

Saved the Masonic Jewels

The story of how Mrs. Ladd saved the Masonic Jewels while her own home was going up in smoke.

The Unselfish Deed of a True Heroine

(Headlines in News & Herald Copying an article by Mrs. K. L. Cureton written for Memorial Edition of The State.)

My mother, Mrs. Catherine Ladd, whose name may be recalled by hundreds of her old pupils throughout the South as one of the most noted and successful teachers of her day, gave up her loved vocation in the beginning of the struggle between the States and devoted herself wholly to the cause of the Confederacy. She had lived in Winnsboro twenty years where she had established a large and prominent institution of learning. Her literary talent was recognized as that among the best. Of her poems one noted said: "They are sweet, smooth and flowing, particularly so, but like Scotch music, their gayest notes are sad."

In her childhood days, she had been, at one time, a playmate of Edgar Allan Poe. Perhaps she caught some inspiration for her poems from these early associations.

She was also gifted as a playwright, and her papers on education, home manufactures and the encouragement of white labor showed that she realized long before the war that the prosperity of the South would depend ultimately on the latter. When the dark war clouds arose in their fury in 1861, this grand

woman closed her school, laid aside her pen and took up her needle and flung her doors ajar for the soldiers to enter. She was president of the Soldiers Aid Association and by her untiring exertions kept it well supplied with clothes.

Once when a gentleman friend said to her "The first time I ever saw you, you were under my father's kitchen looking for old iron vessels to kill Yankees with." My mother, now an old lady, seemed to warm up to the old war spirit and replied: "Oh, yes, and I also sent my full set of German tableware to be melted into bullets and my fine telescope to the officers. It was one with which you could see thirty miles!" She was one of the originators of the Confederate flag. Those were busy days and nights for her but her energy never grew weary, and she never was too tired to lend her personal supervision to any household work.

At the last when we lived in the dire dread of the Yankees "coming through," she still showed her noble patriotism. Although but a new girl at the time, I can still recall those dark, miserable days when we listened anxiously for the unwelcome intruders and how with almost bated breath we watched each night the glowing fires of our beautiful Columbia and nurseries of Country homes around us.

The troubles and anxieties of those gloomy times had cast their dark shadowed pall over us and we lived in hourly expectation of our ultimate ruin.

Oh! was it not enough that our fathers, brothers and

all near and dear to us should be laid on the sacrificial altar? No, this could not satiate the unrelenting fury of the terrible war fires.

The torch of the barbarians from the North, as we viewed Sherman and his brack bearing fellows, must come with their destructive walk leaving in their tracks only standing chimneys, grim sentinels over blackened ruins where once were the comfortable homes and happy fireside of a brave and generous people - monuments to Sherman's relentless pursuit of war, in which a Nero might have gloried but from which a Washington or a Lee would have shrunk in horror. Rumors were afloat that they had orders not to burn down our town and as they swept down upon us like wild Indians, we had this for a hope - a hope alas - too soon to fade into an echoless past.

My mother's house was ordered to be guarded. My father had painted a large, handsome Masonic Chart which stood on an easel in the parlor.

When the crack and snap of fire was first heard and we could see the red flames leaping upward and house after house succumb, suddenly we noticed a Federal officer ride up to our house gate quickly dismounting, dash into the house, and securing this chart, hurriedly give orders to some of his men to dig a hole in the garden, place it between mattresses and bury it. Recognizing in this man a member of the Masonic fraternity, Mother asked him to follow her, and together they rushed into the already blazing Masonic Hall and saved the Masonic jewels. She anxiously and frantically sought the Charter, but was pre-

vented from securing it by the smoke and flames, knowing as she did that leaving her own home for only these few moments meant the loss of all her own property, including the literary works of 30 years. We can but say it was only one instance of her entire unselfishness.

The flames roared and crackled and spread with desperate rapidity, devouring everything within reach. Only too vividly can I now recall those terrible scenes. I can still see the blowing blaze which seemed to reach the lurid heavens, hear the cries of terror-stricken women, shrieking children, groans of slaves, and commingled with the taunts and curses of a relentless enemy, who, filled with liquors, acted more like demons than human beings, swiftly as her feet could carry her my brave little mother put the box containing the jewels in a place of safety and returned to her own house which by this time was burning. The officer ordered his men to carry out our piano, which they did with the loss of one of its legs. Strange to say, the only thing saved of Mrs. Ligon's piano was one leg, and it was a counterpart of mother's. I have in my house the old melodion which did service in the Episcopal Church for many years. While this sacred edifice was burning some of the heartless vandals carried it out into an open space, and as one of

Their lawless band defiled its virgin keys
by playing soore uncouth Tune, the others leaped
and danced like heathen savages - danced
while our women cried for hopeless mercy,

In 1891 Mother was stricken Totally blind
but even thereafter she could not fold
her hands in idleness. Her pen has even
since brought forth many sweet poems.

The following is one among her last,
written in 1898 (The year before her death - 90 yrs. old)

Though our way be dark and dreary,
Though life's trials press us sore
Thou hast mansions for us ready,
Homes where troubles come no more.
O my Savior, guide me, watch me,
Lead me by thy loving hand,
Let me feel that thou art near me,
Until I reach the promised Land.

When the shades of eve are closing,
And the hour of death draws near,
Let me feel thy arms around me,
I will cross without a fear.
By faith I'll see my home of rest,
In that glorious land afar;
I will hear the angels' singing,
"Come! the gates of Heaven are ajar!"