

Diary of a Southern Refugee

Judith W. McGuire

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"War seems inevitable," wrote Judith W. McGuire in her diary on 10 May 1861, shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter. Fervently loyal to the South, she was packing up valuables at her home in Alexandria, Virginia, where the Confederate flag already waved. With her family she fled the city, and for the next four years she would be a refugee in her own land.

Literate and newsy, shrewdly detailed and extremely moving, Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War is one of the best civilian records of the Civil War. Judith McGuire, the wife of an Episcopal minister, follows the newspapers assiduously, taking heart from good reports out of Bull Run and Shiloh and fighting despair when the tide turns against the Rebels. She sews for the soldiers, nurses them in hospitals, and notes the deaths of friends in battle: "Thus we bury, one by one, the dearest, the brightest." Steeling herself, she sees humor in desperate situations.

McGuire shares common hardships, struggling to obtain food and lodging, but her position permits a glimpse of wartime Richmond society and meetings with General and Mrs. Robert E. Lee. Always up and doing, scorning slackers and defeatists, she confides to her diary on a dark day, "I wish I could sleep until the war is over."



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