

# Facing Starvation

“Some time after her trip to Jonesboro wrote, late in 1864: “We had spent the preceding day in picking out grains of corn from cracks and crevices in bureau drawers, and other improvised troughs for Federal horses, as well as in gathering up what was scattered on the ground. In this way by diligent and persevering work, about a half bushel was obtained from the now deserted camping ground of Garrard’s cavalry, and this corn was thoroughly washed and dried, and carried by me and Telitha to a poor little mill (which had escaped conflagration, because too humble to attract attention), and ground into coarse meal.” Returning from the mill one day, Miss Gay saw her mother running to meet her to tell her that Mrs. Benedict, one of her neighbors, and the latter’s little children were in an actual state of starvation. Mrs. Benedict’s husband was in the Confederate Army and she and her children had been supported by refugees driven from their own section by the further invasion of the Federal Armies. Miss Gay at once cooked what little food she had and prepared to divide it with the starving family. “On the doorsteps,” she wrote, “sat the young mother, beautiful in desolation, with a baby in her arms, and on either side of her a little one, piteously crying for something to eat. “Oh mamma, I want something to eat so bad. Of mamma, I am so hungry – give me something to eat.” Thus the children were begging for what the mother had not to give. She could only give them soothing words.”

(In Sherman’s Path, The Women of the South in War Times, Matthew Page Andrews, pp. 307-308)