

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers 1*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is badly faded.

Pictures in the Stricken City

November 14th ' 85

Lawrence Carr

I will say, first as a semi-apology for the pictures I have the pleasure of presenting to the club tonight, and second, to dull the biting edge of criticism that we must remember: impressions of pictures are due to a combination of chances 1st the condition of the pictures when seen; 2nd the time when seen; 3rd of the place where seen, and the condition, mentally and physically of the viewer.

Tis true the pictures may be seen again under more favorable circumstances, but it matters not how rosy the light or pleasant the surroundings, the first impression will overshadow each subsequent viewing.

New Orleans

One peculiarity of this not truly typical albeit essentially southern city is its grand yet busy lonesomeness. This fact is more patent to the stranger when he remembers how little it has in common, and when he observes the few points of comparison with the average American city.

Here he sees what exists to no such extent elsewhere in the United States: a perfect admixture of traits, customs, and colors of every clime. After the time of De Soto on to its actual founding by Bienville, one hundred and sixty seven years ago; thence through its changes of masters, first France, then Spain, France once more, its sale to the American Government, by Bonaparte in 1803, his memorable and historic words when that sale was consummated: "This accession of territory strengthens forever the power of the United States, and I have just given to England a maritime rival that will, sooner or later, humble her pride."; the partial proving of this sentiment twelve years later in the struggle between Pakenham and Jackson; its position during the late Civil War; the inter state riots and dissensions as late as 1878; all of these things have caused to be woven with its history some sentimental threads, and tended to encircle this city in particular with a romantic halo, which on closer inspection is almost painfully absent.

One wonders how, and under what circumstances the writers who have so brilliantly builded this romance found it perchance a residence sufficiently long to become acclimated; is necessary to enable us to discover and enjoy it.

Yet at this season, when your energy has all disappeared and your vitality is rapidly drizzling away from exposure to the steady glare of an almost tropical sun, you care very little whether it exists or no. Now you begin to regard these cool, careless, smoking inhabitants as personal enemies; you wonder how people can smoke with enjoyment in such a climate. That they do enjoy it is without question, for nearly every one that passes you has that infernal and eternal brown paper cigarette in some stage of its short but never to be forgotten existence; from the rapid rolling of the deft fingers to the singularly graceful flit with which it is sent into the street.

Do they query why that roasting and suffocated looking Northerner is not smoking; do they wonder, "does he smoke at home." True, he does not look as though he had a home; he even feels as if he were losing his identity, but hopes in a lazy listless way that the line in the hotel register will be taken as gospel, and prays that no physical exertion will be necessary on his part to prove it.

You finally and by pitying them for their o're weaning confidence and simplicity in being satisfied with this their habitation. Is it possible that they do not see it as unprejudiced eyes may have viewed this picture.

A treacherous resting place in the very heart of a giant octopus that has been, is, and will continue for years reaching far and wide with its numerous large, green and shining tentacles always drawing to its insatiable maw the collection of poisonous vapors generated from the varied floating debris, covering the surfaces of the different boiling swamps in its immediate vicinity.

Yet once again has this slothful and on observing glutton gorged itself to repletion, and while lying dormant from the effects of its pestilential banquet, it is attacked by a stealthy as well as powerful foe who does not quit the assault until the stupefied giant shows signs of returning life and strength by repeated disgorgements of its enormous and unhealthy repast and is left the victor, but at what a cost: almost irreparable damage to a very vital part of its economy.

New Orleans was indeed fearfully afflicted: the yellow fever scourges of 1878 and 1879 are yet fresh and sorrowful memories in the minds of many. Such widespread desolation leaves results that the most brilliant and elastic temperaments forget not for years that spontaneous charity of an entire nation which did so much to heal existing differences while supplying their present needs even yet stands out in bold relief the one verdant pure, and sweet oasis in that desert of hopeless desolation.

Such charity, - here the word takes on its purest meaning - has never been equaled, will never be surpassed, and it has left in its wake some few pleasant memories of that truly dark period. The city at all hours bustling presents now an unusually active appearance: business however is practically suspended, still the streets are full of life; vehicles of all kinds hurrying here and there, wagons loaded with provisions, bedding, delicacies, filled with comforts of every description for the sick and destitute and groaning 'neath ominous receptacles for the dead; little time is wasted in distinction; all are destitute; only in degree do they differ.

People pass and repass friends on the street without speech recognition, notice those blanched cheeks; all the suppressed breathing; what a relief what a flood of hope it brings to see the rushing busy ones so intent on the care of others that they have no time to care for self.

But oh, this fighting an unseen foe, not knowing how soon the call will come for you, not even the semblance of a weapon to protect yourself against his attack without the remotest suspicion of his ambush or faintest knowledge of the manner in which he may strike; words can not picture; none can realize it without they have experienced the constant dread then the sham courage and finally the almost stolid indifference of despair and abject terror.

Here is a large pile of rudely constructed pine coffins number in view but none too many for the day's dead. See the wagons come and go yet while they diminish the suggestive pile at one end, it is as rapidly replenished at the other.

Look at some of the workers; there is a gigantic negro; yes he is actually singing as he shambles to the wagon with a tiny coffin containing a dead child; he dumps the load from his shoulder and is apparently as happy

and careless as if he were simply carrying a pack of merchandise from a steamer's hold.

Here is a creole who helps unload the empty coffins; he is very cool but very quiet; he is continually smoking making his brown paper cigarettes as fast as he can consume them; his movements are cat-like and supple, he actually lends a picturesque grace to this frightful charnel work.

There is a Cuban; how quiet and resigned he appears; he does willingly all that is required of him; his face is cold, smooth, and utterly devoid of expression and for ought it tells he may be a fool, he may be a wit.

See that handsome white-skinned young Northerner; how sadly out of place he looks, even in such times as these. He can't be more than sixteen. His fair skin shows him new to the clime; he is very nervous over his work alert and starts at every sound poor lad he was doomed. How describe the feelings that arose as he told of the good mother who was waiting for him in the old Vermont home, unaware of the wanderer's whereabouts.

How careless people are with personal effects but there is little fear of thieves the hand that a Chicago fire could not stay that the Civil War could not hamper; that e'en the Jeanette disaster could not puierlize, has here lost its cunning, and hangs limp and useless. The first was short while frightful, the second though deadly was visible; the third though a hopeless outlook be and could be seen, and the mind accepted the inevitable. But here all is veiled in deep shadow and while hope is not gone, none exists, nothing is tangible; and the outcome cannot even be guessed. Oh for the pen of a Dante to do full justice to these scenes.

Did you notice those buggies that are driven past you so rapidly? that you scarcely see the weary looking men they contain? Men of that class which was never known to fail in an emergency of this kind, who responded eagerly and quickly to every call who forgot there was a north and a south, who bade a cheerful goodbye to wife, children, parents and friends, to enter a darkness with no light beyond, to fight a battle where no martial music would enliven waning courage, where there was no rattle of musketry or roar of cannon to suggest undying fame and tell that the world held its breath while the struggle went on ready to crown the victor in an almost equal contest, it was of little moment were they skeptic or christian, they took their lives in their hands with less thought than they gave to the well-being of the

beast that bore them as swiftly and safely. A class who carry comfort to the well, and hope to the sick, and whose ranks were filled more rapidly than the scourge with all its fearful power could mow them down.

Here is a funeral procession coming into view; simply wagons one, two fourteen in all and there are no mourners. No mourners, did I say? The third wagon contains a box in which lies the body of a local mercy, Merrick, who, had she died at other times than this would have gone to her grave without sorrowful following, without sincere regret, unwept and unhonored leaving a feeling of guilty relief in the breasts of those who from choice or accident were more closely associated with her during the seeming bright spots in her young life. Yet she was his world, his all to the faithful little brute that said on that coffin lid. He would wince, beg, and scratch, then wait with impatient grief, and, failing to receive recognition, would howl most piteously, anon, and he would try with playful bark and growl to attract her attention. Then, remembering the tricks and capers that had always brought the loving pat and the subsequent caress, he went through them all but to no success. He would then stretch out at full-length with his little nose between his paws, trying to think what it all meant. And so the cortege passes out of sight. But he would not be driven away; to him she was without guile; his unreasoning love saw no fault; and loyally he maintained his place, and taking his position on her grave in Potters Field, there he remained, and died of – well he died.

It is now dark, and a stroll through the deserted streets with the glowing thoughts engendered by the unnatural stillness in this large city bring forcibly to mind Goldsmith's Derested Village what an uncanny feeling creeps over you. You hear a wagon rumble by; you know what it means; you encounter but few going at your gait. They are as a rule running for drugs and doctors; away up the street as far as the eye can reach the striking silhouettes on the window curtains tell the despairing story.

There is a form gliding gently across the room; it bends slowly and tenderly over a couch, and is lost to view. Here you see the outline of an upright figure with hat still in hand; he is surrounded by the sorrowing family. He must've told them there was no hope, for their heads are buried in their hands, and sounds of sobbing come out on the still night air.

See that frantic shadow rushing across an apartment further up the street, how large the pitcher looks as he raises it to his lips to drink; he must

not drink that way, – stop him, someone. Ah, two or three forms rush athwart your line of vision; then all disappear. The sounds continue the story; they are struggling with a fever-frenzied sufferer; prayers, curses, and entreaties are all intermingled as they are wafted to your ears.

Why, this room seems so quiet; what can it mean? Look, a form enters from somewhere; it passes across the curtain; a cry; a shriek; “Oh, my God, he is dead!” Then all sinks out of sight; perchance even as you looked at the spirit was leaving its earthly habitation.

This room but continues the story or rather ends it. Here are several figures; they are evidently carrying a load. Yes, it is so; for as you near the house, if you see in the heavily shadowed street the dead man's wagon before the open door.

Some negro children are standing near the wagon, evidently awaiting an opportunity of speaking; and as the burden is dropped, one of the elder boys said, “I say, Boss, please cum see Lindy.” “What is wrong?” asked one not unkindly. “Dat's jes it haint seen nuffin or 'er fer two hole days.” “What's that,” said one of the scavengers. “Why you see Lindy's Bad Jeff new woman, golly how he whips her. Den he locks her up; coons all spise er kase she bused Jeff's wife and runned her away.”

“Well,” asked another of the dead squad, “what can we do?” “Cum break in de doah. She bin dar two days. Jeff's bad nigga golly spares he's killed her; all de same he runned away. Old folks say dey specks Yellow Jack's got her.” A little frame shanty consisting of two apartments, one of them used as a stable, the other, as you enter with the men presents a frightful picture in the dim light furnished by the lanterns. Two ancient chairs, a rickety table covered scantily with the broken and unwashed dishes containing the stale remnants of the last meal; a small dilapidated trunk half hidden by the gaudy but tattered raiment of its owner an old two holed stove lay on its side the pipe having been pulled from its hole in the roof had fallen over toward a dark corner where on a bed of foul-smelling matting lay Linda, dead. She had died in a semi-sitting or crouching position, resting on her left hip; her limbs drawn under her, her left hand on the floor maintaining the position. Her right hand clutching her hair. The head was thrown back, the mouth, – but why speak of that, the eyes were enough as the sweep of the lantern brought them into the light with a yell of terror the curious crowd that had followed rushed frantically out into the alley.

What a stare, what had she seen; what is it on which she still gazes out in that great beyond with unspeakable reverence for a power you recognize even while you do not understand. You cover the poor eyes with your handkerchief.

She was a light quadron, was quite a beauty, the queen of her kind, yet here she had sickened and died without care without help alone and deserted, and yet thousands were in sound of her voice.

Your reverie is cut short by the request “hold the lantern please” then the stiffened form is hastily bundled into a box and taken out to the wagon.

A last look around the room as you leave it; have you seen all that was in it? No, for there is a piece of looking glass framed with a piece of rusty black velvet, a small shelf just below covered with clean paper; a comb and brush, some ribbons, a box of powder and a piece of puff. They are calling, they want their lantern. You go home sick; you wonder was it Yellow Jack or Bad Jeff; you go to bed to toss and dream and ponder what a day may bring forth; things may look bright tomorrow, perhaps.

Across the street from your lodging is the Howard office. As you enter you are pushed aside by a poor, half demented creature who rushes frantically past you. She has a sick child in her arms, and she breathlessly tries to tell of its sufferings, explaining between sobs its needs. Even as she is speaking the little one dies on her breast.

The mother scarcely comprehending its sudden stillness, croons to it as only a mother can; in a moment her grief-clouded faculties realize that its little spirit has taken its upward flight and with a heart-piercing shriek she sinks in a heap on the floor.

Our laughing, swarthy giant of the previous day has just stepped in. He is ordered to take the dead child out for instant burial. The mother refuses to give up. She will not yet believe it dead. With what kindly force and tenderness for such an untutored fellow, he takes it from her; he has a place to fill and is not found wanting.

Take your thought with you, and come out on Magazine Street. It seems like yesterday that you passed this little cottage. The young father,

happy and contented in the bosom of his family, resting after his day's toil; the little ones are gleeful and noisy; they pull him and haul him and play all manner of pranks at his expense as he wishes to read the paper now he tries to persuade them by an endeavor to look fierce that they are annoying him; his attempt was a dismal failure; they knew him better and harassed him all the more. The mother handsome and buxom, is bustling around preparing the evening meal; she stops every now and then at some fresh outburst and smiles, with a full face of matronly pride.

And now, on entering the room, can this be called a contrast? There on the bed lay the young father, dead, on a little bed beside it lay the two elder children, the one dead, the other dying. A little innocent crawled about, in the dirt on the floor cooing and calling for its mother; and that mother stricken at her post between the beds on the one side her sick children, on the other the inanimate form of one she had promised to love, honor, and obey until death do them part and how nobly she kept that promise when the fearful scourge made it impossible for her to do more, she had fallen on the bed beside his lifeless form to die. 'Twas then the cooing of her youngest born that fanned the expiring spark, that showed the maternal love dominant, and she made a final effort to reach her child the sheet she had partially dragged from the bed in that effort hung over the side, and was entangled about her feet. Thus she had fallen and died beside the now only living member of her family baptizing it with the last gush of her life's blood, vitiated as it was by the scourge.

And there she lay. No friend had been near to tenderly straighten her form, to reverently close those staring eyes, but why close them perchance her last stare disclosed the future home of her brave spirit; a circle of loved ones waiting to receive her, him in whom she believed and whom she honored, ready to bid her welcome. Yes why close them; to gaze on her cause no feeling of horror; for here was no such stare as Linda's.

But we must not forget this little innocent; it must be taken to other quarters. But where? To the Howard's of course where else; for all here is desolation.

How little we hear of this noble charity in times of prosperity; and how much when the dark and dismal yellow fever clouds hovered over the South what a charity it is; what better epitaph can any member of that band here than "Here lies a Howard."

In 1855, a Howard Association was organized at Norfolk, Va. for the purpose of caring for yellow fever sufferers. The organization was thus named in honor of John Howard, the English philanthropist who bankrupted himself financially and physically, by personal supervision of his immense charities.

In June of 1867 the surviving members of the Howard Association in anticipation of an epidemic of yellow fever, renewed their expired charter and organized with seventeen charter members. E. F. Schmidt as President and Dr. Warren Stone as an honorary member. They gave their subscriptions collected from others willing to aid, and to this added their personal supervision of all detail, and labored untiringly, gladly unceasingly in behalf of the sufferers.

It is not necessary to speak of what they accomplished during the epidemics of 1878 and 1879; that is already history. Thoughts surround such memories that bespeak some living jewels dropped unstained from heaven. Was there any silver lining to this gloomy, dark, and threatening cloud?

Yes: away in the far north, west, and east we hear of charity after charity that spread throughout the country with the suddenness and grandeur of the sun burst following the storm. Nothing is given grudgingly; some things are done that were not even dreamed of before but naught is considered mal apropos that will bring additions to the fund being raised for the succor of the stricken people.

In an obscure village a little child is seen leading her pet kid to the butcher. "I want to sell my kid to you so that you may cut it up for meat" said the little one sadly. "You want to sell it my dear" cried the big fellow in his rough but kindly way "don't you love it anymore?" "Love it," exclaimed the girl while the tears coursed down her little cheeks, "Oh, yes I love it dearly;" then placing her arms around its neck she gazed fondly into its soft, innocent eyes, kissing it and sobbing all the while "but I must part with it. I want to give some money to the poor people who are sick in the South; it must be my money, and I don't know how to get it without sending my kid, for it is all mine, you know."

The butcher purchased the kid without much regard is to weight or value and there was a suspicious moisture about his eyes while paying for it;

something so new and strange to him and it interfered with his vision to such an extent that he paid her twice over, then he tried to induce the child to take the kid home again.

“No, no” the child insisted “I don't know why, but that would not be right; it would not be giving up my kid for the sick people.” And she stooped and kissed it a last fond farewell and “Mister, you won't let it see you when you kill it please.” One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. The rugged butcher seized the delicate little child in his arms, and almost smothered her with kisses. Then, putting her down, he beat a hasty retreat from his shop, saying as he went, “When I kill it; that kid won't be killed if I can help it.”

So we see, through all these frightful scenes shown that one bright particular star. Although the night is dark and the storm is desolating, through its weird and death dealing whispers we hear those sweet kind voices bringing us the best wishes of our friends. Through its fearful and chilly blackness we can clearly see the outlines of their loved forms and loving faces, and we can also feel the warm sympathetic grasp of their helping hands.

Their unselfish love, their heartfelt prayers, their boundless tender sympathy come hand in hand through the clouds. Tis like a halo of hope, bidding us good cheer, asking us not to utterly despair.

Aye, this god-like spark of charity has bloomed into a glorious sun, and is burning strongly and glowing brightly with an unquenchable flame and a permanent lustre in the hearts of even the lowliest of our countrymen.