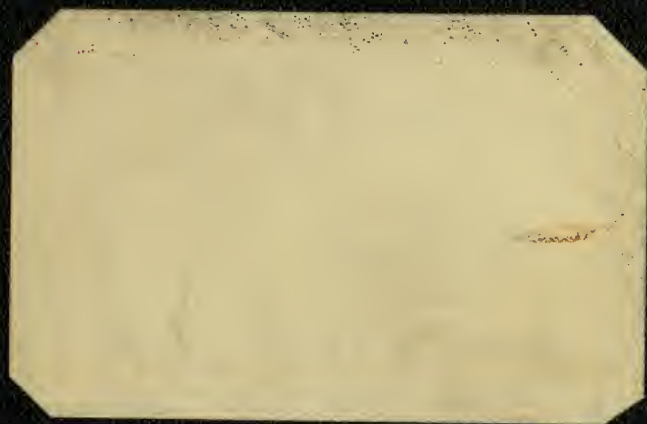


E 631

.P32

Copy 1





Class E 631

Book .P 32





THE COMPENSATED AGENCY

— OF THE —

368
—
950

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION

EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

BY

REV. WM. W. PATTON, D. D.,

Vice-President of the Northwestern Branch.

CHICAGO, ILL.

DUNLOP, SEWELL & SPALDING, PRINTERS.

1864.

E 631
P 32

Peabody
West. Res. Hist. Soc.

THE COMPENSATED AGENCY.

Why does not the Sanitary Commission employ a volunteer, unpaid agency? Why does it pursue the system of compensating those who carry on its operations? Is this not a needless expense, diminishing that much the charities of the patriotic? Is there not benevolence enough in the nation to provide, if need be, an army of Sanitary laborers to work gratuitously for our brave and patient soldiers? Are there not thousands who would delight to engage in such labors of love for a few weeks at a time, relieving each other by a constant succession? And would not such a plan ensure more sympathy between the people and the army, and also between the people and the Sanitary Commission?

These questions are often asked in all sincerity and good faith, and properly demand an answer. Indeed, were no answer given when such inquiries become general, the silence might be interpreted as inability to justify the operations of the Commission, and as a reason why the public should seek another channel of communication with the army.

For the information of the patriotic public, then, let it be known first of all, that the Sanitary Commission uses volunteer and unpaid labor to the full extent of its availability. Its supply department is managed almost wholly on this principle. By the supply department is here intended the arrangement for obtaining supplies from the people. Very few paid soliciting agents have been employed to make appeals to them; fewer than the cause demanded, and fewer than have been employed by other bodies. The treasury and storehouses of the Sanitary Commission have suffered from the undue economy practiced in agencies, advertising, printing, and other costly measures commonly resorted to, to keep a cause before the public. It has trusted almost entirely to the spontaneous liberality of the loyal people. The various branch commissions are operated gratuitously by business and professional gentlemen, at a mere nominal expense for rent, clerk hire and the like; and yet through them, by unpaid agencies and labors, have come the bulk of the stores distributed in the army.

Moreover, in the work of distribution resort is had to gratuitous volunteer aid, where the case admits of it. Thus it has been customary, after bloody engagements, to forward to the army large companies of volunteer surgeons and nurses for temporary service till the emergency

had passed. Some noble men have also given their services for a protracted term. There is no disposition to discard gratuitous labor where it can be made efficient.

But it must next be remarked, that in the larger portion of the operations of the Sanitary Commission it is clearly impossible to employ a gratuitous agency. The work is such as to demand permanent paid laborers in order to be done at all. And here it is necessary to correct the common misapprehension, that the distribution of hospital supplies is the whole or principal work of the Sanitary Commission. It constitutes but one of several departments. There, for instance, is the Back Pay and Pension Department, for assisting discharged soldiers or their friends to obtain their claims upon the government; with reference to which the idea of using a mere gratuitous, volunteer agency is as absurd as to expect to carry on the Treasury Department of the Government in like manner. The business must be done with care, method and intelligence, and with a sense of responsibility also, which result only from long experience and official training. There is the Hospital Directory Department, recording the names of all soldiers who enter the army hospitals, with their transfers from point to point, and their death or discharge. To this department application is made by thousands monthly to discover the life, death or condition of those from whom they have heard nothing. It requires a numerous and careful set of agents to obtain the hospital returns, keep the corresponding books, and answer inquiries orally or by letter. And these agents cannot be changed every few weeks, without defeating the whole object. Their experience is worth more than gold. They must be retained permanently, and therefore receive a salary for support. There is the Department of Army Inspection, employing a large number of able physicians, who spend their entire time in going from camp to camp throughout the seat of war, inspecting the condition of the men and the situation of the camps, inquiring into diet, clothing personal habits, and the regimen of the army in respect to hygiene, making suggestions to officers and men, and obtaining numerous and minute statistics for future publication. These latter (some of which have recently been submitted to scientific bodies in Europe, and elicited great surprise and commendation), are of the utmost value and could not be obtained and recorded by any but professional and experienced persons, who must be employed for long periods and be paid for their services. Take, again, the Relief Department, with its Hospital Cars and its numerous Soldiers' Homes scattered through the land at all the principal points reached by the soldiers on their way to or from the army, where the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, and the houseless are sheltered and lodged; and how is it possible to entrust their management to volunteer, gratuitous agents, changing every month or six weeks? As well undertake to conduct a city hotel on that principle. Then there is the work of publishing and circulating the series of documents issued by the Sanitary Commission, many of them of a medical nature, giving the latest results of medical science and

surgical art with reference to camp diseases and injuries received in battle. These must be prepared with care by competent men at the head of their profession, and must be published and widely distributed with ungrudging outlay. Consider, then, the Distribution of Supplies. There must surely be permanent agents at almost every military post, to receive and handle the goods at the storehouses, to see to arrangements with railroads, steamboats, quartermasters and teamsters, to keep account of stock, and make delivery to the distributing agencies in the field, and to make stated reports to the Commission. But few men have the business knowledge and tact to fill these places; and to obtain and retain them, they must have proper compensation. *No agency for aiding the army pretends to employ gratuitous labor in this part of the work.* But yet, again, over the multitude of distributors of supplies there must be permanent superintendents to direct them where to labor, to instruct them in the details of their work, and to be responsible to the Central Commission for the proper organization and efficiency of the force sent to the field. These must be wise, capable, experienced men, permanently engaged in the cause, and of course supported by the funds of the Commission. *And such paid agency every Commission employs that labors for the good of the army.*

Now two things may be here observed: first, that no Agency but that of the Sanitary Commission even pretends to do anything in the various departments named, with the exception of the last; so that if, in order to avoid paid agencies, the public should desert the Sanitary Commission, it would necessitate the utter abandoning of work as necessary and important as that of hospital supplies; and secondly, that the respects in which it has already been proved that a paid agency is indispensable, and is actually used by all Commissions, are so numerous that very little is left about which to dispute. These cover perhaps three-fourths of the expense incurred by the Sanitary Commission in the remuneration of those whom it employs.

But that no evasion may seem to be practised, the case will be still further examined with reference to the small part of the work which relates to the final distribution of supplies to the soldiers. It will naturally be asked, Whether good, benevolent men, could not be secured to act gratuitously for brief periods of a month or six weeks, in conveying the supplies from the storehouses to the hospitals, and in making distribution among sick and wounded? If laymen cannot leave their business, can not the pastors of churches be sent on short visits to the army for this purpose? It may be answered, that if the Sanitary Commission were to do this, the agency could hardly be called gratuitous; for the churches would still support the pastors and their families by the continuance of their salaries, and would also supply the vacant pulpits at considerable cost, while the Commission would pay the traveling expenses and the board in the army. Instead of being properly a gratuitous operation, it would be borrowing and supporting a paid agency at not a small incidental expense. In every department of work *somebody*

must support the workmen. It were better to add, if necessary a few dollars more, call it a compensated labor, and secure the obvious advantages of the latter plan. These advantages may be summed up in permanence, efficiency and economy.

1. *A paid agency will be permanent.* All who need the labor of others value permanence of arrangement. No housewife likes to change her cook or chambermaid every month. No charitable asylum for orphans or the blind, for the insane or for the deaf and dumb, would choose a gratuitous monthly service from friends rather than a paid permanent service. If a business man finds a good clerk, he wants to keep him. Suppose, now, a company of volunteer agents visit the army, and two or three of them prove to be admirably qualified for the work, would it not be good policy to secure their services permanently by offering such a salary as would enable them to remain? Could money be better expended? Why send them away to let inferior men come in their place, even if the latter will serve for nothing?

2. *A paid agency is the most efficient.* Under the idea of efficiency we may include as elements, selection, order, responsibility and experience. To work to the best advantage in extended operations, selected men must work under strict discipline and for long periods. Those to be employed must be carefully chosen, not merely for general good character, nor even for special piety and usefulness in other fields, but for adaptation to the particular work. But if the Sanitary Commission were to depend upon volunteer agency, they could not use the same particularity of selection as at present. Ten times as many agents would be needed during the year, and these must often be hastily accepted as they might offer, especially as the temptation would be strong to avoid giving offence by their rejection, in case they were persons of influence in the community. Consequently with the good men would be sent many utterly unqualified for the work. The present plan gives opportunity for careful selection in the case of every individual, and thus secures an efficient corps of laborers from the outset. In the field, moreover, each laborer must be rigidly held to his proper place and the prescribed method, and be made responsible for his portion of the work. This can be very partially done under a gratuitous, volunteer system, in which men come of their own accord, stay for a brief term, have their curiosity to gratify, work for nothing, and feel correspondingly independent. It is useless here to say that good men, Christians and clergymen at that, will be free from irregularity and insubordination. Human nature is human nature even in such worthy representatives, and agents will generally take improper liberty, and feel a degree of irresponsibility, who are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and whose labors are a gratuity. The vast extent and great importance of the operations of the Sanitary Commission, involving the distribution of supplies to the value of millions of dollars, require, on simple business principles, that it should have agents perfectly under its control, and of whom it stands in no fear. It is essential, on the one hand, that the agents be dependent upon it for

their employment and support, and subject continually to orders of a superior authority, which they must obey; and, on the other hand, that the Commission be independent of their good will, and not necessitated to use them for subsequent appeals to the people. It must not be in bondage to gratuitous laborers, nor under temptation from them.

And then the necessity of long and varied experience to efficient labor need scarcely be argued with an intelligent public. An experienced man can not only do twice the work of a novice in the same time, but can do it twice as well. He knows where to go, what to do, how to do it, whom to see. He learns the peculiarities of men with whom he has to deal. He becomes familiar with plans, methods, and localities. He acquires tact as well as knowledge. He is worth twice as much the second month as he was the first, and as much more still the third. Would it be wisdom, then, for the Sanitary Commission to abandon a plan which gives them the advantage of disciplined, responsible, and experienced agents, and to adopt one which would make them dependent upon a succession of raw, undisciplined, irresponsible and inexperienced hands, coming fresh from the people every month or six weeks? Let common sense return the answer.

3. *A paid agency is the most economical.* This affirmation is made advisedly, as the result of observation and experience, and thoughtful men will see nothing strange in it. It would not surprise a merchant to tell him that paid clerks would be more economical than the volunteer, gratuitous and inexperienced friends who might offer to assist him, or even that well-paid clerks were more economical than those poorly paid. To judge of economy in a particular case, we must consider more than the money laid out in expenses. The true test is the relation of expense to results. A high rent is sometimes cheaper than a low rent, provided the locality be superior. Housekeepers understand that a cook at ten dollars a month might cost a family less than another at five, or even at nothing. Indeed, not a few assistants in every line of business are dear at nothing.

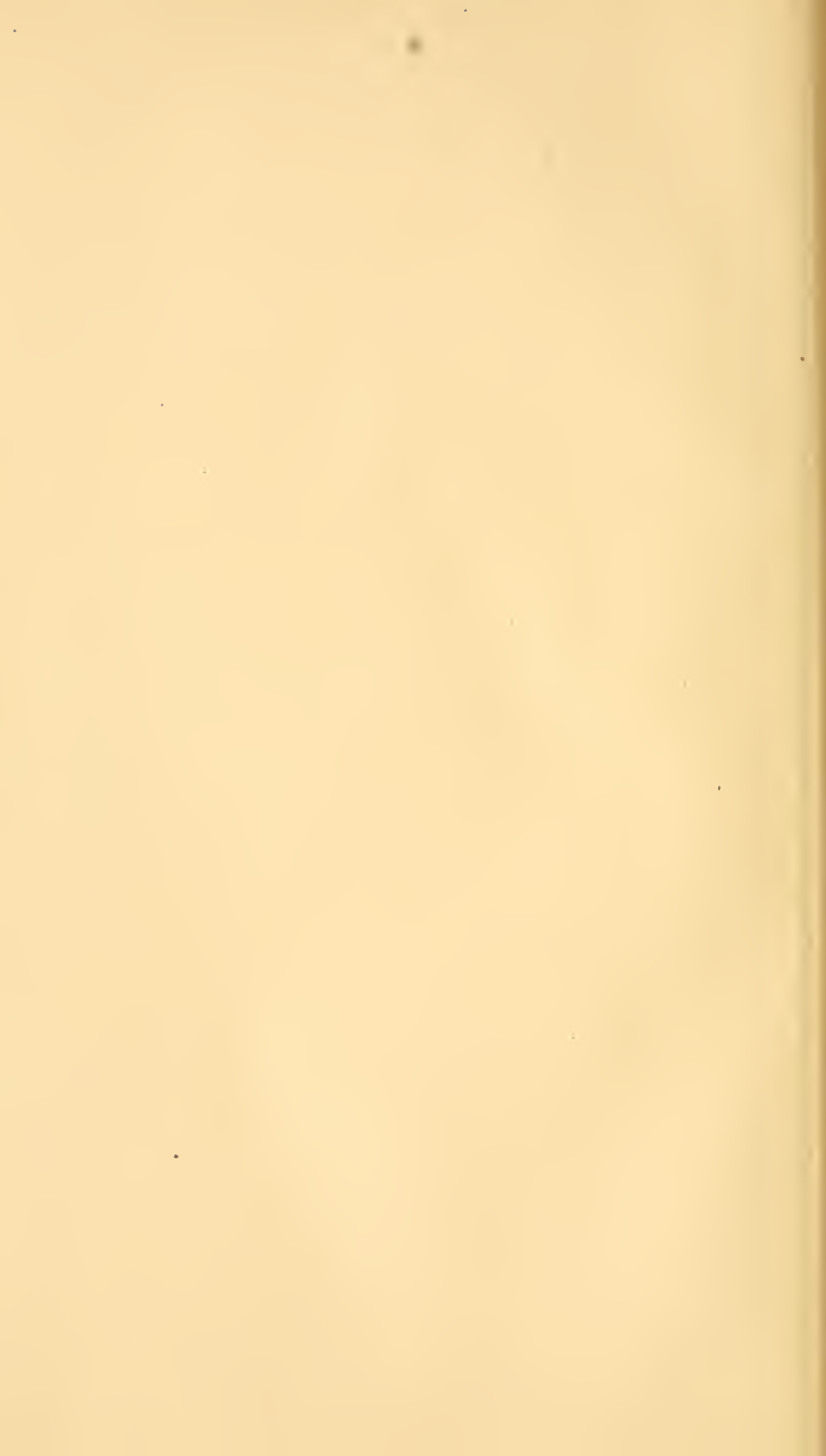
The economy of sanitary operations depends on the amount they cost the public and the government as well as the treasury of the Commission, the proportion the expenses bear to the business done, and the saving as well as the disbursement attending the plan adopted. If the Sanitary Commission should send a new set of clerical distributing agents into the field every month or six weeks, the incidental expense to the churches of supplying the pulpits left vacant, to the railroads and the government of furnishing transportation, and to the Commission of caring for them in food and lodging, would vary but little from what would be required to keep paid agents at work continuously. The relations of permanent rather than transient agents to the Government may seem of small consequence, but Gen. Sherman thought otherwise, and protested earnestly against the constant moving of delegates and agents over the roads, saying that its cost and annoyance to the Government were not to be tolerated. There was not ability to transport soldiers

and munitions of war rapidly enough to meet the demands of the service, and every man of these agents occupied the room of a soldier, or his weight of powder and shell. He was finally compelled to exclude them entirely from the trains.

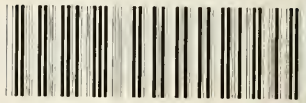
But the comparative economy of paid over unpaid agents is to be estimated chiefly from the use of the stores entrusted to them. The experience of all charitable societies confirms the assertion, that nothing requires more tact, discernment and caution, to avoid waste, than the distribution of benefactions to the needy. Between the covetousness of the recipient and the sympathetic eagerness of the benefactor, there will always be unwise profusion till long experience creates wariness and caution. More will be given to the really needy than their wants require, while dishonest applicants will carry off what should be reserved for cases of genuine distress. The army increases rather than diminishes this risk. The tricks and cunning of a veteran campaigner, and his ability to tell a story adapted to the circumstances, have made the expression proverbial, "to come the old so'ger" over a person. Hence, if the Sanitary Commission should follow the advice of some, and substitute transient, volunteer, unpaid agents or delegates, the result would be immense waste of supplies, not through dishonesty but unwisdom. It would never have any but inexperienced hands. By the time a delegate had acquired a little skill, his brief term of service would expire, and he would give place to a raw laborer. But under the present plan the same agent continues for months at the same work and often at the same post, and consequently gains such experience as enables him to detect imposture or unreasonableness in others, and to restrain undue sympathy and eagerness in himself. And here we are to remember how much more ready men are to be lavish with a public fund than with their own private charities, and how this temptation would increase, if they volunteered their services, and estimated the good done and the impression of their subsequent report by the amount of supplies distributed.

In view of these obvious considerations, familiar to all who manage public charities, is it unreasonable to assert, that a permanent and paid agency would make ninety dollars go as far as a transient, volunteer agency would a hundred? If so, then the Sanitary Commission save by their present plan, in the hospital supply department alone, three times as much as the entire expenses of all the departments. It will thus be seen that the seeming cost of a paid agency in the work of distribution is repaid many times over. And what we arrive at by fair reasoning from the known facts of human nature and of other benevolent operations, is corroborated by observation and experience in the Sanitary Commission work. The testimony often comes back from the field that the system saves more than it costs. After watching the experiments of ourselves and others with special care, we are assured that the system of permanent, compensated agency is not only the best as regards efficiency and economy, but is in truth the only system on which so varied and extensive operations can be carried on.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 744 402 1

