CLARA BARTON,

the Angel of the Battlefield

**By**

**Marguerite dar Boggia**

Most people may know that Clara Barton was responsible for the American Red Cross, but they have no idea of her character and personality. She was one of the most courageous women who had heart, integrity, foresight, determination, ethics and values that apply to saints and warriors. She was influenced by her Mother who believed in women’s rights. Clara believed that everyone should have a free education. She was so far ahead of her time, that even today, society has not fully accepted her vision of a just, and equitable society.

She was born on December 25, 1821 in North Oxford Massachusetts. She identified with her father who was a Captain in the Indian Wars. She was the youngest of five children. She had two older sisters and two brothers. As a very young child she was extremely shy and timid. When her brother David, fell off the roof of a barn, the doctors had no hope for his recovery. Clara, at the age of 10, nursed him for two years. Everyone was amazed at his recovery. This gave her confidence in herself. She was a worker. She needed to work and to be helpful. (Her Sun was in the sign of Capricorn. These people can sometimes be workaholics.)

At 17 years of age, she started work as a summer school teacher. She was so competent, that she was offered a full position for the year. When she refused to be paid less than the male teachers, the school Board acceded to her demand. She received the same pay as the male teachers. She rebelled at injustice. No one was going to take advantage of her!

After earning her college degree, she worked for 12 years as an educator. She knew how to handle rambunctious children. Later she opened a free public school in Bordertown, New Jersey. This was the first free public school in New Jersey. By the time she was 33, the school had 600 students. When the School Board appointed a male principal to replace her, she was angry and resigned. This was a woman who stood on her rights.

She found a job in the patent office in Washington D.C. as a recording clerk. When she was fired because she was a woman, she appealed to President Lincoln. He agreed with her and she and the other women got their jobs back. She fought for the rights of women to be treated equally for the same work.

This was the time of the start of the civil war 1861. Many soldiers were returning to the city wounded. She knew many of them. Some were her students. They were sick, hungry and some had no place to sleep. She appealed to the women organizations of the city for funds, food and medical supplies. She organized a way to get the supplies to the soldiers on the front lines. But this was not enough for her. She was granted permission to go directly to the battlefield. She nursed and fed the men, listened to their personal problems, read to them and wrote letters for them. Her presence inspired the soldiers. Her skirt was so drenched with blood that she had to wring it so that she could walk. While giving water to a soldier he died. Apparently a bullet went through her blouse and killed the soldier. They called her the Angel of the Battlefield.

After the war she received letters from mothers inquiring of their son. She realized that this was an area that should be addressed. Through her efforts she was in charge of the Office of Missing Soldiers. She and her assistants received and answered over 63,000 letters and identified over 22,000 missing men. Clara wrote voluminously throughout her life. She was articulate and veterans attending her lecture were often moved to tears. She lectured all across the country and achieved widespread recognition. After a year, she was tired, exhausted and depressed. She was advised by the doctor to take a vacation in Europe.

In Europe, she met Susan B. Anthony. She became an advocate of the women’s suffrage movement. She met Frederick Douglass and became an activist for civil rights. When she was 48, she was introduced to Dr. Appia, the Head of the International Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland. He urged her to open the Red Cross in the United States.

At the time of the Crimean war in 1870, she assisted in the preparation of the military hospitals. She was doing what she enjoyed most: being of service to all who needed help.

Through her influence with women and men in important positions in Washington D.C. she finally established the Red Cross in the United States at the age of 60 in 1881. As its first President, she ran the Red Cross as a general for 23 years. It was largely devoted to disaster relief. Recipients of Red Cross aid included prisoners of war, and Cuban refugees. Everything was system and order. She knew what was needed for people in distress. She made decisions as to who and where to assist. She was called “the queen”. She had many opponents but many loyal followers. Because of the mounting criticisms of her management style, Clara resigned as President of the Red Cross in 1904. Did that cause her to be depressed? Absolutely not! She was a fighter! She immediately established the National First Aid Association of America and served as its honorary president for five years.

Besides civil rights, equal rights, women suffrage, a cemetery for the soldiers, she also fought for prison reform. What a woman! Clara published books about the beginnings of the Red Cross and also wrote the story of her childhood. She died on 4/12/12 at 91 years of age.

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