

AN EARNEST WOMAN.

Then, after I had expressed my gratification at seeing a lady who fearlessly expressed her true sentiments, and assured her that the raw recruits who were hastening to their army would only be in their own way, and of no sort of impediment to the merits of the controversy, I brooding the light of the South to withdraw from the Union, and she advancing arguments against any such "destructive and revolutionary theory."

Agreeing finally to disagree on this subject, she said: "I have an aquarium in my garden, and it is a most interesting thing to me. I was praising your troops just now, and said they had disturbed nothing about the premises; I forgot, one of your soldiers did the most heinous thing this morning. I immediately imagined something dreadful and tremblingly inquired what had happened?" She pointed towards the garden, and said: "I had a very particular pet; I know them all by name and they know me. Whenever I go out to feed them they come to the surface and frisk about in the sunlight like so many playful kittens. With six or seven soldiers, however, I stumbled over the fence and stabbed with a stick or bayonet my most beautiful fish, for I found him dead. Wasn't it horrible?"

"It was impossible to suppress a smile at this, and, lest she might think me rude, I explained that, having read over a section of Virginia that had been devastated by the Federal forces, and knowing of innumerable instances of ferocious cruelty towards Southern women and children, she must pardon me if the story of her unfortunate fish struck me as being unpropitiously ludicrous. "Oh," she said, "I have read of these things, but have never credited the accounts. How can men so far forget themselves as to act like such barbarians? But let me show you my aquarium."

"We walked out into the beautiful and carefully tended garden, and passing beneath a graceful vine-covered arbor or summer-house, came upon the most extensive and exquisite aquarium I had ever seen. The water was as clear as crystal, and therein were all sorts of artificial caverns for the pretty gold and other rare fish that flashed and gambled about as if their lives were one long ecstasy. At one end of this aquarium, the very picture of a soldier, stood at attention the young Confederate infantryman, with his bright Minnie musket by his side. Looking at the lady inquiringly, she said in a whisper: "Oh, when I saw my poor dead fish I wrote a note detailing the circumstances to Gen. Lee, whose headquarters were over, and he sent me that soldier to stand guard over my fish."

"This was too absurd, and I laughed heartily as we turned away. "She said it was very kind of Gen. Lee, and went far to convince me that she had a right to his noble qualities of true patriotism. When about to take my departure, my hostess said: "Let me make a prediction: you are satisfied your army will be victorious; well, before the fourth of this month Vicksburg will be taken and Lee's army will be utterly defeated. In your own army your soldiers may be reckless and revengeful, and that they will set fire to our house. All I ask, is to be permitted to burn our own house and barn."

"I thanked her for her courtesy, smiled at her prediction, and promised, if near at hand, to come in and see her. I had been permitted to enjoy the mournful pleasure she craved so earnestly. Her prediction was wonderfully verified. Vicksburg fell on the 4th, and we were in full retreat from Gen. Grant's army. I made it convenient not to pass by that house."

"N. B.—The lady was Mrs. McClure, wife of the wealthy and distinguished Congressman, and if I am not mistaken, Gen. Lee, subsequently, in one of his raids, destroyed her entire property. She had never gloried in her misfortune, for a plunker, more earnest, or more patriotic woman did not breathe north of the Potomac."

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