

YELLOW - FEVER

It was the last week in August, 1876. My intimate friend, Mrs. Belle (Lewis) Spivey had been quite ill for several days, - so ill that I had not been allowed to see her; but she was not thought to be in a serious condition. On Wednesday evening my husband and I went over to our cousin Eddy Anderson's, across the street. He and his wife, Meta, were sitting as usual on their piazza, and with them was uncle Ned Anderson, who at that time was Mayor of Savannah. We found they were discussing a report that there were some cases of yellow fever in the city. "If there is any danger of yellow fever," said Meta, "I hope, Edward, we can all of us go away." "Oh," he replied "I don't think its more than a scare; Dr. Read is an alarmist." "It is all damned nonsense" exclaimed uncle Ned (who was a kinsman of Dr. Read) "There is no more yellow fever here now than there is every summer; there are always a few sporadic cases here and in Charleston. It don't amount to anything." "Well" said Eddy, dubiously, "I dare't say you are right uncle Ned, but if there IS any danger, I would like to know of it. Of course I don't want to leave town unless its necessary." "Leave town!" snorted uncle Ned. "Nonsense: Dr. Jimmy Read has started all this folly. He ought to be ashamed of himself!" "Such reports, when they get about, do great damage to our city. There's not the least reason for anybody to concern themselves about it." "All the same," ventured Meta, "I do wish we might go away and take the children!" - broke in uncle Ned, "Absurd folly, for any one to dream of running away from a scare!" We went home not much impressed with any idea of Yellow Fever.

Friday morning Alice went over to her Aunt Meta's to play with her

little cousins, Elise and Meta, but presently returned, saying Elise was quite sick and as Aunt Meta did not know just what might be the matter she thought it wiser for Alice not to stay. It was a very hot day so I did not go to walk that afternoon and therefore heard nothing of Belle Spivey. About one o'clock that night, (or rather Saturday morning) we were aroused by a violent knocking at the front door. Willy put his head out of the window and asked who was there? "It is I, Johnny Lewis," called up a voice "I have come to tell you Captain, that Sister Belle has just died of yellow fever, and mother wants Miss Nelly to come to her if she will; but I cannot wait for her." "She will come at once," said Willy and I was out of bed and dressing as fast as I could. "You ought not to go, really" remonstrated Willy. "Its very risky. If you could do any good-- but Belle is dead and I think I will go up there and say I would not let you come."

"Give me a quinine pill and a drink of whiskey" I said "if you think there is any need of it"--"But I must certainly go." So in ten minutes we started.

I went right up to Belle's room where poor Mrs. Lewis and Madgie, the sister, were in agonies of grief, and my poor Belle lay there dead and as yellow as an orange. No one had dreamed what was the matter with her until that afternoon, when black vomit set in, and a few hours brought the end.

I could do but little to comfort the poor stricken ones, but I was glad I had gone. After I had been there half an hour Willy sent word he was waiting for me, so I kissed my dear Belle "good-bye," and said farewell to the poor mother and sister; As we reached Harris Street, Willy said suddenly, "Nelly you must take the children away from here to-morrow. You must all go up to stay with Eliza until frost." "Will you go too?" said I. "No," he replied,

"I belong to the Benevolent Association, and my place is right here." "Then my place is right here with you" said I "Oh, no," he began "we must consider the children" -- "Not at all", I broke in, "they can stay here and get the yellow fever. What do I care for them in ^{compari}son with you, Willy Gordon? You must be crazy!"

The situation was discussed next morning at the breakfast table. The children were much excited over it. All the children were willing to stay in Savannah, except Daisy. -- She wanted to leave at once! I reproached her "Wouldn't you want to stay and die with your family?" I asked. "I'd like to live anywhere with my family" replied Daisy, "but I don't want to die with my family here or anywhere else" and from this point of view nothing could move her. I continued to protest against going away. "Unless you come too" I insisted to Willy "I certainly won't stir a step!" "You make it very hard for me," said he, "if you will take the children up to Eliza's" he pleaded, "I will get board for you at Col. Davant's a Guyton, and then I can come up there every night and be in town every day." To this arrangement I consented, for the Davants were old friends and the Col. was in Willy's office and Guyton was only 20 miles away on the Central Railroad. Immediately after breakfast I went over to Eddy Anderson's. I told them of my plan to take my children away, and offered to take his children also. He was very sad, for Elise's illness had been pronounced to be yellow fever. He and Meta were most grateful for my offer, and said they would consult Dr. Schley as to what was best to do. Dr. Schley advised them not to send the children up the country, as they had been exposed to the disease and it might develop up there away from any physician able to treat the disease. Two days after we left, little Meta went down with the fever. (The boys, Randolph and George, having fortunately been sent to visit their cousin Johnny Anderson at Beaulieu ten

miles from town.) We decided to send little Willy to Brooklyn to stay with a cousin, Mrs. Howard, and he left that afternoon on the steamer in charge of cousin Caro Lamar who was going directly there, and kindly promised to deposit him at his cousin Julia's. He was told he might take two of his most valued treasures with him. He selected his Bible and his shot gun!

I left that same night for Etowah Cliffs and got there next day with my three little girls Nelly, Daisy and Alice. We had a warm welcome from my hospitable sister, Eliza Stiles, and after one day's rest I came back as far as Guyton, and took up my abode with the Davants. There were already other refugees installed at Mrs. Davant's who had thrown open her house to shelter those who could leave the plague-stricken city. Mr. John, and Mr. Frank Nisbet, William, John, James and Tom West (brothers). These occupied the large upstairs bedrooms so the only available place for me was a small room, back of the parlor, where I was very comfortable. In spite of my husband's promise to spend his nights at Guyton and go daily to Savannah, my expectations in that respect were rudely shattered. He tried at least, to run up occasionally at noon and return on the 5 o'clock train, but he found it almost impossible to do even that, -- for the epidemic grew worse and worse, and all the time he was not in his office was spent in looking after the people in his beat and nursing the sick. One after another of his clerks went down till only he and Col. Davant were left to run the office, and it was thought so deadly in that part of the city that no policeman was stationed there. Meantime dear little Elise died, and little Meta was very ill. She at length began to recover, and Eddy wrote me to beg me to try to hire a furnished house for them in Guyton, so they could all move up to Guyton (as little Meta was now convalescent) and they wanted to be out of the fever zone. I succeeded in engaging the Eaton house and the sad cavalcade arrived, bringing also the horses and victoria, and "Boney" the coachman. The Eaton house was

only a short distance from the Davants, and I saw them nearly all day and every day. They had only been there a few days when I got a message early one morning from Meta, to say that Eddy was down with the fever! I rushed over there, and found him very ill. We telegraphed at once for Dr. Semmes, who had been through several yellow fever epidemics, and was considered an expert in its treatment. He arranged to spend every night with Eddy, arriving by the 5 o'clock train, and going to the city every morning.

Meantime I spent every day there, not staying at night, as they had Dr. Semmes with them then; besides I felt I must not break down lest Willy should be taken ill, and I not be in a condition to take care of him. Meantime Captain Fred Waring's wife was on her way to Savannah, and he came up to implore Mrs. Davant to take them in. But where to put them? Mrs. Davant came to consult me. "Put them in my room" I said "and give me one of the little shed rooms off your upper back piazza." "But it is unfurnished" she said "We never use these rooms." "You can put a lounge in there" I suggested, "and a box for a washstand, and I will get my husband to send me up a bed and a bureau." Easier said than done! Everything was so crowded on the railroads that it was days before I could get any furniture sent up. Meantime I had the lounge, a chair, and a packing box for a washstand, - and Fred and Lou Waring were installed in my late room back of the parlor. Eddy continued desperately ill, but little Meta improved daily. Of course no one had ever heard of trained nurses in those days. Boney and another colored man helped to nurse Eddy and I was there all day. I usually went over immediately after breakfast and returned in the evening. One morning as I was setting forth, Fred Waring stopped me "I am going to tell Willy Gordon" he said "That you won't last much longer if you don't stop this nursing." "Add my epitaph," I replied, "Killed by the accidental discharge of her duty." This,

while not original made them all laugh; and to laugh was a good thing in those days. Indeed we all tried to keep up our spirits as best we could, and I was always glad when I could get off a joke. But presently things got too serious. One morning early, I got a message from Meta. "Do come over at once, I have got the fever." I went at once. Sure enough, she was down, and was in a small room adjoining Eddy. Dr. Semmes was still there, but had to go to town on the ten o'clock train. A colored woman named Elizabeth and Boney had to take care of both invalids, under my supervision. Eddy grew much worse. He had a fearful sinking turn. I sent for Mr. Jimmy McAlpin, who had had yellow fever in 1854 and was consequently immune. He came, and we covered Eddy with mustard plasters, and gave him champagne. He realized how ill he was and said "Nelly I am going,-- Take care of my poor Meta". "Nonsense!" I replied in a most cheerful tone, "Don't be foolish Eddy,-- you are just feeling a little down -- nothing to worry at; drink this champagne, and you will be all right in a moment." So we pulled him through it. This was about three o'clock and the Doctor was due at 5. As I heard the train's whistle, I saw Eddy begin to draw long sighing breaths, and knew another sinking turn was at hand! I flew down to the train, (which stopped only about fifty yards from the house) "Hurry, Hurry," I cried to the Doctor as he jumped off the train. "Eddy Anderson has had one sinking spell, and is just going into another!" He pulled off his coat as he ran full speed to the house. He called for the brandy, and then mixed a dose of something which Eddy refused to take. "Try to get it down him" said the doctor to me. "I can't, Nelly" said Eddy, when I tried to get him to swallow it, "I'm full up to here," touching his throat; I said "Eddy I've done a good deal for you, haven't I?" "Indeed you have," he replied, "Well then" said I, "just TRY to do this one thing for me. I want you to try to swallow this for Meta's sake."

He gulped it down----and then the hot water bags, the mustard plasters and stimulants, began to take effect and he rallied. But about 8 o'clock, another spell came on! Every thing was tried but without effect. We sent for Col. Davant and Jimmy McAlpin--for Eddy had now become delirious- and it was all they could do with Boney's help, to keep him in bed. Presently he became unconscious; Dr. Semmes came to me, and said "Nothing more can be done, he is dying." "Then," said I, "you must bring his wife in here and put her on the bed right beside him" "But it is as much as her life is worth" said he. "Her life won't be worth anything to her when he dies,-- and I insist that she be brought in here and put beside him" said I. So they wrapped her in a blanket, and put her on the bed beside him, while I stood by him on the other side. I am sure he knew we were there, though he was too far gone to make any sign;- He just passed peacefully away. Poor Meta was almost in a collapse herself- and so dazed she could only moan pitifully. I took Eddy's keys and money, - got out his clothes for Boney to put on him, and then I went in and laid on the bed beside Meta, holding her hand and now and then falling into a doze. In the morning I had to break the sad tidings to poor little Meta who was terribly overcome! Col. Davant and Jimmy McAlpin telegraphed to my husband and to Uncle Ned Anderson, who ordered all the arrangements for the funeral, and Eddy's remains were sent to Savannah, where he was placed in the family vault at Laurel Grove.

While these sad things were happening, various things took place at the Davants. Mr. William West thought it best for his health to remove himself to Baltimore or Philadelphia; where his wife's people lived. John, James and Tom, remained at the Davants. Meta began to recover. As soon as she could travel I was to take them all to Atlanta. Meantime dreadful things were

happening. A day or two after Eddy's death, Fred Waring who was employed in the C.R.R. and went to Savannah daily went down with the fever. Dr. James Waring came up every day, and Dr. William Waring spent every night, and finally stayed there all the time. As Fred grew worse, Mrs. Davant gave up the parlor to them, and Fred was moved in there (as being larger and more convenient). Fred grew worse. A prominent physician, Dr. Harriss, who had considered himself an "immune", was taken desperately ill, and his wife was summoned from Waynesboro. She was a cousin of the Wests. One day Jimmy West came to Mrs. Davant to say that Dr. Harriss was dead; and Mrs. Harriss was on the train for Savannah, due to arrive at Guyton that afternoon! They did not want to let her go to Savannah, as it would be so useless, and she might take the fever. Could Mrs. Davant take her in for the night? "What can I do" said poor Mrs. Davant, at her wits end, "The only thing I can think of" said I, "is to take her off the train and put her in with me. -- She can't sit in the station all night!" So this was done. She was nearly frantic, not having had the least idea of her husband's danger, still less of his death. I developed one of my sick headaches, and having got Mrs. Harriss under the influence of some bromide, and comparatively quiet, I threw myself on the bed to try to sleep. About one o'clock I was awakened by Mrs. Davant "Oh, Mrs. Gordon" said she, "I am so sorry to wake you, but Col. Davant has gone down with the fever, and I cannot leave him, and Capt. Waring is dying, and his wife is alone there, except for Dr. William Waring!" "I will go right down there" said I. "Mrs. Harriss is so worn out with grief that she has fallen asleep, and won't miss me." So I went down to the poor-broken-hearted Lou Waring. Fred lay there with his half-opened eyes already glazed

in death. Dr. William Waring was trying to write a message to his brother to have arrangements made for the funeral. It was to go in by the early train. Evidently they thought Fred was unconscious. I don't know what made me doubt it, but I said "Lou, I believe Fred can hear and understand all you are saying." "Oh, you think so," said she "Oh, if he only could!" "Try him" said I. She said "Darling if you can hear me, move your lips" He at once did so, most emphatically! So she sat by him and was able to communicate with him until nearly the last moment. He died about six o'clock. When I found I could be of no more use, I went back to my room with one of the worst sick headaches I ever had. Poor Lou Waring was sent back to Virginia, and Fred was buried in Savannah. Thus passed away one of the dearest and most loyal friends my husband ever had. Mrs. Harriss returned to Waynesboro to rejoin her children and family. Mr. Andy Charlton (Mrs. Davant's brother-in-law) was the next victim. He and his wife occupied a cottage in the Davant grounds. Young Tom West was also taken ill. Neither of these cases were fatal. Indeed Tom West ~~xxxxxxxx~~ did not know until nearly well, what had been the matter with him! As Meta was now able to travel, I took the whole party up to Atlanta and located them there comfortably, and at once returned to Guyton. When I got to the front door, I heard a weak voice from Mrs. Davant's room (on the right of the front hall) say, "Is that Mrs. Gordon, Anna?---Tell her to come right in here. I want her to make me laugh!"

Mrs. John Nisbet had determined to join her husband at Guyton. In vain her husband implored her to remain in Marietta. Come she would, and come she did! Mr. Fritz, moved out of his brothers' room, and faute de mieux, went into the room back of the parlor vacated by the Waring's. It had been whitewashed

and disinfected, but Mr. Fritz took ill and insisted on being transferred to an upstairs room. He was given the room opposite mine opening on the piazza. One of the peculiarities of this epidemic was the offensive odor that accompanied it. I could smell it in my room with the door shut. The change of room had come too late for Mr. Fritz. He developed a severe case. Dr. Read came up daily to see him. About the fourth day of Mr. Fritz's illness, Mrs. Davant came into my room in a great state of worry. She said he was just going off into a sinking spell, and absolutely refused to take brandy or any sort of stimulant, unless it was ordered by Dr. Read, -- She had the brandy ready in a cup but he refused to touch it. "Give it to me," said I. "I'll make him take it!" I walked into his room. There he lay; his six-foot-three, much too long for his bed, and his usual rosy hue, changed to a dull yellow. "Mr. Fritz" said I, "I have brought you some brandy, and I beg you will open your mouth and swallow it down at once" "I cannot take anything unless the Doctor orders it" he replied, "Oh, yes you can," said I, "You can take it when I order it, and that's just now!" "I know what I am doing; Dr. Read is not coming up here again till tomorrow morning, and if you don't take this at once, you won't be here to receive any orders from Dr. Read when he does come!" He looked at me for a moment, and then evidently thought "discretion was the better part of valor," for he opened his mouth and drank every drop. -- We telegraphed for Dr. Read, who came up on the afternoon train and told Mr. Fritz I had probably saved his life! As soon as he was able, Mr. Fritz went to Marietta, to recuperate. Mr. and Mrs. John Nisbet had already betaken themselves to that healthier location. There, Mr. Fritz had a slight relapse, and a hemorrhage from the gums as a final result of his attack, a sort of secondary "black vomit." His was the last case in the

Davant household. John and Jimmy West escaped entirely. I kept a box of quinine pills on my table and looked at them sometimes, but never took any. In fact I am not afraid of disease, and never catch anything. I went through a violent epidemic of cholera in Chicago in 1852 and of Yellow-fever in Savannah in 1858 and was never ill a moment, so I think I may consider myself "immune."

As for my husband, he turned out to be a perfect fraud as far as coming up to Guyton was concerned. I rarely saw him except two or three times when he ran up for a couple of hours in the afternoon. But I forgave him, since he was so busy nursing the sick in the City. He had mighty little time to spend with me! Savannah was divided into districts, and members of the Benevolent Association or other volunteers, took them in charge. One of the largest of these was my husband's "beat". He had besides, many personal friends to look after. His business office was on the Bay, where the atmosphere was so deadly that not even a policeman was stationed there. He had twelve clerks go down one after the other with the fever.

His daily routine, was, as soon as he had breakfasted, to take a quinine pill and a drink of whiskey, and then to make the round of his "Beat" seeking out the fever cases, administering promptly mustard-plasters, hot-baths, medicines, summoning a Doctor, and providing suitable food. After his morning rounds he went to his office. A second tour of duty in the afternoon left him pretty tired out, and as the night air was considered very unhealthy, he got to bed as early as possible. Very sad scenes met his eyes, as when, on one occasion, he made his way into a house and found the mother dead in one bed, -- the father dead in another, and several little children sprawled on the floor, crying with hunger. In spite of all one could do, whole families would be swept away in this sudden manner, -- either because of the virulence of the

attack, or because of some imprudence of the patients. My husband attributed his immunity during this epidemic to a violent attack of broken-bone fever he had had in 1854. It was a fearful yellow-fever year. He had graduated at Yale, and had sent a box of books home to be stored until his return. The books stood open in the worst part of the infected zone. On his return in November he sorted out his books and put them away. In ten days he went down with "Dengue" fever, (which is called the "cousin of yellow-fever") and was desperately ill. He always believed this attack had made him an immune."

We were both pretty well used up by the time the first hard frost came, and we realized that the fearful scourge was at last ended! --

/signed/ Nelly K. Gordon