

CLARA BARTON, HUMANITARIAN

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Clara Barton, Humanitarian by Mrs. Corra Bacon-Foster & Clara Barton

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MRS. CORRA BACON-FOSTER & CLARA BARTON

**CLARA BARTON,
HUMANITARIAN**



CLARA BARTON, AT THE TIME SHE ORGANIZED THE AMERICAN RED CROSS.

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CLARA BARTON

HUMANITARIAN

FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS, LETTERS, AND CONTEMPORARY PAPERS

BY

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BY

MRS. CORRA BACON-FOSTER

(Read before the Society, December 18, 1917.)

First on the long roll of America's great women is Clara Barton. First in her ideals—first in her achievements. When Senator Hoar was once asked who in his opinion was the greatest living American, he unhesitatingly replied, "Clara Barton." Thinking he had not been understood the questioner repeated, "Who is the greatest American *man*?" Again the reply, "*Clara Barton*, where will you find the *man* to equal *her*?" In every field of her endeavor she was successful; the schools she taught for eighteen years always prospered; the difficult desk in the Patent Office was efficiently held; as a writer her diction was clear and comprehensive—sometimes eloquent; in diplomacy she could instruct statesmen; in oratory John B. Gough pronounced her remarkable; as winner and holder of affection none have ever surpassed her; on her service to humanity in war and in peace no one can place an estimate. In courage, intrepidity, and

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patience, in skill in organization, she has seldom been equaled by man or woman in any country or in any age; hers was truly a most remarkable character. In America she ranks with Jeanne d'Arc in France, to whom the English are now placing a memorial in Westminster. When will Americans thus express the gratitude and reverence due their heroine, Clara Barton, the "Angel of the Battlefield" and the Founder of the American Red Cross?

Intellectual activity was the characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century, peace and prosperity in the United States had permitted bright minds of the great middle class opportunity to turn from the strife for existence, which had followed the war for independence, to studies of nature, of science, and of psychology; in consequence, amazing discoveries, wonderful mechanical inventions, and spiritual investigations were changing the mode of life and of thought. In no section of the country was there more such development than in Worcester County, Massachusetts, where on the Christmas Day of 1821 Clara Barton was born.

She was the youngest of the family of Captain Stephen Barton, a man of middle age, who was descended from a founder of the colony. He had been a soldier under General Anthony Wayne in his campaign against the Indians in the northwest and was a leader in progressive thought in intellectual Oxford village; well-to-do, a Free Mason, a life-long Democrat. The little girl, bright and precocious, became the pet of the much older sisters and brothers, three of whom, educated school-teachers, proved themselves in her case worthy anticipators of Madame Montessori's cult. In the long winter evenings, nestled in her father's arms, she imbibed some knowledge of mili-

tary tactics from checkerboard campaigns, and the brother David took her out to the pasture and taught her to become a fearless horsewoman while developing sinew for the strenuous life of middle age. A serious accident befell this brother when Clara was eleven years old from the effect of which he was an invalid for two years; by his desire and the exigencies of the household she became his sole attendant, thus rendering her first service in the cause of humanity; this experience was also a preparation for later things.

She grew into a painfully bashful, sensitive girl, so much so as to cause her friends grave anxiety. Phrenology was one of the "isms" of the day and as a matter of routine was investigated by the Barton family. One of the exponents of the science, Mr. L. W. Fowler, was a guest in the house while giving a course of lectures in Oxford. His advice was sought as to a future course for her; "The sensitive nature will always remain," was his reply, "she will never assert herself for herself, she will suffer wrong first, but for others she will be perfectly fearless. Throw responsibility upon her, give her a school to teach." The accuracy of his estimate of her character the story of her life sustains, especially in the events of 1900-1904.

Without difficulty she secured the necessary certificate from the school trustees of the district in which her recently married sister had located, and at the early age of fifteen she took up a profession in which she achieved notable success. In controlling other minds she acquired self-control, although to the end of her long life she was timid and sensitive to a degree unless driven by a strong impulse. Her winning personality gained the hearts of her pupils, while firmness and diplomacy checked any insubordination. In the

intervals between three summer schools she attended the excellent academy at Oxford village, always an educational center; in fact she never ceased to be a student and investigator.

Her brothers' mills at North Oxford were the second in the country to introduce spindle and power looms; they employed many operatives who were deprived of school facilities—this was long before philanthropists had evolved a child-labor law. Not being successful in securing the location of a district school they erected a building and installed their young sister as mistress of the factory school, which she taught winter and summer for ten years. In the office of the mills, after school hours, under the tutelage of her capable brother Stephen, she mastered the intricacies of bookkeeping and became sole accountant, a discipline aptly recalled in later Red Cross years when an assistant complained: "No matter what happens those accounts *must* be kept up to date." Meanwhile this indefatigable young woman lived with her parents; and, knowing of New England customs of the day, we may assume that she bore her share of the household duties and then formed the frugal habits of a lifetime. Looking back it appears as if the practical mother had been the balance wheel in this family of brilliant intellects. Old letters contain reminiscences of the many frolics that enlivened this period where the Barton wit had full play, for Clara Barton was far from being a serious-minded person; her sense of humor and ready repartee made her always the life of any assembly of friends.

After the death of the mother in 1851 the father went to the home of his eldest son, the family home was closed and Clara decided to spend a year at the Clinton Liberal Institute in New York State for

senior study. In this college town she found a leisurely, scholarly society, very different from the keen business activity of the factory village. Friendships she there formed broadened her point of view and were lifelong. The principal of the Institute recognized her ability and won her gratitude by his encouragement and advice; an associate tutor, a literary aspirant, admired her and stimulated her ambition—this friendship with many episodes endured for years and was probably the great romance of her life; she also met there Miss Mary Norton, a literary star of note and friend of Horace Greeley, with whom an affectionate and intimate relation existed until the death of Miss Norton many years later. This year in college, with the succeeding season in the cultivated Norton family circle while teaching in Hightstown, N. J., was doubtless most important in the development of Clara Barton's character—although she was then over thirty—in softening the very practical ideals of New England life.

While teaching in Hightstown she learned of the deplorable lack of public schools in the neighboring Bordentown. A progressive trustee of the place interested her in the subject and she proffered to make an effort to establish a school that would succeed; if she should fail she would demand no salary for the first three months of service. Her offer was reluctantly accepted, a small room was secured for the experiment and she opened her term with an attendance of six notoriously bad boys of the town. Somehow she tamed them and attracted others until the small room could not accommodate the applicants. Here she met Miss Lydia Haskell, a kindred ambitious spirit with whom much of her future was associated.

Her success in the public school was so pronounced