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U. S. Sanitary Commission.—No. 89.

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

Quarterly Special Relief Report

OF THE

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION,

Washington, D. C., April, 1865,

CONCERNING THE REBEL HOSPITALS AT RICHMOND, VA., AND
THE PROVISION MADE FOR THEIR PATIENTS, AS CON-
TRASTED WITH THE SUPPLIES FURNISHED
TO UNION PRISONERS OF WAR IN
REBEL HANDS.

Richard A. Knapp

WASHINGTON, D. C. :
PRINTED BY MCGILL & WITHEROW.
1865.

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U. S. 7 June 12

[Extracts from the Report of Frederick N. Knapp, Superintendent of Special Relief, read at the quarterly meeting of the Board of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, Washington, D. C., April 20, 1865.]

* * * * *

On Sunday, April 2d, I arrived at Wilmington, North Carolina, having left Washington in response to the call made by Dr. Agnew in his letter of March 20th, describing the wretchedness and destitution of the 1,500 or 2,000 Union prisoners who had just been brought into Wilmington, exchanged or paroled from the Rebel prisons.* When

* Dr. C. R. Agnew, of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, in a letter to the General Secretary, dated Wilmington, N. C., March 20, 1865, writes thus:—

* * * “The returned prisoners sent into Wilmington numbered nearly 9,000. Some 7,000 of the less famished have gone North. General Abbott, who received our poor fellows in the exchange, has just told me that language would utterly fail to describe their condition. Filth, rags, nakedness, starvation, were personified in their condition. Many of the men were in a state of mind resembling idiocy, unable to tell their names, and lost to all sense of modesty, unconscious of their nakedness and personal condition. Some of them moving about on their hands and knees, unable to stand upon their gangrenous feet, looking up like hungry dogs, beseeching the observer for a bite of bread or a sup of water. Some of them hitched along on their hands and buttocks, pushing gangrenous feet, literally reduced to bone and shreds, before them. Others leaned upon staves, and glared from sunken eyes through the parchment-like slits of their open eyelids into space, without having the power to fix an intelligent gaze upon passing objects. Others giggled and smirked, and hobbled like starved idiots; while some adamantine figures walked erect, as though they meant to move the skeleton homewards so long as vitality enough remained to enable them to do so. To see the men who remain here in hospital would move a heart as hard and cold as marble. Their condition is that of men who have for months suffered chronic starvation. Their arms and legs look like coarse reeds with bulbous joints. Their faces look as though a skillful taxidermist had drawn tanned skin over the bare skull, and then placed false eyes in the orbital cavities. They defy description. It would take a pen expert in the use of every term known to the anatomist and the physician to begin to expose their fearful condition. May God in his infinite mercy, forgive the creatures who have done this horrid thing!” * * * *

I reached Wilmington, all but 300 of these Union prisoners had been sent North; and those who remained had been made in all respects clean and comfortable, as had been those who had gone on shipboard. And this had been done largely, almost exclusively, through the abundant supplies of clothing furnished by the Commission—some thousands of garments—which enabled these men to lay aside the filthy rags in which alone they had for months been clothed. I am convinced from what I myself saw, and from the testimony of the medical and the military officers at Wilmington, that the Sanitary Commission did one of its most blessed and beneficent works in the help it gave to the surgeons there, who, with utterly deficient means at hand, were trying to lift these returned prisoners out of a state of filth and starvation—a condition resulting directly from long confinement at the South and studied deprivations. And I may add that among the men who still remained at Wilmington, although they were surrounded by comforts, and their appearance had of course been entirely changed from what it was at first, there was, in the seventy gangrenous limbs (dry gangrene from frost or exposure) of men gathered in one hospital, the saddest and most striking evidence I have yet seen of the malignant cruelty practiced upon our Union prisoners by the enemy.

* * * * * * *

On Friday, April 7th, I left City Point, upon the Sanitary Tug Boat, "Gov. Curtin," which was starting with stores for Richmond. We arrived at Richmond Friday evening, having been delayed on our way up two hours, at "Deep Bottom," where we took on to the "Curtin" quite an amount of supplies from what had been the Sanitary Store-house of the 25th Army Corps; the sanitary wagons,—which you will recollect followed the troops into Richmond the morn-

ing it was evacuated,—though well loaded, were able to take but a share of the supplies.

Saturday morning, after passing by the smoking ruins, and getting sight of “Libby Prison” and “Belle Isle,”—each bound in with its terrible history,—I went out to “Jackson Hospital,” one of the principal hospitals of the place, a mile and a half or two miles from the city; and here I saw that which, by contrast, made me feel ten-fold more fully than ever before how great had been the barbarity of that system of starvation and exposure by which the rebels, with slow and terrible death, had killed off our men, their Prisoners of War.

I found at that rebel hospital the evidence of thorough organization and wise system—a large generosity in all the provisions for the comfort of their patients; and testimony proving the fact that, as a general thing, there had been no lack of supplies there, but usually an abundance of all needed stores. As I looked on these well ordered methods, and the liberal provision which had long been made by the rebels at that hospital, located within less than cannon-shot distance of Belle Isle, I felt that the thin screen of “*ignorance*” or of “*inability*,” with which some persons still seek to temper the barbarity of the rebels, must be at once and utterly swept away, leaving the inhuman cruelty of this slow murder to stand out clearly, and its true nature to be recognized, viz: a means systematically arranged and adopted, under a deliberate plan, *as an engine of war*, whereby to thin our ranks by death, precisely as the bayonet is used in battle,—except that the bayonet is connected with bravery, while this instrument of death is the weapon of cowardice. For what could stand in stronger contrast with the boasted chivalry of the South, or with the undoubted valor of her soldiers in the field, than this resort to a process of starving defenceless men by thousands, showing that the spirit of

slavery, which fomented and has guided this rebellion, is not only oppressive but base; since bravery—that virtue which all men praise—dies out under a system that creates and thrives upon brutality and ungoverned passions? What, therefore, if not this meanest and most cruel method of getting rid of a dreaded foe, should forever be branded as *cowardice*?

Jackson Hospital, as established and conducted by the rebels, was excellent; in some respects, few military hospitals of our own surpass it. It was excellent in its general plan of organization; in its location and its arrangement of buildings; in its administration; in its thorough policing; in the exceeding cleanliness of its bedding, and in the very liberal provision made by the Rebel Government for the Hospital Fund.

Jackson Hospital comfortably accommodates 2,500 patients. Winder Hospital, which is near by, but which I did not visit, is said to be similar to Jackson Hospital in general arrangements and capacity, but inferior in its situation and its appointments. The buildings at Jackson Hospital are much like our usual wooden hospital barracks, well arranged and well warmed and lighted, the floors nicely scoured, and the walls, in many wards, covered with canvas, which was painted white. The bedsteads were only wood, but were kept very white, and on each was both a straw bed and a cotton mattress, and two feather pillows, with nice pillow cases. The sheets and blankets and bed-spreads were unusually clean, and bore marks of being carefully looked after. The cleanliness of the bed-linen was accounted for by the large laundry, where sixty (60) laundresses were constantly at work. The laundry was provided with a long row of fixed tubs, into which the water was brought by pipes, and ample provision was made for heating water, heating irons, &c., &c.

This laundry had its tenements near by for the women employed there, where they seemed comfortable in their quarters, and neat in personal appearance. At the hospital, beside the medical corps and nurses, and the two Matrons to every ninety patients, there were in each section a Chief Linen-Matron, and a Chief Culinary-Matron, with their two assistants. In each section was a kitchen for special diet, with four to six stoves—this besides the general kitchen attached to each section. The special diet list was posted in all the wards, and seemed liberal and aiming to secure variety. The Dispensaries were well fitted up, and the persons in charge said, in answer to my inquiry, that, excepting a deficiency at times in some few articles, their supply had been good. The Linen-rooms were kept in the neatest order, and seemed to have been unusually well filled. The Baggage-rooms were like the rest, clean and well arranged. The Dining-rooms of each section, where the convalescents ate, were also kept well, and the tables neat, and bearing marks of care and comfort, and convalescents who had been there some months assured me that their fare was on the whole excellent. There were no covered walks connecting the different buildings in the section with the dining rooms, nor were there any “tram-ways” from the kitchens to the wards; but the walks were hard and clean, and the drains deep and free. At the head of each section were neat buildings, one of which was occupied by surgeons, others by matrons and women assistants. These buildings, with their white-washed fronts and green blinds, and patches of grass, had a look of comfort. There was no general method of carrying water by pipes over the different buildings, consequently there was no provision for bath rooms in the several wards—a decided deficiency; but good water for ordinary use was furnished by wells. The water closets for



convalescents were located where a running stream carried off the deposits.

Within the hospital grounds and near by was an open grove of large trees, with grass beneath, neatly kept. At the further edge of this grove was one of the two large ice houses which supplied the hospital, each 30x30 feet, and 18 feet deep. They are both now filled solid with ice, well protected. A little way from the hospital on the other side are large sheds and a barn, also a dairy house, with the cold water of the melting ice of one of the ice houses flowing through it. At this dairy in summer they have had sixty cows (pastured near by) to furnish fresh milk, and at times fresh butter also, to the patients. The refuse from the barn yard goes to enrich the hospital garden of three or four acres, which, the surgeon formerly in charge told me, had become very productive.

Near the dairy house stands a large bakery, (at present not used) with capacious ovens where formerly, as the man in charge stated, they turned out sixty thousand pounds of bread per day.

To the above memoranda is to be added this most important fact, viz: that the Rebel Government, in making provision for the "Hospital Fund," added *one hundred per cent.* to the usual army ration. Thus was furnished large means for purchasing extra supplies.

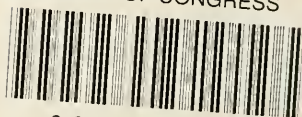
Such, roughly sketched, is the record of Jackson Hospital, as it had been during the past year or more; while near by, all the time, was Belle Isle, with its shelterless and starving thousands. * * * * *

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