

Modest Woman Gives Her Life to the Needy and Helpless



Mrs. G.W. Ahlquist



The Choir and the Congregation



Mrs. Ahlquist and the babies



Mrs. Ahlquist and her "Porters"



In the Sick Ward



Mrs. Rose Elliott

IT MAY or may not be easy to be at the head of a charity institution when such a headship pays a regular salary, but it is a safe conjecture that a person of very limited means who maps out a policy embodying a life of service to the needy and destitute for no consideration whatever finds the row not so pleasant as that of the paid head of a charity dispensary. Yet in Omaha there is one woman, Mrs. G. W. Ahlquist, 2740 Meredith avenue, who for twenty-five years has gone modestly and silently about the city feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Never has the hour been too late or night too dark for this heroic woman to make her way through the blindest alleys of the city when once she heard of a sick human being in need of a friend.

During the last ten years Mrs. Ahlquist has had a noble partner in this work. This is in the person of Mrs. Rose Elliott, 2518 Decatur street. So well is this heroic woman known among the needy of the city, that her telephone is busy almost from morning till night with the reporting of cases of destitution. Always she goes to her phone makes a record of the case, just as though she had a large charitable institution from whose fund she could draw. Yet she has no such fund. Often she starts out to minister unto the sick and needy when she has scarcely more than car fare to take her to the place. Yet always before she returns to her home, she has provided temporarily for those in need.

Scattering the Loaves and Fishes

So it is with Mrs. Ahlquist. Both these noble women working with the "loaves and fishes" for they have "fed the multitude" in the last twenty-five years, yet they scarcely know whence came the food.

"I have two wealthy women in the western part of the city," said Mrs. Ahlquist, "who some times help me when I am hard pressed to raise a few dollars to get the necessities of life for a destitute person."

Mrs. Ahlquist has buried sixty inmates of the county hospital whom she thus rescued from a place in the potter's field west of the institution, or from the dissecting table of medical schools. Visiting the sick, finding homes for babies, and burying the dead, have been her occupation for twenty-five years, not only in the county house, but throughout the entire city of Omaha and in South Omaha. She has found work for hundreds of men and women in these cities and has thus helped them to get on their feet after they have been destitute.

Scarcely a Sunday in twenty-five years has Mrs. Ahlquist failed to make her trip to the County hospital on the hill where she is eagerly awaited by dozens of patients who are cheered and strength-

ened by her inspiring presence. Regularly at 2:30 o'clock Sunday afternoon she steps off the street car at Forty-sixth and Leavenworth street. As regularly she finds Joe White and George Meredith, two inmates of the insane ward, waiting at the car to carry her bundles up the long hill to the poor house and county hospital. For twenty-five years these two harmless unfortunates have never failed to meet the faithful woman at the car. Recently Charlie Conder, another inmate, has joined them. The weary days of the week drag in their limited world until Sunday comes when they go to meet their friend.

Methods of Hospital Work

Arriving at the hospital she goes from room to room and ward to ward. Into the tuberculosis ward she walks regularly and fearlessly. The pallid, wasted faces light up with momentary joy when she appears in the room, for she has a word of cheer and a lemon and other fruit for each and every patient. Into the insane ward she strolls also, meeting friends right and left. Many inmates embrace her as she enters, for she is the only friend from the outside world that calls on them regularly. She knows them all by their first names and never fails to have a word of cheer for each. Little bits of fruit or candy are always welcomed by the inmates, and the appreciation is demonstrative.

There is one little invalid who with wide open eyes watches her door from Sunday morning until the hour when Mrs. Ahlquist arrives. This is "Little Lottie," 12 years old. It was Mrs. Ahlquist who found her two years ago, neglected and friendless at 1928 South Nineteenth street. It was Mrs. Ahlquist who washed her, cared for her and got her into the county hospital, where she now enjoys the comforts of a clean white bed, and daily attention from trained nurses.

"Little Emma" is another patient little sufferer who recognizes in Mrs. Ahlquist the one ray of sunshine that reaches her from the world outside the walls of the county hospital. "Little Emma's" body is wasted by the ravages of a hereditary disease, and she can never hope to go into the broad world to seek happiness. Her happiness consists of lying in her little bed, and smiling at the kind face of Mrs. Ahlquist when that woman enters her room and says pretty things to her.

Comfort for the Dying Destitute

Dozens of patients at the county hospital have died in the arms of Mrs. Ahlquist. Dozens, in deserted parts of the city, lying destitute and dying alone, have been ministered unto during their last moments by this woman who never leaves when death approaches a sick bed. Dozens of neglected hovels has she cleaned up and scrubbed just in time

to make the death chamber a little more presentable while a destitute and abandoned patient died.

This silent charity worker has been at the graves of more than sixty poor that she has laid to rest. She does not like to have them placed in the potter's field, so she makes application to have the bodies turned over to her at the county hospital. Then she has the task of raising the money to bury the bodies. On certain occasions undertakers in the city who know of her great work have contributed caskets for the burial. On other occasions she has raised the money in various ways.

"I hardly know how I raise the money some times," says Mrs. Ahlquist, "but when the time comes some how the money is always forthcoming. Through the kind help of the county commissioners and three wealthy women in the city I have always been able to raise the funds to do this work. I have spent \$1,500 in street car fares alone visiting sick and caring for the dying."

Friendless People Have Funeral Services

Mrs. Ahlquist's funeral services are always simple. When she can secure a minister to go to the undertaker's chapel where she has a body she does so. If for any reason the minister disappoints her, as frequently happens, this patient woman never wavers, but simply bows beside the casket,

asks the undertaker to do the same, and then quietly and with due dignity she repeats the Lord's Prayer. Usually she sings a hymn, and after that the body is taken to the cemetery and laid to rest.

During the present winter Mrs. Rose Elliott and Mrs. Ahlquist have inaugurated a little sewing circle of their own at the home of Mrs. Elliott. Every Thursday regularly these two women meet here and make quilts and comforters from the scraps of cloth that are given to them throughout the week. They make no effort to sell their product, but immediately take the new-made quilts to some sick person or poor child who is sadly in need of bedding.

Bedding and Coal in Most Demand

"We find more people who are in need of bedding than any thing else," says Mrs. Elliott. "Bedding and coal are always needed, for coal especially costs so much." In the home of Mrs. Elliott letters from the poor are constantly piling up. They appeal for coal, food, clothing and bedding, and Mrs. Elliott sets herself to the task of supplying these necessities just as zealously as though she were drawing a large salary for caring for these people, and as though her job depended upon prompt service.

Recently Mrs. Elliott has taken it upon herself

to provide a home for young working girls. Into her home she has taken a half dozen young working girls of the city, giving them board and room and the privilege of the house for a ridiculously low remuneration.

"I thought it would be better for them than the influence of most of the rooming houses," she explained, "and I expect the girls to help me all they can with my work. If I can only pay the grocery bills and keep out of debt I am satisfied."

During the cold weather of the present winter Mrs. Ahlquist has put stoves into sixteen homes where heating stoves were not before. Some of these stoves were given to her by more fortunate people who had discarded them for better ones, others she had to buy with money raised in various ways. She has clothed many men at the poor house whose clothing was in such shape that they were ashamed to appear at church. They are able to attend church unabashed now.