TRIALS OF OUR FOREFATHERS.

By Mrs. Harriet L. Westcott-Hill.

PERMIT me to call your attention for a brief time to a recital of some of the stories which have come down to us through public and private sources depicting actual experiences of patriot fathers and mothers and their families during the stern struggle for our national freedom. These details of individual and family hardships and privations must speak to our hearts and consciences more loudly than even the most accurate official accounts of battles lost or won.

These memories of men and women of the Revolution deserve careful preservation and must awaken deep sympathy and earnest gratitude. Among many more thrilling narratives I have selected a simple description of home life in the vicinity of the famous battle of Long Island, because there our own gallant Maryland men especially distinguished themselves by their indomitable valor even unto death. Their self devotion rendered such service to the cause of freedom that their names will ever be enrolled upon the hearts of their grateful countrymen, and a lofty niche in the Temple of Fame shall ever be kept sacred to their memory. But to-day we will contemplate another page in this soul-stirring book of the past. In addition to the conflict of battle, there were home incidents of that time that have come down to us through family correspondence.

The neighborhood about the scene of the memorable conflict on Long Island was an agricultural one. The women and children were at home on the farms with their colored servants and young boys and old men, while the able bodied fathers, husbands and sons were absent in the army. At that time many of our commonest modern conveniences and comforts were unknown. Neither furnaces, stoves nor grates had been introduced; neither gas, electric lights or even lamps were used. Within the wide, open fire-places of kitchens and living rooms blazing logs of wood dispensed heat and also light, in addition to the home-made tallow candles. Around the hearth stone and the cheerful blazing fire or ruddy coals the family would cluster at night, after the busy hours of the day, and the young people would hear many a well remembered tale of life experience from the lips of honored grandparents or father or mother. From the peace of such home life the farmer folk were rudely awakened that momentous 22d of August, 1776. From the recorded annals of one particular family I have learned some of their trials from the clash of arms between the Americans and British that memorable day. The early morn was bright and beautiful, and presaged nothing of the sorrow and distress so imminent. The fields were covered with ripening grain, sweet clover blossoms scented the air, and the honey bees flitted from stem to stem gathering sweetness. Suddenly the firing of cannon resounded through the still midsummer air.

The workers in the fields soon came running to report the surmise that the British had landed and must be approaching. Then was there a hastening to the postoffice or the country store (the great place of rendezvous in the neighborhood) to learn more definitely the latest news. Women, dressed neatly in the short gown, (the style of their modest home attire) ran to their front doors to make anxious inquiry of any chance passer-by. The house servants gathered in alarm around their mistress, asking, "What is the matter?" The men who had been left to work on the farm as less robust than those who had already gone in the army, hastened to arm themselves with anything available they could find. The master at the school house soon caught the excitement, and, with his pupils, left his desk and came out to join the anxious inquirers. An awe struck the hearts of the hearers as from the low Dutch church suddenly a violent ringing of the bell was heard, for that was the well known signal of coming danger.

Soon their worst fears were realized, as the reverberation of the big Hessian guns smote the air, and the black smoke darkened the deep blue of the cloudless sky like the unfurling of a banner of evil import. The one who recorded these facts was then but a girl of barely sixteen years. Her father (an invalid) her mother and one sister, with the colored servants and their children, composed the household. The father was feeble from sickness and had to walk with a stout cane, and dressed in the long bodied and long skirted coat, with knee breeches and knee buckles, the style of the time, he looked much older than he really was.

This family of unprotected, helpless ones knew they should seek greater safety by removing to some place more distant from the opposing armies. The farm wagon and horses were hastily made ready and brought to the house door to remove the family and other valuables to a place of safety. Some few pieces of furniture most prized were placed in the wagon, also the works of the tall old Dutch clock. Then was put in the much loved Dutch Bible, with its great shining brass clasps, besides a few other things. The old colored cook brought out the big iron dinner pot with the meat in it, which had been boiling over the fire in preparation for the family meal. The pot had to be left, but they took the joint of meat with them. In those days there were no butcher's nor grocery wagons, nor poultry dealers to bring supplies around to families as now. The farmers supplied their needs chiefly from their home resources. The beef was from animals reared, fattened and killed at home; a large part pickled and kept in casks to be drawn upon as needed. Poultry was abundant, raised by the farmer's thrifty wife. Fish were to be had in the near-by ponds and streams. The fatted calf would be killed and the neighbors would share with each other at each one's especial "killing time."

This was the happy condition of the time of peace, but on this day we speak of the firing of guns, though still distant, was constantly telling to anxious hearts that a battle was waging. Before the farm wagon, with its full load, left the home, the father gave orders that the remaining horses should be taken as far from the highway as possible so as to escape being captured by the enemy. An order was given to take the grain already stored in the barn to the open field and to stack it to be burned, that it might not be used for the enemy's supplies. "We had never a more plentiful harvest," said the poor father, with a sigh. The mother replied, "Never mind; our people will save it if they can, but better to have it burned than to strengthen the enemy." They could tarry no longer, and with sad and fearful hearts drove to the house of some relatives at a distance, leaving their home, the poor father said, never to see it again nor to recover their possessions. One evening not long after they saw a bright light in the direction of their house and a heavy smoke in the sky, which alas! arose from the burning stacks of grain and their comfortable homestead.

Their home was a typical Dutch farmhouse, and had tiles decorated with scripture scenes about its wide fire-place, and had been built soon after the settlement of Flatbush, either with imported Holland bricks or some home manufactured ones, at a brick kiln which had existed early in the vicinity. This house was burnt by the order of Lord Cornwallis, because it had been a defense behind which our American riflemen had fired. When the armed forces left that neighborhood this family retnrned to their desolate home, having lost nearly everything but the bare land. Kind neighbors gave them shelter and food, and for a time they oecupied a deserted house to which the owner did not return till later. The father, in ill health, was utterly despondent at the prospect of the coming winter. The mother, remarkably cheery and hopeful, was the stay and comfort of them all. As speedily as possible this good mother secured lumber from a loyalist, who had some piled on his premises, and soon had carpenters busily at work to build another house.

The two daughters and any young friends they could press into service were given the task of diligently hunting for nails that could be used again in the new house among the ashes and debris of the ruined dwelling. Before the new year they had the satisfaction of moving into their house although not finished till long after, as the lumber gave out, Some prisoner officers who were allowed their liberty on parole living in the neighborhood, used to help hunt for naile and straighten them out for use again. Around was a scene of of general havoc. Disaster had followed the patriot army. General de Heister, with his Hessian troops; Lord Cornwallis, with his regiments of infantry and artillery; and Lord Percy, with his Grenadiers, were well trained soldiers, and more than a match for our own raw troops.

Our men had been commanded ably by General Green, but at this time he was very sick, and the command devolved upon another general, who was unfamiliar with the locality. Our American forces were repulsed again; the loss in killed, wounded and prisoners was fully 1,500; (some historians say twice that many.) It was during this time of disaster and deep sadness that our Maryland batallion rendered such vital service in covering the retreat of our broken forces by ther heroic conduct. The written narrative from which I have taken my facts continues thus:

"On the farms, in the fields and woods, everywhere, men were found desperately wounded or having just died. In the old Dutch church the mortally wounded were placed, and the dead were buried just outside the walls in the old burial ground. One could not cross the woods in any direction without finding the body of some soldier who had fallen in that terrible retreat utterly ex-

(Continued to sixth page.)

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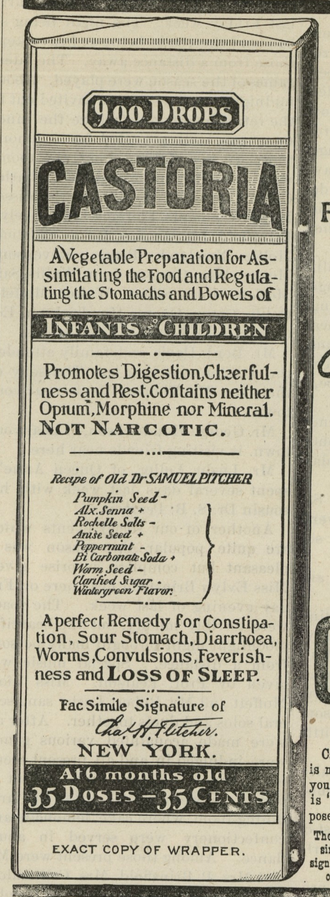

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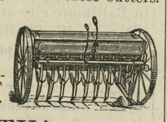

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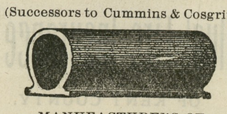

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