

CORRESPONDENCE.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA IN WAR TIME

Santiago de Cuba, Aug. 11, 1898.—Miss Annie Wheeler, youngest daughter of Gen. Wheeler, of Alabama—a fragile girl of 24 years—has charge of the female nurses in the army hospital of Santiago. How she became a Red Cross nurse is a romantic story. The motherless girl is peculiarly devoted to her father, whom she calls her "sweet-heart." She accompanied him and her brother to Tampa, and was daily seen riding about the camps with them on horse-back. To be by her father's side, she would gladly have gone into battle; but since that could not be, she determined to do the next best thing and go to the front as a nurse, in order to remain as near to him as possible. She met with strongest opposition on every hand; but with the blood of "the fighting Wheelers" in her veins, Miss Annie is not easily swerved from a good purpose. Gen. Wheeler earnestly protested against the project, but would not oppose a command to the dictates of his daughter's conscience. Some of the heads of the army absolutely refused her transportation to Cuba, and others denied her permission to land when she finally arrived off Santiago. Only Gen. Miles, after recapitulating the dangers, which she well understood, and urging her to return to safety—lent his strong helping hand and enabled her to enter upon her chosen path of duty.

When she first joined Miss Barton, female help was very scarce in Santiago. For a week she was almost in the crowded waterside hospital, so far as other women are concerned. There were several male attendants, to lift the sick, to bring in patients and carry out the dead, besides an efficient steward and two or three visiting physicians; and now there are also four white and three colored female nurses, under Miss Wheeler's direction. Early and late she toils, rising at 5 a. m. and leaving the scene of her labors only at nightfall, often walking unattended through the darkened streets of Santiago—but as safe as in her own parlor under the all-protecting symbol of the Red Cross. In the hospital she is as a ray of sunshine, her slender figure dressed in girlish white, or in blue cambric with snowy apron and kerchief, her curling hair brushed neatly back and blue eyes shining with earnest purpose; washing sick men's faces, writing home letters for them, administering food or medicine, and taking the last messages of the dying. No necessary service, however menial or repellant, is ever shirked by her, nor will she weary in well-doing. The old rule holds good, here as everywhere else in this odd, old world, that the worst "kickers"—who loudest bewail scant army rations and lack of home comforts—are those who have been least accustomed to luxury. Miss Wheeler, the child of wealth and ornament of society, whose Washington winters are spent in the luxurious Arlington, has never uttered one word of complaints. She is a prayerful girl, who begins and ends each day on her knees beside her army cot; and only heaven knows how many times during the long, hard days her "soul is on its knees," in the language of Hugo. The lover father and brother have been ordered to the North and she alone, of all "the fighting Wheelers" remain in Cuba. But she will not desert the work, wherein she was never more needed than today; and as for protection, there is not a soldier in our army who would not lay down his life for her, if needs be.

The hospital of which I write, though

created only a few weeks ago by the necessities of war, is by far the best in Cuba. It is the boat-house of the swell American club, loaned for the temporary purpose. It is built directly over the bay, some rods from shore and is reached by a long pier. Its great banquet hall, whose lattle red walls can be raised to admit every vagrant breeze, is now closely set with army cots, and double rows of the same are ranged along the encircling verandas. The smaller apartments have all their special uses, and in a little ante-room several oil stoves are set over which beef tea, malted milk and gruel are prepared. Not an inch of space is unfilled and were the commodious building ten times as big, it would be equally crowded.

When I first saw this hospital, two weeks ago, the sick were lying on the bare floors, but now, thanks to the Red Cross, they are amply supplied with cots and bedding. Considerable army red tape is squandered in getting patients into this haven of refuge, so that sometimes a half-conscious man, brought on a mule cart or a stretcher, lies for hours in the sun at the street end of the pier, before an order can be obtained from the palace, a mile up town, for his admission to the hospital. But when once inside, a man's chances of recovery are wonderfully increased. For example, there have been but three deaths in this hospital in a fortnight, while in the fever hospitals at Siboney they are dying by hundreds, and in the various field hospitals at an average of twenty per day. Out in the camps, the sick men are yet lying on the ground, under dog tents, alternately soaked with rain, scorched by the noon-day sun, chilled to the marrow at night unattended except by their comrades, and with nothing to eat but beans, bacon and hard-tack, even for those dying of dysentery. No wonder that fever is daily increasing among them, and yesterday out of a whole regiment, only two men were able to report for duty.

I spend a few hours every day in the water side hospital, where mine is the unofficial and inglorious part of cheering the convalescent—chatting awhile with this man, reading to that man, feeding another, writing home letters for others, doing comparatively unimportant things for which the busy nurses have no time, but which—so Minister Wheeler says—are sometimes more useful than medicine. Most of the men are very considerate, realizing that nurses are constantly on their feet, doing their best to meet a thousand demands. Of course there are querulous ones, who send their tired sisters on some trifling errand from one end of the big building to the other and who are never suited with anything that is done; but they are few, and never once have any of the ladies met with the slightest rudeness or insult. Officers and private soldiers, rich men's sons and their servants, lie side by side—all clad in Red Cross pajamas, which I regret to add, are not plentiful enough to be changed as often as they should be. In nearly every case the millionaires have borne suffering and hardship far better than their hostlers and valets. Almost without exception, the rich young society swells have been unexpected revelations of heroism, giving up their own few comforts to needier men, brave and uncompaining to the last. As the United States is now so largely un-American, her army was recruited from all the nations of the earth. Hence in the hospitals we see

the unmistakable Irish lip and eyes of Irish blue besides the German physique on the next pillow, and the blonde Sax on in contrast to the swarthy Latin. Some are grey-haired, middle-aged men, other boys in their teens, and all are so bronzed by exposure and unkempt as to hair and beard, that I doubt if their own mothers would know them. Every case is sad enough, heaven knows—of strong men brought to the gates of death, not on the field of battle, but by unnecessary exposure, afterwards and the criminal carelessness of their superiors, and some are positively heart-rending.

For example: A young Hercules, whose name nobody knows, raved five days and nights in the delirium of typhoid, until death ended his sufferings. He lies in an unmarked grave, his identity not yet discovered. Another mother's boy—a sweet-faced, gentle fellow, under 20, died of lung fever, from sleeping on the wet ground in his rain-soaked clothes. Most of the men have the local calentura—a swift, sharp fever, which runs its course in a week or two—induced from lying in the trenches, with insufficient food, during that dreadful first week in July.

The most peculiar case that has come under my observation is that of a tall, bronzed cavalryman, who for six days and nights has lain most of the time in an unconscious state. Nobody knows who he is. He came rushing into the hospital one hot mid-day, a week ago, delirious with fever, having walked from some distant camp in the broiling sun. He spoke of himself as "Guy" and is now known by that name, though whether it really belongs to him, as family or "given" name, none can say. He spent the first night alternately stalking up and down the hospital, imagining that he was commanding a regiment, and struggling with the attendants in efforts to leap over the veranda rail into the bay. Toward morning he lapsed into unconsciousness, and lay for three days like one dead—jaw dropped, eyes rolled far back into his head, the only sign of life a faint fluttering of the pulse. Though death was momentarily expected, the faithful steward injected medicine into his arm at regular intervals and poured a few drops of nourishment down his throat; and still he lingered hour by hour—no fever now, no weakening of the pulse, no change in the rolled-up eyes and fixed expression. It seemed such a pity, a strong-looking man to die and give no sign. On the fourth day I sat beside him, holding his two warm, limp hands between both my own, praying within myself that heaven would send the poor soul back from the border-land of shadows, if only long enough to send some message to the waiting wife or mother—when suddenly a change flashed over the countenance; first an expression of agony, quickly followed by a smile, and then the eyes unclosed and looked with full intelligence into mine. Holding fast the hands, as if by that means to stay the fluttering soul, I bent over him and said, "Guy! Tell me where you lived. I will write to your people." He understood, and made a desperate effort to speak. The lips moved, but no words came; then the eyes turned upward again till nothing but the whites were visible and the strange, half unconscious, state returned. But he was not altogether insensible. He moved himself to the edge of the cot, as close to me as possible and as long as I held his hands, remained quiet, but the instant I laid his hands upon his breast and tried to move away, his arms beat the air like windmills and a fearful expression came to his face. So there I sat till dark—and still he made no sign. Then it was impossible to stay longer, because imperative duties awaited me elsewhere. I went reluctantly, and all night long was worried by the fear that