

The Civil War Era Diary of Sarah Morgan Dawson



ABOUT THE READING Many accounts of the Civil War focused on battlefield conditions and the lives of soldiers. These rugged tales are balanced, however, by the diaries and memoirs left by women from both sides of the conflict. The wartime diary of Sarah Morgan Dawson was first published in 1913. The diary chronicles the experiences of the Morgan family, who lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and offers many insights into the lively personality and wit of its author. The excerpts below were written in 1862.

VOCABULARY

consequence result

parish Louisiana county

pillaged robbed by force

wanton excessive

profusion great quantity



As you read consider the difficulties and dangers faced by civilians, particularly women, during the war.

August 21st

Miriam and mother are going to Baton Rouge in a few hours, to see if anything can be saved from the general wreck. From the reports of the removal of the Penitentiary machinery, State Library, Washington Statue, etc., we presume that that part of the town yet standing is to be burnt like the rest. I think, though, that mother has delayed too long. However, I dreamed last night that we had saved a great deal, in trunks; and my dreams sometimes come true. Waking with that impression, I was surprised, a few hours after, to hear mother's sudden determination. But I also dreamed I was about to marry a Federal officer! That was in **consequence** of having answered the question, whether I would do so, with an emphatic "Yes! If I loved him," which

Source: *A Confederate Girl's Diary* by Sarah Morgan Dawson. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913.

will probably ruin my reputation as a patriot in this **parish**. Bah! I am no bigot!—or fool either. . .

August 23rd

Dr. Perkins . . . repeated the same old stories we have been hearing, about the powder placed under the State House and Garrison, to blow them up, if forced to evacuate the town. He confirms the story about . . . the town being **pillaged** by the negroes and the rest of the Yankees. He says his own slaves told him they were allowed to enter the house and help themselves, and what they did not want the Yankees either destroyed on the spot, or had it carried to the Garrison and burned. They also bragged of having stopped ladies on the street, cut their necklaces from the necks, and stripped the rings from their fingers, without hesitation. It may be that they were just bragging to look great in the eyes of their masters; I hope so, for Heaven help them if they fall into the hands of the Confederates, if it is true.

Confederate forces were prepared to destroy part of the town to prevent supplies from falling into the hands of Union troops.

I could not record all the stories of **wanton** destruction that reached us. I would rather not believe that the Federal Government could be so disgraced by its own soldiers. Dr. Day says they left nothing at all in his house, and carried everything off from Dr. Enders's. He does not believe we have a single article left in ours. . .

She is referring to a group of Confederate artillery soldiers.

This morning Withers's battery passed Mr. Elder's on their way to Port Hudson, and stopped to get water. There were several buckets served by several servants; but I took possession of one, to their great amusement. What a **profusion** of thanks over a can of water! It made me smile, and they smiled to see my work, so it was all very funny. It was astonishing to see the number of Yankee canteens in the possession of our men. Almost all those who fought at Baton Rouge are provided with them . . . I declare I felt ever so important in my new situation as waiting-maid!

Throughout the war, the Confederacy struggled to keep its soldiers supplied. Here Morgan notices that southern troops have come to rely on captured Union equipment.

There is very little we would not do for our soldiers, though. There is mother, for instance, who got on her knees to bathe the face and hands of a fever-struck soldier of the Arkansas, while the girls held the plates of those who were too weak to hold them and eat at the same time. Blessed is the Confederate soldier who has even a toothache, when there are women near! What sympathies and remedies are volunteered!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What does Dr. Perkins say is happening in Baton Rouge?

2. How does Morgan help the Confederate soldiers? What is their response?

3. What do you think are Sarah Morgan's general fears and concerns about the war? How do you know?
