



Annie Wittenmyer

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Mrs. Annie Turner Wittenmyer, an Iowa woman who earned a proud place in Iowa's civil war record, was born in Sandy Springs, Adams county, Ohio. She was of a patriotic, stalwart, ancestral stock. Her maternal great-great-grandfather, Simeon Smith, senior, who came to this country from the north of Ireland, early in the seventeenth century, belonged to an influential family of protestants of wealth and culture. His eldest brother bore a lordly title, and every circumstance invited to a life of luxury and ease, but the spirit of independence and enterprise prompted him to try the new world and there become the architect of his own fortune. He became an officer in the colonial war, known as the French and Indian war, 1754-56. On July 5, 1776, the day after the declaration of independence, he was elected an officer in Warner's brigade. His only son, Daniel Smith, was killed in the revolutionary war. Her grandfather, Simeon Smith, junior, although a boy, bore a part in the revolutionary war, and was also an officer in the western campaign with William Henry Harrison during the war of 1812. She had three brothers in the civil war, in which she also took a large part along benevolent lines.

Mrs. Wittenmyer was among the first to become a member of the Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the lineage book of this organization contains the above authenticated facts. One branch of her mother's family descended directly from the Flemings of Scotland. One of the earliest settlements in Kentucky was made at Flemingsburg by her ancestors, the town and county being named after her family. Her maternal grandfather was a graduate of Princeton college and took great interest in her education. She had all the advantages of the schools of her time, and was an enthusiastic student of history and the sciences, and has since kept up her investigations along those lines. Her tastes are literary. Her first poem was published when she

was twelve years old, and she has been a prolific writer of prose since the war. She edited for eleven years a monthly paper which had a large circulation, and for five years a department in the New York *Weekly Tribune*. She is the author of the following books: "Woman's Work for Jesus," which had a large sale; "History of the Temperance Crusade," a volume of over 500 pages; "Women of the Reformation," a historical work; "The Red Book," which is the manual and guide for the Woman's Relief Corps of the G. A. R., and "Under the Guns," containing incidents of the war that came under her own observation. She has much material in manuscript that may yet be published, both poetry and prose. She has written many well known hymns, among them, "The Valley of Blessing," which has been sung around the world in many languages; "When the Curtains are Lifted," "Jesus is Mighty to Save," "When I Stand on the Streets of Gold," are others.

Mrs. Wittenmyer was married in 1847, and in 1850 removed with her husband to Keokuk, Iowa. There were at that time no schools in the town, but school houses were being erected. She hired a teacher and opened a free school for children. Nearly two hundred were on the roll. Many of these children were ragged, dirty, and neglected. She had them washed and clothed, the women of the various church denominations helping her in this work. A Sunday school was started in the warehouse where her day school was kept. The superintendent was Captain Newton, brother of the distinguished Philadelphia divine of that name. Out of that school the Chatham Square church, one of the largest and strongest in Keokuk, took its rise. The children were unable to furnish books and her first bill for them, amounting to thirty dollars, was bought on credit; but a gentleman from Chicago (Mrs. General Belknap's father) who overheard the conversation at the time of the purchase, made inquiries after she had left the store and paid the bill. Many of these children became quite prominent, and all were grateful. Her

hold upon them was complete and her government masterly. The school was continued until the public schools were opened. She taught a large Bible class of young men before the war in the church of which she may be said to have been the founder; when it became necessary to break up the class to furnish officers and teachers for the school, she organized an infant class which continued to increase until there were 160 on the roll. When she entered the army work she had to abandon it, much to the distress of the pastor of the church, who found it impossible to fill her place. One good result of this work was that infant departments were opened in many other churches.

She was one of the first to help organize a Soldiers' Aid Society at Keokuk, of which Mrs. J. B. Howell, wife of the editor of *The Gate City*, was president, a very lovely and able woman. Mrs. Wittenmyer was secretary. She made a trip to the army the last of April, 1861, to ascertain its needs, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Howell, which was published in *The Gate City*, and was copied by the press of the State, in which she said that lint and bandages were not needed for the sick soldiers in the hospitals, but ticks in which to put the straw for beds, pillows were needed for their heads instead of knapsacks, cotton sheets and garments instead of army clothes, and dried fruit and delicacies to take the place of army rations. Although absent but about ten days she found awaiting her enough supplies to load a steamboat, so liberal was the response to her appeal, and she was obliged to return south almost immediately in order to distribute them. On her second trip she went as far as Cairo and Mound City. From that time on, supplies of all kinds came in a continual stream from the Aid Societies of the State of Iowa; the steamboats for the first sixteen months carrying them free of cost. The people of Iowa were princely in their generosity. Muscatine at one shipment sent her 1500 bushels of potatoes. One society near Des Moines sent five cows to furnish fresh milk for the hospitals. A total of about \$160,000

worth of supplies passed through her hands during the war. In their distribution she traveled all along the lines, was on many battlefields, in trains when fired into by guerillas, in pest houses and malarial districts, and suffered untold hardships.

During the extra session of the Iowa legislature in 1862 a bill was passed the first section of which read as follows:

"Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa, That the Governor be and he is hereby authorized and required to appoint two or more agents (one of whom shall be Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer) as Sanitary Agents for the State of Iowa."

Hon. George W. McCrary (afterwards appointed Secretary of War by President Hayes), was active in securing the passage of this bill. This official position as Sanitary Agent for Iowa, greatly increased her duties. In addition to the distribution of supplies and the correspondence with societies, she devoted much time in securing furloughs and discharges for disabled and broken-down soldiers. Whenever she found a case in the hospital where there was little probability of recovery without a change, or a soldier hopelessly disabled, who might live if sent home, she set herself at once to secure the needed papers. Beginning with the ward surgeon she followed the request on to the medical director, and usually in a day or two had these disabled men aboard the steamer or train and on their way home. Hundreds of Iowa soldiers were thus saved from death. She had a register of all Iowa soldiers in general hospitals at the headquarters at St. Louis, Mo., where she had an efficient clerk, E. J. Mathis, who could communicate information at once. The surgeons of the general hospitals co-operated with her, and as sick or wounded Iowa soldiers were brought to them they reported this list to that officer. On several occasions she secured the removal of Iowa troops, who were stationed in unhealthy quarters, to more healthy locations. At one time she effected the transfer of all the sick in the hospitals at Helena, Arkansas, about

2,000, who were quartered beside a great cypress swamp, green and stagnant, to northern hospitals. She was at the siege and surrender of Vicksburg, where she received and distributed immense supplies.

In the course of this work she saw many men die, who spoke of the children whom they were leaving helpless orphans. This enlisted her sympathies and after much thought she arranged for a convention of the Aid Societies of Iowa in Muscatine, the 7th and 8th of October, 1863. The convention was large and influential, and when Mrs. Wittenmyer brought forward the project of a Soldiers' Orphans Home it was adopted with great enthusiasm. The first Home was opened at Farmington, Iowa, a small place near Keokuk, but soon became too limited for the hundreds who sought admission. N. H. Brainard, Gov. Kirkwood's secretary, Rev. P. P. Ingalls, Rev. Mr. Baird of Burlington, Judge Lowe, Judge Wright, Governor Stone and a host of other leading men became identified with the movement. Mrs. Wittenmyer was elected President, but refused to serve, and urged the election of Governor Stone and the bringing in of the strongest men of the State. At the earnest request of the management she went to Washington, D. C., in 1865, and through Mr. Stanton, Secretary of War, subject to the approval of Congress, secured the splendid new barracks of the cavalry camp at Davenport, Iowa, with thirty acres of land joining the corporation, which cost \$4,600, and \$6,000 worth of hospital supplies suitable for furnishing the Home.

Hon. Hiram Price, who was at that time a member of Congress, brought the matter up and carried it through triumphantly. In the course of time the Home became a State institution, the association turning over all its property to the State. During these years thousands of children have passed through that Home, where they have been supported, clothed and educated. Many of them are now prominent men and women in this and other states. The institution is still flourishing, under modified conditions.

At the close of 1863 Mrs. Wittenmyer brought forward a project known in history as the Special Diet Kitchen system, which the Christian and Sanitary Commissions and the government recognized as the solution of the greatest difficulty they had had to contend with, the preparation of proper food for the very sick and a safe and judicious use of all supplies. This plan was the establishment of a special diet kitchen in connection with each hospital, entirely separate from the general cookery. These kitchens were furnished with the largest ranges and all the necessary appliances for work on a large scale. Some of them furnished meals three times a day for 1000 to 1800 patients. These patients were scattered through all the wards, but the surgeon of each ward prescribed the diet for his own patients. A consolidated list was sent from each ward to the kitchen and the food ordered by the surgeon was sent in homelike preparation to the bedside of the patient. But the great reform was in the kitchen. Two first class women were in charge who superintended the cooking. They were not cooks or drudges, but dietary nurses, who superintended the work and were responsible for the men detailed to do the cooking and for the commuted supplies of the government which properly belonged to the patients, and for the Sanitary and Christian Commission supplies. They carried the keys. From that time on there was little or no complaint of misappropriation of supplies. When this plan was submitted to the Christian Commission it was officially accepted on the condition that Mrs. Wittenmyer would take full charge of the work under the government, arrange for the kitchens, employ women and supervise the work. This she consented to do. She arranged with the government for the transportation of these women from any part of the United States, and Secretary Stanton gave her at once one hundred orders officially signed in blank, with instructions to call for more when they were exhausted. Some time before the President of the United Telegraph lines had given her an order for free tele-

graphing to the end of the war. The field was so wide, extending not only along the whole battle-line, but to the great hospitals in the northern cities, that Mrs. Wittenmyer was obliged to resign her position as Sanitary Agent in the State of Iowa, which she did with great regret. The cooking of the hospitals had always been defective. She tells of going once into a hospital where the first man she noticed was one of her brothers. He was rejecting his breakfast. "Take it away, I don't want that," he said. "Well that's all there is, if you can't eat that there's nothing else," was the reply of the nurse. She stopped him in the aisle and looked at the food. He held in one hand a rusty tin plate with a piece of fat pork swimming in its own grease, and a piece of baker's bread without butter, in the other a cup of coffee as black as a man's hat. She found on examining her brother that he was very ill with typhoid fever, and it took the best medical care and nursing to restore him to health. While she ministered to him she ministered to many others, and made radical reforms in the kitchen and saved many lives. This brought her to see the need of a change in the cookery of the United States hospitals. We all know that the appetite of a sick person is capricious, and when life is hanging in the balance a very little thing will turn the scale for or against the patient. It was therefore of the utmost importance that the patient should be consulted. Under the new system this was done, and the food ordered by the surgeon was prepared in the most careful manner. Gen. U. S. Grant with his staff, all being disguised as citizens, looked thoroughly into this system of which he had heard so much praise. He afterward told Mrs. Wittenmyer that it was the most complete system that he had ever seen, and that he regarded it as a very important part of the hospital work. It is estimated that thousands of lives were saved through this instrumentality. There were issued from these kitchens about a million rations each month. The consolidated report for February, 1865, shows 899,472 rations, although all of the kitchens had not reported.

This valuable work continued until the close of the war and the hospitals were emptied. It will always be identified with the name of Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer. The United States Congress, when they voted her a pension, which the members literally urged upon her, stated in the bill, "Although we find many precedents as to the amount, we find no precedent as to the extent and value of her services." Mrs. Wittenmyer urged upon the Surgeon-General of the United States the same system for the Spanish-American war and he adopted it in part, but it was not a complete success from lack of proper supervision by responsible women in the field.

Soon after the close of the civil war, at the request of Bishop Simpson, of the Methodist church, she went to Philadelphia to organize a Home Missionary work, in the prosecution of which she spoke before nearly all the annual conferences of that denomination. She had previously spoken to great audiences; her first important speech being made soon after the fall of Vicksburg, before the Iowa legislature, in response to a joint resolution of that body. *The Iowa State Register*, of February 11, 1864, which gives an abstract of her address on the sanitary condition of the Iowa soldiers, comments thus: "Long before the hour appointed the hall was filled to its utmost capacity—her audience followed her with closest attention and liveliest interest—Representative Hall was as quiet as a church during divine service."

After the Woman's Temperance Crusade, in which she had some part, the forces met at Cleveland, November 18, 1874, to organize for the permanent work. Mrs. Wittenmyer was then elected as the first president of the W. C. T. U., in which position she continued for five years. During this time nearly all of the northern and western states were organized and the work was advanced to some portions of the South. It was estimated on reliable data that there were of paying and non-paying members, 100,000, about 75,000 children under

temperance teaching, 75 friendly inns and reading rooms had been established, and there were in the men's reform clubs about 120,000. She called an international convention in the Academy of Music at Philadelphia, June 12, 1876, where an International Christian Temperance Union was founded; it was very large and representative. After five years Miss Willard, who had been secretary of the society for the two years previous, succeeded Mrs. Wittenmyer as president of the National W. C. T. U., and later she organized the international work under the name of the World's Women's Christian Temperance Union. Mrs. Wittenmyer continued to work in connection with the W. C. T. U. until it became politically partisan. She then became a member of the non-partisan organization and served two years as president. She still continues her temperance work in connection with that and the Anti-Saloon League.

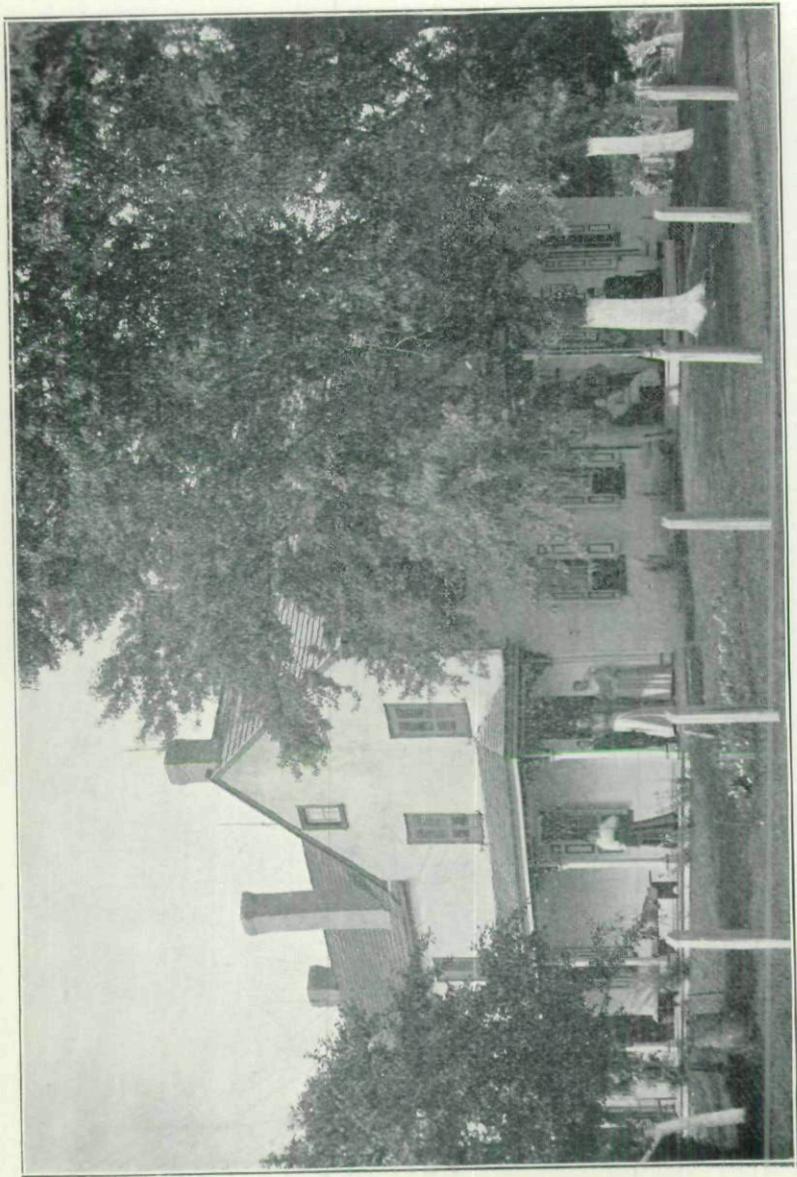
When in 1883 the Woman's Relief Corps of the Grand Army was formed she joined in that work. From the first she has been one of its most influential members. Although its chief officers serve but one year she has continuously held some office from the first, and is the author of the work known as their Red Book. In 1889 she was elected national president and visited and spoke before seventeen annual encampments. During her term of service she inaugurated a movement for a home in her adopted state, Pennsylvania, for soldiers' mothers and widows and for soldiers and their wives, who were disabled, and for soldiers' orphan children. She has been officially connected with this from the beginning. The property occupied for this purpose at Brookfield, Pennsylvania, is worth about \$25,000. The charity is so highly esteemed that the legislature at each session makes an appropriation of about \$7,000 for its support. A large number of children have been educated in this Home and transferred to the State Industrial School.

During her term as president of the W. R. C. Mrs. Wittenmyer inaugurated the movement, authorized by the

national society, for a National Woman's Relief Corps Home, and secured some valuable property at Madison, Lake county, Ohio, which has been supplemented by the purchase of land, by donations, and by an appropriation from the Ohio legislature of \$35,000. The property is now worth \$70,000 or \$75,000. She has been chairman of the board of management from the first. The inmates—soldiers' dependants, such as widows, mothers and army nurses—are received from all parts of the country. The charities of the W. R. C. organization are very large, exceeding \$150,000 annually. One half the per capita tax is devoted to the support of this National Home.

Efforts had been made from time to time since the war to secure pensions for army nurses, but all had failed. In the winter of 1892 Mrs. Wittenmyer went to Washington with a determination to carry the measure through. That Congress was very adverse to the pension interests, but by her tireless efforts, after five months of devoted work, she carried the bill, giving twelve dollars a month pension to all army nurses who could prove their title under the law. It was a matter of great surprise to find that the bill had been carried by nearly a three-fourths vote. It showed how thoroughly the work had been done. She soon found that there were great difficulties in the way, in the pension office and in the war department, and that she would have to secure more favorable rulings in all the departments. It required two months of courageous work in Washington to secure the proper administration of the law, and then the nurses themselves, many of them old and feeble, appealed to her for aid. So that for months she was overwhelmed with the work, which has continued more or less burdensome through the intervening years. The official record last year showed that 655 army nurses had received pensions through the Pension Bureau of twelve dollars a month. So that nearly \$100,000 went out of the United States treasury into these poor homes.

Mrs. Wittenmyer was active in the effort to secure the



The Home of Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, at Sanatoga, Pa

control of the Andersonville prison grounds. By the help of the G. A. R., of Georgia, the ownership of the grounds was secured and vested in the Woman's Relief Corps. Mrs. Wittenmyer is on the board of management, of which Mrs. L. A. Turner, of Boston, is chairman. About \$3,000 have been raised and expended for the improvement of the grounds. The eighty-five acres belonging to the tract have been enclosed by a first class Page wire fence; a commodious frame cottage built, the twenty-five acres enclosed in the stockade have been cleared and put down in Bermuda grass as a lawn; and the "Providence Spring," which was opened by a thunderbolt during an electric storm at a time when thousands of our men were famishing for water, has been improved and enclosed, and still runs fresh and clear as it did on that eventful night.

On the occasion of her seventieth birthday, in 1897, Mrs. Wittenmyer received congratulations and good wishes from all parts of the country. Those testimonials and autograph letters have been skillfully placed in a large beautiful morocco bound volume. The gifts and checks sent amounted to about \$3,600.

Mrs. Wittenmyer now lives in a beautiful home near Santoga, in southeastern Pennsylvania, among the foothills of the Alleghanies. Sixty-five acres of fertile and highly cultivated land surround the old mansion, which dates back eighty-five years. This home, with its pleasant, old-fashioned rooms and porch sixty feet in length, is noted for its hospitality, but however numerous or distinguished the guests, Mrs. Wittenmyer is always, from the force of her own character, the recognized leader. She is a woman of notably fine presence and strong personality, accustomed to leadership, to command and influence others. If a keen thrust is needed it is given with a dry wit and a serene good nature that gives her the advantage. She has been singularly happy in her life, as she has lived to see the results of her work. She has a trained, quick mind, full con-

trol of every power, a wonderful memory, a keen sense of humor, and complete self-mastery. Her public life has never affected her domestic life, which has remained sympathetic and simple. At the urgent request of her friends she is now preparing her autobiography. In that will be given a full and complete account of her experience, especially during the war. It was her privilege to know nearly all the leading men of the government and of the army. General and Mrs. Grant were her intimate friends during the war, and she was a frequent visitor at the White House during Grant's administration. When the news of Sheridan's great victory was brought to President Lincoln, Mrs. Wittenmyer was sitting with him before an open fire-place, in the White House, on a cool October evening. As an illustration of his deep meditative moods she says that the orderly bearing the message could not gain his attention for several moments, although he repeatedly said, "An important message, Mr. President," "Very important news, Mr. President." Of him she says "I never saw such a far-away look in any man's eyes as in Mr. Lincoln's."

Mrs. Wittenmyer has but one living child, the other four having died in infancy. Her son, Charles Albert, married Alice P. Banning of Wilmington, Delaware. They lived happily together for nine years, until the 14th of January, 1897, when she died, leaving no children. This son is a comfort to his mother in her old age; a sober, christian gentleman, of literary and artistic tastes; a favorite with all who know him. His devotion to his mother is very hearty and beautiful. These two make their home together.

HEALTH OF IOWA.—The health of this Territory is, thus far in the season, universally good. Burlington, especially, is peculiarly favored this season. There has scarcely been a case of sickness known in this city during the present summer.—*Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 8, 1840.*

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