inauguration, in 1881, she again presented her beloved cause, and he received it and her with much cordiality. He urged its favorable consideration by Sercetary of State James G. Blaine, who opened

a correspondence with the International Committee and began immediate arrangements to organize the Red Cross in the United States. That very summer occurred the tragic death of the President, but to Miss Barton's great joy his successor, President Arthur, continued these plans. On March 1, 1882, he proclaimed to the world that this country had entered into the Treaty of Geneva. President Moynier at once wrote Miss Barton: "You must feel happy and proud at last to have attained your object, thanks to a perseverance and zeal which surmounted every obstacle." In Geneva bonfires were lighted in celebration of the news that the United States had become a Red Cross nation. This is doubtless the only instance where an international treaty was brought about solely by one person, and that one a woman. Miss Barton was very properly made president, and she held this most responsible office for twenty-two years.

The United States had now the association, but its largest war had been over for many years, and it was hoped and believed that there would not be another for generations, if ever. This is, however, a country of great disasters, in many other forms, and the resourceful mind of this woman-general realized that if the society were to justify its existence it should have power to extend its aid in any national calamity. With that diplomacy of which she was past-master she brought those in authority to this belief, and when the treaty was presented to other nations for their ratification it contained this request. They willingly granted it and it became known as the "American Amendment." Many years passed before it was adopted by other countries, but now all of them have it in their treaties.

The wisdom of this provision is apparent, for, in the quarter of a century which has passed, the United States has had only one small war—the Spanish-American—while the Red Cross has rendered invaluable aid in scores of calamities. The list of these is long, and includes the Michigan forest fires, Ohio and Mississippi River floods, cyclones in many States, the Texas famine, the great earthquakes, Florida yellow-fever epidemic, the memorable disaster at Johnstown, the South Carolina Islands hurricane, and the great tidal wave at Galveston. Twice the Red Cross has sent relief to the sufferers from famine in Russia; it went to the help of the Armenians after the massacre; it was first

to relieve the distress of the Cuban "reconcentrados," and its services throughout the Spanish-American War are still fresh in memory. Our people always respond instantly and generously to all such appeals for help with thousands of dollars in money and thousands in supplies, but these are of small avail unless properly distributed, and this is the mission of the Red Cross. At the first cry of distress its workers are on the field and there they remain till the last needed act of mercy has been accomplished. To all of these scenes of suffering Miss Barton went in person, with her devoted assistants, and remained for weeks and months, burying the dead, apportioning the supplies, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, nursing the sick, and helping rebuild the ruined homes. It would be impossible to enter into the details of this work. These are fully set forth in the many official reports of Miss Barton and her large and interesting book entitled *The Red Cross in Peace and War*. Nothing in fiction ever was so dramatic and thrilling. Here also is the long and entertaining story of the society's part in the war between Spain and the United States from the time it responded to the first call of the starving reconcentrados, in 1897, until their own flag of liberty floated over Cuba. The Red Cross knows neither race nor color, neither Cubans nor Spaniards. In 1898 the Spanish Government expressed its appreciation of Clara Barton in the "Diploma of Gratitude," a beautifully engrossed testimonial from the Supreme Assembly of the Red Cross of Spain for kindness and help to Spanish soldiers.

In 1883 Miss Barton was appointed superintendent of the Reformatory Prison for Women at Sherborn, Massachusetts, by Governor B. F. Butler, but soon resigned the position. In 1885 she was made Special Commissioner for Foreign Exhibits at the New Orleans Exposition, but with these exceptions her life for thirty years was devoted to the Red Cross. For many years she made her home in Washington, where she provided a headquarters for the society from the time of its organization. Later she went to Glen Echo, a few miles away, attracted by the quiet and peace which left her undisturbed at the times when she could be at home. In a beautiful and picturesque spot overlooking the Potomac she built a unique house after the fashion of the temporary structures used by the Red Cross in its relief work. A wide hall extended the entire length, with a gallery looking down

upon it from the second story, and into this hall and gallery all the rooms opened. Between the partitions were almost numberless cupboards and closets whose existence never would be suspected, and most of these were filled with books and Red Cross literature. The stone towers, vine-covered and apparently architectural features, were in reality fireproof vaults for the protection of the important papers. Thus by personal care and at her own expense she preserved the records of the American Red Cross all the years.

This quaint but pleasant and comfortable house was full of interest. Domestic and personal associations clustered about the old furniture, pictures, and china brought from her childhood home, while all around were reminders of a public life that was without a parallel. The walls were covered with the flags of all nations, gifts to Miss Barton—our own banner, the great eagle of Germany, the eagles of Austria, star and crescent of Turkey, the blue-and-white silken folds of Greece, the royal banners of Italy, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, and the flag of Switzerland voted to her by that Government. Everywhere were engrossed and illuminated diplomas and testimonials from the German War Veterans, the Red Cross of Austria, the Sultan of Turkey, the Prince of Armenia, the Cortes of Spain, the Portuguese Red Cross, the Governor and Legislature of Texas—from all parts of the world. In cabinets were many jewels and decorations, including the Iron Cross of Prussia from Emperor William I. and Empress Augusta; Gold Cross of Remembrance and jewels from the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Baden; Red Cross from the Queen of Servia; decoration from the Queen of Spain; medals from potentates and societies without number.

Miss Barton was five times appointed to represent this Government at international conferences of the Red Cross in Europe—at Geneva in 1884, Carlsruhe in 1887, Rome in 1890, Vienna in 1897, Russia in 1902. At the last named she was received with marked distinction by the Tsar and Tsarina and the Empress Dowager, and although eighty-one years old she bore her full part in the duties of the conference. Notwithstanding the distinguished honors paid her by the sovereigns of Europe and eminent men and women of all countries, far beyond those ever conferred upon any other American woman, she was wholly without egotism or assurance, and so modest and reserved that she could not

be persuaded by any means to talk about herself. It was only from her closest friends that one could secure the facts about her life in which an appreciative public had a right to be interested. She was too reticent, for toward the close of her life, when she shared the fate of all who have achieved fame and the effort was made to depose her from her high position, she scorned to enter into controversy. "Let my life and my work speak for themselves," was her only answer to criticism, although she was deeply wounded. When she was convinced that the society which she had founded and sustained for so many years would pass into capable hands she gladly resigned the presidency and laid down the heavy burden.

Although at this time eighty-four years old Miss Barton had no thought of ceasing from work; she purchased at Oxford, Massachusetts, near the home of her birth, a handsome colonial house in which she expected to spend most of her time while still retaining the Glen Echo place. From here in 1905 she sent out to hundreds of friends her Christmas and birthday greeting, a little book of eight pages, containing her picture with a dainty cover of holly design. In this she outlined what she called "My Later Work" and said: "This announcement will not surprise you. You have never known me without work and you never will. It has always been a part of the best religion I had." She referred to the Red Cross now wholly taken over by the Government as "a finished effort" and said: "But this does not finish the need of help for the woes of the world about us. Another work reaches out its hands to me and I have taken them. The humane and the far-sighted are pressing to its standard—the standard of Organized First Aid to the Injured."

Miss Barton's plan, as afterward outlined, was to provide a training for firemen, policemen, employees on railroads, ships, in all kinds of factories, which would enable them to know what appliances and remedies to use on the instant when accidents should occur. This training would be given also to the women of the household so that they too might be prepared for the emergencies which so often arise. This scheme, which, when put into general practice, would be as valuable as the Red Cross itself, was carefully worked out even to the selection of a capable board of management, and this new organization has already taken its place among the great humanitarian agencies of the world.

Miss Barton was a strong advocate of woman suffrage, and, while she could not spare the time to make it a special part of her work, she always went to the national conventions when it was possible, occupied a seat on the platform, and bore strong testimony to her belief in the justice of this cause. She attended the convention in Baltimore in February, 1906, the last at which Miss Anthony was present, and in the course of her eloquent and touching remarks she said:

"A few days ago some one said in my presence that every woman in the world should stand with bared head before Susan B. Anthony. Before I had time to think, I said, 'And every man as well.' I would not retract the words. I believe her work is more for the welfare of man than for that of woman herself. Man is trying to carry the burdens of the world alone. When he has the efficient help of woman he should be glad, and he will be. Just now it is new and strange, and men cannot comprehend what it would mean. But when such help comes, and men are used to it, they will be grateful for it. The change is not far away. This country is to know woman suffrage, and it will be a glad and proud day when it comes."

Age passed Miss Barton by, leaving but few traces of the many years. Her dark eyes were bright and her cheeks pink, while the brown hair parted smoothly over her forehead had scarcely a thread of white. When she was eighty-four she offered her services and those of the Red Cross to both Russia and Japan and held herself in readiness to start for the Orient at the word of command. Almost to the last she kept a stenographer busy day after day answering the thousands of letters which came to her from all parts of the globe; she found constant employment for her own pen and supervised personally all the details of whatever work she was engaged in carrying forward.

The nation will indorse that resolution passed by the Central Relief Committee of Texas after the Red Cross had ended its work for the sufferers from the storm at Galveston:

"*Resolved,* That we especially thank and render homage to the woman who is the life and spirit of the Red Cross; to her who is the embodiment of the saving principle of laying down one's life for one's friend, whose friend is the friendless and whose charge is the stricken; to her who should be exalted above queens and whose achievements are greater than the conquest of nations or the inventions of genius, and who is justly crowned in the evening of her life with the love and admiration of all humanity—Clara Barton."

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