

THREE WEEKS AT GETTYSBURG.

THIS unpretending sketch of the labors of two Ladies among the wounded, after the Battle of Gettysburg, was only originally printed for private distribution among a few of the Soldiers' Aid Societies. It is now, by request, reproduced for a more general circulation among the friends and contributors to the SANITARY COMMISSION, in the belief that it cannot fail to stimulate and encourage them in their work.

NEW YORK:
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH,
No. 683 BROADWAY
1863.

WHAT WE DID AT GETTYSBURG.

July, 1863.

DEAR ———:

WHAT WE DID AT GETTYSBURG for the three weeks we were there, you will want to know. "We," are Mrs. ———, and myself, who, happening to be on hand at the right moment, gladly fell in with the proposition to do what we could at the Sanitary Commission Lodge after the battle. There were, of course, the agents of the Commission, already on the field, distributing supplies to the hospitals, and working night and day among the wounded. I cannot pretend to tell you what was done by all the big wheels of the concern, but only how two of the smallest ones went round, and what turned up in the going.

Twenty-four hours we were in making the journey between Baltimore and Gettysburg, places only four hours apart in ordinary running time; and this will give you some idea of the difficulty there was of bringing up supplies when the fighting was over, and the delays in transporting wounded. Coming toward the town at this crawling rate, we passed some fields

where the fences were down and the ground slightly tossed up: "That's where Kilpatrick's cavalry men fought the rebels," some one said, "and close by that barn a rebel soldier was found day before yesterday, sitting and dead;" no one to help, poor soul, "near the whole city full." The railroad bridge broken up by the enemy, Government had not rebuilt as yet, and we stopped two miles from the town, to find that, as usual, just where the Government had left off the Commission had come in. There stood their temporary lodge and kitchen, and here hobbling out of their tents came the wounded men who had made their way down from the Corps Hospital expecting to leave at once in the return cars.

This is the way the thing was managed at first: the surgeons left in care of the wounded three or four miles out from the town, went up and down among the men in the morning, and said, "Any of you boys who can make your way to the cars, can go to Baltimore." So off start all who think they feel well enough, anything being better than the "hospitals," so called, for the first few days after a battle. Once the men have the Surgeons' permission to go, they are off; and there may be an interval of a day or two days, should any of them be too weak to reach the train in time,

during which these poor fellows belong to no one, the hospital at one end, the railroad at the other, with far more than chance of falling through between the two. The Sanitary Commission knew this would be so of necessity, and coming in, made a connecting link between these two ends.

For the first few days the worst cases only, came down in ambulances from the hospitals; hundreds of fellows hobbled along as best they could in the dust, for hours, slowly toiling, and many hired farmers' wagons, as hard as the farmers' fists themselves, and were jolted down to the railroad, at three or four dollars the man. Think of the disappointment of a soldier, sick, body and heart, to find, at the end of this miserable journey, that his effort to get away, into which he had put all his remaining stock of strength, was useless; that "the cars had gone," or "the cars were full;" that while he was coming others had stepped down before him, and that he must turn all the weary way back again, or sleep on the roadside till the next train "tomorrow!" Think what this *would* have have been, and you are ready to appreciate the relief and comfort that *was*. No men were turned back. You fed and you sheltered them just when no one else could have

done so; and out of the boxes and barrels of good and nourishing things, which you people at home had supplied, we took all that was needed. Some of you sent a stove (that is, the money to get it), some of you, the beef stock, some of you the milk and fresh bread ; and all of you would have been thankful that you had done so, could you have seen the refreshment and comfort received through these things.

As soon as the men hobbled up to the tents, good hot soup was given all round. That over, their wounds were dressed,—for the gentlemen of the commission are cooks, or surgeons, as occasion demands,—and finally, with their blankets spread over the straw, the men stretched themselves out and were happy and contented till morning, and the next train.

On the day that the railroad bridge was repaired we moved up to the depot, close by the town, and had things in perfect order; a first rate camping ground, in a large field directly by the track, with unlimited supply of delicious cool water. Here we set up two stoves, with four large boilers, always kept full of soup and coffee, watched by four or five black men, who did the cooking, under our direction, and sang (not under our direction) at the tops of their voices all day,

“ Oh darkies hate you seen my Massa,”

“When this *cruel* war is over.”

Then we had three large hospital tents, holding about thirty-five each, a large camp-meeting supply-tent, where barrels of goods were stored, and our own smaller tent fitted up with tables, where jelly-pots and bottles of all kinds of good syrups, blackberry and black currant, stood in rows. Barrels were ranged round the tent walls; shirts, drawers, dressing-gowns, socks, and slippers (I wish we had more of the latter), rags and bandages, each in its own place on one side; on the other, boxes of tea, coffee, soft crackers, tamarinds, cherry brandy, etc. Over the kitchen, and over this small supply tent we women rather reigned, and filled up our wants by requisitions on the Commission's depot. By this time there had arrived a “delegation” of the right kind from Canandaigua, N.Y., with surgeon dressers and attendants, bringing a first-rate supply of necessities and comforts for the wounded, which they handed over to the Commission.

Twice a day the trains left for Baltimore or Harrisburgh, and twice a day we fed all the wounded who arrived for them. Things were systematized now, and the men came down in long ambulance trains to the cars; baggage-cars they were, filled with straw for the

wounded to lie on, and broken open at either end to let in the air. A government surgeon was always present to attend to the careful lifting of the soldiers from ambulance to car. Many of the men could get along very nicely, holding one foot up, and taking great jumps on their crutches. The latter were a great comfort; we had a nice supply at the lodge, and they traveled up and down from the tents to the cars daily. Only occasionally did we dare let a pair go on with some very lame soldier, who begged for them; we needed them to help the new arrivals each day, and trusted to the men being supplied at the hospitals at the journey's end. Pads and crutches are a standing want, pads particularly. We manufactured them out of the rags we had, stuffed with sawdust from brandy boxes, and with half a sheet and soft straw. Mrs. ——— made a poor dying boy as easy as his sufferings would permit. Poor young fellow, he was so grateful to her for washing, and feeding, and comforting him. He was too ill to bear the journey, and went from our tent to the church hospital, and from the church to his grave, which would have been coffinless but for the care of ———, for the Quarter Master's Department was overtaxed, and for many days our dead were simply wrapped in their blankets and put into the

earth. It is a soldierly way after all, of lying wrapped in the old war-worn blanket, the little dust returned to dust.

When the surgeons had the wounded all placed, with as much comfort as seemed possible under the circumstances, on board the train, our detail of men would go from car to car, with soup made of beef-stock or fresh meat, full of potatoes, turnips, cabbage, and rice, with fresh bread and coffee, and, when stimulants were needed, with ale, milk-punch, or brandy. Water-pails were in great demand for use in the cars on the journey, and also empty bottles to take the place of canteens. All our whisky and brandy bottles were washed and filled up at the spring, and the boys went off carefully hugging their extemporized canteens from which they would wet their wounds, or refresh themselves till the journey ended. I do not think that a man of the 16,000, who were transported during our stay, went from Gettysburg without a good meal—rebels and Unionists together, they all had it and were pleased and satisfied. “Have you friends in the army, madam?” a rebel soldier, lying on the floor of the car, said to me, as I gave him some milk: “Yes; my brother is on ——’s staff.” “I thought so, ma’am. you can always tell; when people are good to soldiers

they are sure to have friends in the army." "We are rebels, you know, ma'am," another said; "Do you treat rebels *so?*" It was strange to see the good brotherly feeling coming over the soldiers, our own and the rebels, when side by side they lay in our tents. "Hullo boys! this is the pleasantest way to meet, isn't it? We are better friends when we are as close as this, than a little farther off." And then they would go over the battles together: "we were here," and "you were there," in the friendliest way.

After each train of cars daily, for the three weeks we were in Gettysburg, trains of ambulances arrived too late, men who must spend the day with us until the 5 P. M. cars went, and men too late for the 5 P. M. train, who must spend the night till the 10 P. M. cars went. All the men who came in this way, under our own immediate and particular attention, were given the best we had of care and food. The surgeon in charge of our camp, with his most faithful dresser and attendants, looked after all their wounds, which were often in a most shocking state, particularly among the rebels. Every evening and morning they were dressed. Often the men would say "That feels good. I haven't had my wound so well dressed since I was hurt." Something cool to drink is the first thing asked for after the

long, dusty drive, and pailfuls of tamarinds and water, “a beautiful drink,” the men used to say, disappeared rapidly among them.

After the men’s wounds were attended to, we went round giving them clean clothes; had basins and soap and towels, and followed these with socks, slippers, shirts, drawers, and those coveted dressing-gowns. Such pride as they felt in them! comparing colors, and smiling all over as they lay in clean and comfortable rows ready for supper, “on dress parade,” they used to say. And then the milk, particularly if it were boiled and had a little whiskey and sugar, and the bread, with *butter* on it, and *jelly* on the butter—how good it all was, and how lucky we felt ourselves in sharing the immense satisfaction of distributing these things, which all of you, hard at work in villages and cities, were getting ready and sending off, in faith.

Canandaigua sent cologne with its other supplies which went right to the noses and hearts of the men. “That is good, now;”—“I’ll take some of that;”—“worth a penny a sniff;”—“that kinder gives one life;”—and so on, all round the tents, as we tipped the bottles up on the clean handkerchiefs some one had sent, and when they were gone, over squares of cotton, on which

the perfume took the place of hem,—“just as good, ma’am.” We varied our dinners with custard and baked rice puddings, scrambled eggs, codfish hash, corn starch, and always as much soft bread, tea, coffee, or milk as they wanted. Two Massachusetts boys, I especially remember, for the satisfaction with which they ate their pudding. I carried a second plateful up to the cars, after they had been put in, and fed one of them till he was sure he had had enough. Young fellows they were, lying side by side, one with a right and one with a left arm gone.

The Gettysburg women were kind and faithful to the wounded and their friends, and the town was full to overflowing of both. The first day, when Mrs. ——— and I recalled the place, we literally begged our bread from door to door—but the kind woman who at last gave us dinner would take no pay for it. “No ma’am,, I shouldn’t wish to have that sin on my soul when the war is over.” She, as well as others, had fed the strangers flocking into town daily, sometimes over fifty of them for each meal, all for love and nothing for reward; and one night we forced a reluctant confession from our hostess, that she was meaning to sleep on the floor that we might have a bed, her whole house being full. Of course, we couldn’t

allow this self-sacrifice and hunted up some other place to stay in. We did her no good, however, for we afterwards found that the bed was given up that night to some other stranger who arrived late and tired:—"An old lady, you know, and I couldn't let an old lady sleep on the floor." Such acts of kindness and self-denial were almost entirely confined to the women.

Few good things can be said of the Gettysburg farmers, and I only use Scripture language in calling them "evil beasts." One of this kind came creeping into our camp three weeks after the battle. He lived five miles only from the town, and had "never seen a rebel." He heard we had some of them, and came down to see them. "Boys," we said, marching him, into the tent which happened to be full of rebels that day waiting for the train; "Boys, here's a man who never saw a rebel in his life, and wants to look at you;" and there he stood with his mouth wide open, and there they lay in rows, laughing at him, stupid old Dutchman. "And why haven't you seen a rebel?" Mrs.—— said; "why didn't you take your gun and help to drive them out of your town?" "A feller might'er got hit!" which reply was quite too much for the rebels, they roared with laughter up and down the tent.

One woman, we saw, who was by no means Dutch, and whose pluck helped to redeem the other sex. She lived in a little house close up by the field where the hardest fighting was done, a red-checked, strong, country girl. "Were you frightened when the shells began flying?" "Well, no; you see we was all a baking bread round here for the soldiers, and had our dough a rising. The neighbors they ran into their cellars, but I couldn't leave my bread. When the first shell came in at the window and crashed through the room, an officer came and said, 'you had better get out of this,' but I told him I could not leave my bread, and I stood working it till the third shell came through, and then I went down cellar, but (triumphantly) I left my bread in the oven." "And why didn't you go before?" "Oh, you see, if I had, the rebels would a come in and daubed the dough all over the place." And here she had stood, at the risk of unwelcome plums in her loaves, while great holes, which we saw, were made by shot and shell through and through the room in which she was working.

The streets of Gettysburg were filled with the battle. People thought and talked of nothing else; even the children shewed their little spites by calling to each other, "Here, you rebel," and mere scraps of boys

amused themselves with percussion caps and hammers. Hundreds of old muskets were piled on the pavements, the men who shouldered them a week before lying under ground now, or helping to fill the long trains of ambulances on their way from field. The private houses of the town were, many of them, hospitals; the little red flags hung from the upper windows. Beside our own men at the Lodge, we all had soldiers scattered about whom we could help from our supplies; and nice little puddings and jellies, or an occasional chicken, were a great treat to men condemned by their wounds to stay in Gettysburg and obliged to live on what the empty town could provide. There was a colonel in a shoe-shop, a captain just up the street, and a private round the corner, whose young sister had possessed herself of him, overcoming the military rules in some way, and carrying him off to a little room, all by himself, where I found her doing her best with very little. She came afterward to our tent and got for him clean clothes, and good food, and all he wanted, and was perfectly happy in being his cook, washer-woman, medical cadet and nurse. Beside such as these, we occasionally carried from our supplies something to the churches, which were filled with sick and wounded, and where men were dying—men

whose strong patience it was very hard to bear—dying with thoughts of the old home far away, saying, as last words, for the woman watching there and waiting with a patience equal in its strength, “Tell her I love her.”

Late one afternoon, too late for the cars, a train of ambulances arrived at our Lodge, with over one hundred wounded rebels, to be cared for through the night. Only one among them seemed too weak and faint to take anything. He was badly hurt, and failing. I went to him after his wound was dressed, and found him lying on his blanket stretched over the straws—a fair-haired, blue-eyed young lieutenant, a face innocent enough for one of our own New England boys. I could not think of him as a rebel, he was too near heaven for that. He wanted nothing, had not been willing to eat for days, his comrades said; but I coaxed him to try a little milk gruel, made nicely with lemon and brandy, and one of the satisfactions of our three weeks is the remembrance of the empty cup I took away afterward, and his perfect enjoyment of that supper. It was so good, the best thing he had had since he was wounded and he thanked me so much, and talked about his “good supper” for hours. Poor creature, he had had no care, and it was a surprise and pleasure to find himself thought of; so, in a pleased,

childlike way, he talked about it till midnight, the attendant told me, as long as he spoke of anything, for at midnight the change came, and from that time he only thought of the old days before he was a soldier, when he sang hymns in his father's church. He sang them now again, in a clear, sweet voice. "Lord, have mercy upon me;" and then songs without words—a sort of low intoning. His father was a Lutheran clergyman in South Carolina, one of the rebels told us in the morning, when we went into the tent, to find him sliding out of our care. All day long we watched him, sometimes fighting his battles over, oftener singing his Lutheran chants, till in at the tent door, close to which he lay, looked a rebel soldier, just arrived with other prisoners. He started when he saw the lieutenant, and quickly kneeling down by him, called, "Henry! Henry!" But Henry was looking at some one a great way off, and could not hear him. "Do you know this soldier?" we said. "Oh, yes, ma'am; and his brother is wounded and a prisoner, too, in the cars now." Two or three men started after him, found him, and half carried him from the cars to our tent. "Henry" did not know him, though, and he threw himself down by his side on the straw and for the rest of the day lay in a sort of apathy, without speaking, except

to assure himself that he could stay with his brother, without the risk of being separated from his fellow-prisoners. And there the brothers lay, and we strangers sat watching and listening to the strong, clear voice singing "Lord, have mercy upon me." The Lord *had* mercy, and at sunset I put my hand on the lieutenant's heart, to find it still. All night the brother lay close against the coffin, and in the morning went away with his comrades, leaving us to bury Henry, having "confidence," but first thanking us for what we had done, and giving us all that he had to show his gratitude, the palmetto ornament from his brother's cap and a button from his coat. Dr. W. read the burial service that morning at the grave and —— wrote his name on the little headboard: "Lieut. Rauch,, 14th Regt.. S. Carolina Vol."

In the field, where we buried him, a number of colored freedmen, working for Government, on the railroad, had their camp, and every night they took their recreation after the heavy work of the day was over, in prayer meetings. Such an "inferior race," you know! We went over one night and listened for an hour, while they sang, collected under the fly of a tent, a table in the middle, where the leader sat, and benches all round the sides for the congregation, men

only,—all very black and very earnest. They prayed with all their souls, as only black men and slaves can: for themselves and for the dear, white people who had come over to the meeting, and for “Massa Lincoln,” for whom they seemed to have a reverential affection some of them a sort of worship, which confused Father Abraham and Massa Abraham in one general call for blessings. Whatever else they asked for, they must have strength and comfort and blessing for “Massa Lincoln.” Very little care was taken of these poor men. Those who were ill, during our stay, here looked after by one of the officers of the Commission. They were grateful for every little thing. Mrs. ——— went into the town and hunted up several dozen bright handkerchiefs hemmed them, and sent them over to be distributed the next night after meeting. They were put on the table in the tent, and one by one, the men came up to get them. Purple, and blue, and yellow, the handkerchiefs were, and the desires of every man’s heart fastened itself on a yellow one; they politely made way for each other, though, one man standing back to let another pass up first, although he ran the risk of seeing the particular pumpkin color that riveted his eyes taken from before them. When the distribution was over, each man tied his head up in his hand

kerchief and sang one more hymn keeping time, all round, with blue and purple and yellow nods, and thanking, and blessing the polite people, in "their basket and in their store," as much as if the cotton handkerchiefs had all been gold leaf. One man came over to our tent, next day, to say, "Missus, was it you who sent me that present? I never had anything so beautiful in all my life before;" and he only had a blue one, too.

Among our wounded soldiers, one night, came an elderly man, sick, wounded and crazy, singing and talking about home. We did what we could for him, and pleased him greatly with a present of a red flannel shirt, drawers, and red calico dressing-gown, all of which he needed, and in which he dressed himself up, and then wrote a letter to his wife, made it into a little book with gingham covers, and gave it to one of the gentlemen to mail for him. The next morning he was sent on with the company from the Lodge, and that evening two tired women came into our camp—his wife and sister, who hurried on from their home to meet him, arriving just too late. Fortunately we had the queer lime gingham book to identify him by, and when some one said, "It is the man, you know, who screamed so," the poor wife was certain about him.

He had been crazy before the war, but not for two years, now, she said. He had been fretting for home since he was hurt, and when the doctor told him there was no chance of his being sent there, he lost heart, and wrote to his wife to come and carry him away. It seemed almost hopeless for two lone women, who had never been out of their own little town, to succeed in finding a soldier among so many, sent in so many different directions, but we helped them as we could, and started them on their journey the next morning, back on their track, to use their common sense and Yankee privilege of questioning.

A week after, Mrs. —— had a letter full of gratitude, and saying that the husband was found and secured for *home*. That same night we had had in our tents, two fathers, with their wounded sons, and a nice old German mother with her boy. She had come in from Wisconsin, and brought with her a patchwork bed quilt for her son, thinking he might have lost his blanket, there he laid all covered up in his quilt, looking so homelike, and feeling so, too, no doubt, with his good old mother close at his side. She seemed bright and happy, had three sons in the army—one had been killed—this one wounded, yet she was so pleased with the tents, and

the care she saw taken there of the soldiers, that while taking her tea from a barrel head as table, she said, "Indeed, if *she* was a man, she'd be a soldier, too, right off."

For this temporary sheltering and feeding of all these wounded men, Government could make no provision. There was nothing for them if too late for the cars, except the open field and hunger, in preparation for their fatiguing journey. It is expected when the cars are ready that the men will be promptly sent to meet them, and Government cannot provide for mistakes and delays, so that but for the Sanitary Commission's Lodge, and comfortable supplies, for which the wounded are indebted to the hard workers at home, men, badly hurt, must have suffered night and day, while waiting for the "next train." We had on an average sixty of such men each night for three weeks under our care, sometimes one hundred, sometimes only thirty, and with the "delegation," and the help of other gentlemen volunteers, who all worked devotedly for the men, the whole thing was a great success, and you, and all of us can't help being thankful that we had a share, however small, in making it so. Sixteen thousand good meals were given; hundreds of men kept through the day, and twelve hun-

dred sheltered at night, their wounds dressed, their supper and breakfast secured, rebels and all. You will not, I am sure, regret that these most wretched men, these "enemies," "sick and in prison," were helped and cared for, through your supplies, though, certainly, they were not in your minds when you packed your barrels and boxes. The clothing we reserved for our own men, except now and then, when a shivering rebel needed it, but in feeding them, we could make no distinctions. It was curious to see, among our workers at the Lodge, the disgust and horror felt for *rebels*, giving place to the kindest feeling, for *wounded* men.

Our three weeks here were coming to an end; the work of transporting the wounded was nearly over; twice daily we had filled and emptied our tents and twice fed the trains before the long journey. The men came in slowly at the last, a Lieutenant, all the way from Oregon, being among the very latest. He came down from the Corps Hospitals (now greatly improved), having lost one foot, poor fellow, dressed in a full suit of the Commission's cotton clothes, just as bright and as cheerful as the first man, and, all the men that we received had been. We never heard a complaint. "Would he like a little nice soup?" "Well, no thank you, ma'am;" hesitating and polite. "You

have a long ride before you, and had better take a little; I'll just bring it and you can try." So the good, thick soup came. He took a very little in the spoon to please me, and afterwards the whole cupful to please himself. He "did not think it was this kind of soup I meant. He had some in camp, and did not think he cared for any more; his 'cook' was a very small boy, though, who just put some meat in a little water and stirred it round." "Would you like a handkerchief?" and I produced our last one, with a hem and cologne too. "Oh, yes; that is what I need; I have lost mine, and was just borrowing this gentleman's." So the Lieutenant, the last man, was made comfortable, thanks to all of you, though he had but one foot to carry him on his long journey home.

Four thousand soldiers, too badly hurt to be moved, were still left in Gettysburg, cared for kindly and well at the large, new Government hospital, with a Sanitary Commission attachment.

Our work was over, our tents were struck, and we came away after a flourish of trumpets, from two military bands who filed down to our door and gave us a farewell, "Red, white and blue."