

Letter from Chaplain Quint.

Contributors

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183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
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No. 5.

LETTER FROM CHAPLAIN QUINT.

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The following letter from Chaplain QUINT, 2nd Mass. Vols., is the testimony of one who has had abundant opportunities for judging of the work of the Commission since the beginning of the war, having been attached to a gallant regiment, with which he has labored, professionally, from its first organization.

CITY-HALL PARK, NEW YORK, Sept. 5, 1863.

A few days ago one of our men (a faithful man, too, one who is detailed for special duty, but always takes his gun, and shares the dangers of his comrades when there is a fight), was told that his wife and child were just outside of the guard, and went to bring them in. As soon as he was in sight, his little boy, who had not seen his father since the war opened, rushed past the guard, and over the tent ropes, and climbed up to his father's neck and hung there, while his father could not help the tears of delight. Was n't it soldierly? Well, some of the guard themselves put on a very soldierly air—but they wiped their eyes. They are no worse soldiers for the memory of the little boys and girls at home, and much better men for it.

Camp life has, indeed, been a good deal variegated (in the city) by the presence of wives and children. It is astonishing how much the dull mess-room, which has been made a kind of general parlor, has been brightened up by family groups. While I write, two active youngsters are daring to play marbles in the sacred precincts of camp; but the bayonet glistens still on the sentry posts.

The great feature which seems to distinguish this war from all others, is the great system of home help to the army. What other army ever had such benevolence poured out? What one, even, ever had such a mail system as ours—so wise as it is in its effect on the men? What other ever had the sick, the wounded, and the dying so ministered unto? The Government has done wonderfully in this direction, itself. But such outside helps were never before witnessed. They are good. They do the army good. Every child that helps sew, on a garment for a soldier, is doing what our Lord approves. Every stitch is a work of love. The old man who, poor, learned to knit so as to do something, in his chimney corner, for the soldiers, was a hero.

The chief among the links to home as an agency for relief is the Sanitary Commission. The more I see and hear of this institution, I am amazed at its wonderful efficiency. I regard it as chief, not as exclusive. But chief it is. I lately saw and heard more of its doings. Perhaps your readers do not know its plan beyond Washington, and you will allow me to outline it as it is in our army — merely for furnishing supplies.

The central agency is, of course, at Washington. Here supplies are accumulated; and large deposits are necessary for any emergency.

In the army, each corps is supplied with a Relief Agent, who *lives in the corps*. He moves with it. He has a four-horse wagon, supplied with sanitary stores, — articles additional to those furnished by Government. These wagons are generally with the ambulance train, and the Relief Agent has discretionary power to dispose of his articles. He issues them to Field Hospitals on requisitions from the medical officers there. New supplies are constantly sent, so as to have plenty on hand.

The whole arrangement is under the care (I have asked for the names) of J. Warner Johnson, (firm of T. & J. W. Johnson & Co., Law Book Publishers, Phila.,) and Captain Isaac Harris of New York. The Relief Agents are — 1st Corps, W. A. Hovey of Boston; 2nd, N. Murray of New Jersey; 3d, Col. Clemens Soest, formerly commander of 29th New York; 5th, E. M. Barton of Worcester, Mass. — a son, I think, of Judge Barton; 6th, D. S. Pope of Baltimore; 12th, Rev. J. A. Anderson of California. Dr. W. S. Swalm acts as Inspector in the Field, while Dr. Steiner of Frederick, Md., has general charge at Washington for this army — a man of ripe experience and qualities for the post. These names are a guaranty for efficiency. These men work for little or no pay, but they are *permanent agents*.

That this system ensures success there can be no doubt. I think I wrote you that at Chancellorsville the hospitals were well supplied with even luxuries, by the Commission, while the battle was still in progress. I am now told, on most reliable authority (that of the surgeons), that on the Thursday and Friday, the great days of the Gettysburg battles, the Sanitary Commission were distributing their stores *under fire*. In two corps (one is ours) that this was done, clear evidence also exists in the receipts given by the surgeons at the battle-ground. I was somewhat astonished at this, as, while at home, I had read statements that some other agency was *three days in advance of all others* with supplies at Gettysburg. But as the Sanitary Commission was there while the battle was still in progress, this latter statement is evidently a mistake.

One great reason why the Sanitary Commission works so well is, that it works in and by means of the regular authorities. It does not set itself up as independent of the medical officers. It distributes through the surgeons. The wisdom of this plan is evident at a glance. The surgeons know what is needed, and how to use it. An indiscriminate administering of relief by independent helps, is subversive of all order. A case just in point happened — no matter where, but I know. A soldier had turned the critical point of disease, and was doing well. A benevolent individual, distributing

supplies out of a basket, gave this soldier some pickles — and I know not what else — which he ate. The surgeon discovered it, and informed the philanthropist that the charity had probably ensured the death of the patient. In fact, it did — within forty-eight hours.

The independent method is bad. The medical authorities are the only ones who ought to be, in general, entrusted with supplies. It sounds pretty to say, "We place the article in the hands of the soldier himself" — very pretty, but very ridiculous. While this course could do good occasionally, as a system it would be bad. The surgeon knows what the sick man should eat, and what he should wear. And an institution which furnishes things at the time needed is invaluable.

The independent system showed itself in hospital at Gettysburg. In one corps hospital (I have the best authority for this) some five or six men were discovered drunk. Inquiry was made, and it was found that certain individuals who had come as volunteer laborers, or what that excellent book *Hospital Transports* calls "an indiscriminate holiday scramble of general philanthropy," (I quote from memory,) had been giving away liquor at random to whomsoever wanted it, with the result here mentioned. Difficulties also ensued from the great trouble with which needed articles could be obtained from these agents. And when certain other irregularities occurred (which I do not wish to mention), the whole band was ordered out of the lines, — the second occasion on which the same agency had met that fate in the same corps. The whole trouble arose from the impossibility of harmonizing an independent, outside management, with the methods which Government has established. The Sanitary Commission avoids all such complications. Another agency or agent has just written (as I read), "The Chaplains, what few there are, work with us." It would be equally cool for the Sanitary Commission to say, "The surgeons work with us," instead of taking the sensible ground which they do, that *they* work with the *surgeons*.

While the Commission was thus harmoniously acting with the authorities in relieving the suffering, several Chaplains were, as I have learned from others, working night and day in corps hospitals at Gettysburg. I am informed that they were invaluable. They ministered to the wounded and the dying like brothers. I know how it was, for I know these men. Such men are not praised in newspapers. Other agencies turn up their eyes in sanctimonious mourning over them. But while disgusting puffs employ mail and telegraph over holiday laborers, these men do the steady, everyday, heavy work. When others, at Chancellorsville, ran away — being asked again and again, "Chaplain, is *this* a safe place?" these men risked shot and shell, and some found captivity in doing their duty. No letter-writer tells about somebody "bending over a dying man in prayer," — as being a nobler sight than a "mitered archbishop" doing something or other, — because it is the *regular business* of those men.

The Sanitary Commission has shown true wisdom, also, in its plan of employing regular and *permanent* agents. Sudden spasms of work do little. The Commission knows that. It takes time for men to learn their

business. When taught, one man is worth twenty temporary volunteers. The work which the Tract Societies are doing in the army is effective because they employ permanent managers, and work in harmony with the recognized religious workers of the army. Mr. Alvord, for example (I refer to him because I know his work), accomplished wonders because he used all existing facilities. Finding a chaplain, or (in case there were none) some other religious man in each of (say) a hundred regiments, he had a hundred permanent agents all his own for Christ's sake. Gathering them together, and thus exciting new fervor, holding meetings for prayer of those hundred laborers, each of whom had his own field, in which none could do the work that laborer could, a life was sent through the whole, when *outside* workers could only have made a slight impression on the circumference.

The Sanitary Commission works through the proper channels. There is, therefore, no outside work which in the matter of supplies can rival its, in cheapness, directness, or usefulness. It does a work which fathers and mothers and wives at home ought to be thankful for. It ministers to the helpless. It succors where suffering and death would often be the result of absence of succor.

A. H. Q.

Notice.

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