

**HOW CAN WE BEST HELP
OUR CAMPS AND
HOSPITALS? STATEMENT
AND CORRESPONDENCE**

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How can we best help our camps and hospitals? Statement and correspondence by Various

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STATEMENT

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CORRESPONDENCE,

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE

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STATEMENT, & c.

No. 10 COOPER UNION,
New York, March 27th, 1863. }

Penna. State Library

The Woman's Central Association of Relief publishes the following letters from members of the Medical Staff of the Army, for the purpose of aiding those who desire to relieve the Army, to decide how they can do so most economically and advantageously.

Many organizations are calling for money and supplies to be used for this purpose. The interests of the Army, and of the Country, which relies (under God) on the health and efficiency of the Army, for its preservation from ruin, require that the people be kept informed as to the relative utility of these organizations, and thus enabled intelligently to select that channel for their bounty through which it will do the greatest amount of good to the soldier, with the least disturbance to military discipline and self-reliance. It may do more or less good, no doubt, if sent through any channel. But all the efforts of Government and private patriotism for the relief of the Army, are still insufficient. Destitution and suffering still exist at many points. Contributions of clothing, stimulants, medicines, and hospital stores of every kind, are still most urgently needed by our soldiers in camp and in hospital. This is inevitable, no doubt, in a war waged on so vast a scale, at points so remote from northern civilization, and under a military and medical organization not yet fully perfected in all its details. But it shows the necessity of carefully economizing the bounty of the people, and applying it to the best possible advantage. It imposes on every one the duty of inquiring seriously and

earnestly, in what way and through what agency, he can make his contribution, no matter how trifling, most productive of good. The most generous shipment of supplies is neither truly charitable nor truly patriotic, unless its precise destination and its mode of conveyance have been decided after anxious investigation and study. The country cannot afford to let the public bounty, however lavish, be dispensed carelessly and un-systematically.

Our Association, which has been in active operation since the first outbreak of the Rebellion, has received and is receiving a very large amount of Army supplies from the North and East. It has dispensed them to the Army through the Agents and Inspectors of the National Sanitary Commission, with which it is affiliated.

It is fully satisfied that the Commission, recognized by Government, and acting in harmony with its system, seeking impartially to relieve the National Army and Navy everywhere, without regard to state lines or sectional prejudices, and conducting its operations through trained experts, is, on the whole, decidedly the best and most economical channel through which the Army can be aided. Under this conviction, and with no object but the good of the Army, and of the country, it addresses this communication to the people, and especially to the women of the loyal North.

The letters herewith submitted were received in reply to the following circular addressed to about forty of the Army Medical Staff, the Surgeon-General included. The officers to whom it was addressed were, almost without exception, personally unknown to the writer. They were mostly selected as being in charge of important General Hospitals.

WASHINGTON, D. C., }
February 1863. }

To

U. S. A.:

Sir,—Having been from time to time interested in securing supplies to be sent to our sick and wounded soldiers, I am anxious to be able to answer judiciously the question often asked me, viz.: “*Through what established channel can supplies best be conveyed to the soldiers?*” The doubt of the people seems to be between—

- 1st. State Agencies.
- 2d. The U. S. Sanitary Commission.
- 3d. Individual Visitors and Dispensers.

Will you allow me the benefit of your large experience in your answer to the question, which one of these three, as shown by its practical working, is the best repository and distributor of the people's bounty, giving the greatest amount of good to the soldier, with the least interference with the Surgeons of the Hospitals?

Very respectfully,
Your obed't serv't,

W. H. HADLEY.

To this circular letter thirty-two replies were received, all of which are herewith submitted; of these, it will be found that twenty-four assert the Commission to be the best channel through which the People can aid the Army, five are undecided, or express a qualified approval, and three condemn the Commission as a failure, or express a preference for some other channel of supply. We have thought it best to submit them all, without omission, to the good sense of the People, in full confidence that the verdict of the people on the whole case, thus brought out, will be according to the weight of evidence.

The following considerations are suggested as likely to have been present to the minds of Army medical officers when fram-

ing their answers to Mr. Hadley's circular, and as deserving the attention of all who desire to promote the health and efficiency of the Army :

I.

Agents and Depots of the Commission are at every centre of military operations from Fredericksburgh to Port Royal, Vicksburgh and New Orleans. These Agents report regularly to its Central Office at Washington as to the wants of the Army at their respective stations.

The Central Office is thus enabled to overlook the whole field of operations, East, West, and South, and is kept informed from day to day not only of the *actual* but of the *relative* necessities of every camp and hospital.

It is thus enabled to use all the supplies received from the People to the utmost advantage, and to send them where they are most wanted and will do the greatest good to the greatest number.

No individual and no other organization possesses this advantage. They can never be sure that their benefactions would not do *more* good, relieve *more* suffering, and save *more* lives for the National defence, if bestowed elsewhere. Agents of the Commission often find camps and hospitals in absolute want, while others in their immediate neighborhood are overburthened with luxuries, injurious alike to health and to discipline, heaped on them by the wasteful unsystematic bounty of some wealthy community, on which they are supposed to possess a special local or provincial claim. Bounties thus bestowed injure instead of blessing both the receiver and the giver. They pamper and weaken the former, while the act of giving tends to blunt the National feeling and stimulate the sectionalism of the latter.

There can be no question but that fully one-half of the

People's voluntary contributions in aid of the Army, since the war began, has been wasted, because not systematically distributed by a central organization.

Other difficulties embarrass the operations of State and local agencies and render them less economical than those of the Commission. For instance, the transportation of supplies to hospitals or camps at points where active movements are in progress, or expected, is necessarily irregular and uncertain. All lines of communication with such points are monopolized by Government, and commonly tasked to their utmost for the conveyance of men, of ordnance, and of commissary stores. Cases consigned to particular hospitals, regiments, or companies, must wait. Unless there is some agent on the spot like those of the Sanitary Commission, whose special business it is to see that they are forwarded, who is responsible for their prompt delivery, who has special relations with Quartermasters and medical officers, and who understands how the work is to be done, such supplies are apt to wait indefinitely. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars worth of cases and packages intended for the Army, have thus been wasted and lost.

II.

It is sometimes said, that unpaid volunteers are preferable to Relief Agents, regularly engaged, and paid like those of the Commission, and that the employment of such Agents by the Commission, and its expenditure of money in salaries, is an objection to its system.

A very slight acquaintance with the work these Agents have to do will suffice to correct this error.

When the Commission commenced its operations, it availed itself of all the volunteer aid it could secure. But it soon learned that volunteers were unreliable for permanent, system-

atic, and subordinate labor. It was compelled to abandon the volunteer system, and to require every one of its Agents and Inspectors to engage himself to the performance of specified duties, at a fixed compensation. The rates of compensation it adopted are so moderate that no one will enter its service except from motives that make up for the smallness of the pay it gives. But "business relations" between the Commission and its Agents have been found indispensable to secure subordination, responsibility, and punctual performance of duty. Many of them refund their monthly salary to the Commission, but the amount is received and acknowledged like any other donation of money.

On a sudden exciting emergency, as for instance, immediately after battles, like Antietam, or Fort Donelson, or the Seven days before Richmond, volunteers are easily secured by the score. Humane and patriotic gentlemen of leisure, surgeons who wish to see something of practice on the field, and to make their professional skill useful when so urgently needed, men who want a new excitement, and men who seek newspaper notoriety—all are ready and anxious to go forward with supplies, and to rough it on the field for a few days, or weeks, without fee or reward. Many offer themselves from the highest impulses of self-sacrificing patriotism and Christian charity. But they can not, as a general rule, be depended on for permanent duty, and the majority of them would soon weary of dispensing stores and aiding regimental surgeons, month after month, amid the mud and monotony of winter quarters. Yet, without the experience that can only be acquired by this very persistence in comparatively dull and common-place work, the volunteer relief agent is sure to do as much harm as good, no matter how excellent his intentions or how abundant the supplies at his disposal. For he cannot possess such practical knowledge of military usage, regulations, and system, as to be able to relieve sick or wounded men in camp or hospital without great waste and without serious injury to discipline and efficiency.