

Bushnell (F. H.)

REPORT

OF

30356

REV. F. H. BUSHNELL, HOSPITAL VISITOR.

UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION,
LOUISVILLE, KY., April 1, 1863.

J. S. Newberry, M. D., Secretary of Western Department:

Sir: In my last report I alluded at the close to the wrong done the soldier in not forwarding his descriptive list when he was sent too far from his regiment to be mustered with it for pay. I did not at all exhaust the subject, as it relates to sick or wounded soldiers sent to a hospital hundreds of miles from their companies. There can scarcely be anything more depressing to the spirits of a sick man, or tend more to retard his recovery, than his inability to get his pay, especially if he has a family, and they are in need. And it amounts to a cruel torture when his comrade in the adjoining bed is paid and he is passed by, because his Captain, from wilfulness, ignorance, or neglect, has failed to forward his descriptive list. There has been much more attention given to the subject since my last report, greatly to the comfort of the soldiers, but there are still many unnecessary cases of distress. I know there are reasons that many Captains would urge, calling them good, although contrary to the regulations, and also that there are difficulties in the way at times, incident to an army changing its position. But these excuses do not answer, when months pass and letter after letter has been written for them. Only the other day a soldier told me he had been three months in hospital, had written himself and had gotten others to write again and again, urging his Captain to send his list; nearly all this time he had been a subject of discharge.

Finally, in despair of anything better, he had determined to leave his papers behind and go home on a discharge furlough to a distant part of Michigan, aided by you from the Ware fund. At the last moment, however, his descriptive list came, and I was enabled to carry his money from the Paymaster to his bedside and start him on his journey home. There has not yet been enough said or done about this sad neglect. In many cases the lists are made out so carelessly or ignorantly that when sent they are almost useless. Sometimes a soldier suffers only in the amount paid him, and generally he will bear this, rather than wait for his paper to be returned to his Captain for correction. The other day a Captain of cavalry neglected to mention on a soldier's descriptive list that he had furnished his own horse, and consequently he must lose the "forty cents a day for the use and risk thereof" for all the time he was in actual service, or wait for the correction of his papers. He chose to take whatever he could get. And to-day a Captain has neglected to mention the date of enlistment on a descriptive list, and, though the papers

were all made out with this exception, as his clothing account had never been settled, the soldier must wait, how long I do not know, till his list can be corrected by his Captain. I felt sad as I glanced at the certificate of disability—his disease was consumption. The great cruelty and oppression of Captains to sick men, when, as has been the case in the past, they have six or more months' pay due, and it may be their families suffering, cannot be too strongly characterized. The knowledge of a single case of such a kind would degrade a man so fully in almost any community, and a wilful neglect should, it seems to me, cashier any Captain, who, in addition to the great wrong to the soldier, violates the regulations of the army.

While speaking of the troubles connected with descriptive rolls I may mention that in many hospitals a number of these papers are now remaining. In one I found as many as fifty, some of deserters, some who have died in hospital, but others of men who have gone to other hospitals or joined their regiments. At the Medical Director's where all should be collected, there are a very large number, a list of which has been made out by the clerk. The difficulties a captain would have in attempting to certify to the financial standing of a soldier who had been absent for months in distant hospitals is well known, and if a captain had no scruples, the paymaster's personal liability would prevent his paying upon a roll so defective. I would suggest that the list already made out should be perfected by the addition of those remaining in the hospitals and published in one of the daily papers, and the same type arranged in some convenient form to be sent to all the hospitals where these men may have gone, and also forwarded to the army in the best way to reach their company commanders.

OF LETTERS NOT DELIVERED.

Quite a large number of letters remain in the hospitals and have from them been accumulated at the Medical Director's office.

If some plan could be adopted by which the address of the persons could be made out, and the letters forwarded to the owners, a great kindness would be effected. Sad stories are in too many instances being accumulated by the delay of these letters. After all were sent that could be, might not the remainder be returned to the post-office, and through its present arrangement sent back to the writers?

HOSPITAL FUND.

The hospital fund, which is the commuted value of the rations issued to a hospital which have not been consumed by the inmates, is now, in well-managed hospitals of the city, sufficient to supply in a great measure those wants which in earlier days the Commission

has exerted itself to meet. I give as an illustration the fund accumulated in Hospital No. 7 in a single month and some of the items in its disbursement. There are many things that can yet be supplied to add to the comfort of the sick soldier here, but it is apparent from the following extract that the burthen of the sanitary stores should now be forwarded as they are to hospitals having greater need nearer the front, and that the Commission can here turn its attention to other charities connected with the soldier. The report from which I have taken the extract and summary was furnished me by the surgeon in charge, Dr. W. W. Goldsmith.

The whole amount of rations due hospital No. 7 for the month of February was 24,414, valued at 16 cts per ration, \$3,906 24—rations for about 800 men one month. The value of the regular rations drawn was \$2,486 45, leaving a hospital fund for the purchase of articles of diet beyond these rations of \$1,419 79. The hospital had already accumulated from preceding months no less an amount than \$1,438 90. In their purchases this month they drew upon this fund, for they spent \$2,161 63, leaving still a balance due this month of \$697 05. The list of articles is too long to be inserted here, and a few items will answer the purpose of the whole: Of butter 2,051 pounds; of milk 1,400 gallons; of eggs 589½ dozen; of mutton 1,302 pounds; \$57 for cans of peaches; \$55 for oysters; \$40 for oranges; \$22 for rabbits; \$76 for chickens; dried peaches \$38; dried apples \$44; potatoes \$159; onions \$35; turnips \$29; cabbage \$12, &c.

SPECIAL RELIEF.

The work of aiding the invalid discharged soldier, which for some time has been so thoroughly and kindly done at Washington, D. C., is now being carried out very completely here. The Kentucky branch have their special Relief Agent stationed at the Soldiers' Home, which has now been increased to double its former capacity. He attends to that department, where, besides furnishing the discharged soldiers lodging and food without charge, while waiting for his pay, all needed assistance in procuring his pay is rendered him. Papers are also examined there, and soldiers who are unable to care for their own papers have them prepared and carried to the paymaster and the money brought to them. This work will be greatly facilitated in a short time by the removal of the paymasters to the rooms being prepared for them at the Home.

It is true the discharge papers say that an agent is an unnecessary expense, and under the supposed circumstances it would be. But when so large a business is done as the paying a great many thousand dollars upon separate small accounts the business has to be systematized and time economized to prevent unnecessary delay and confusion, and necessary rules do not have at all times much reference to the ignorance, convenience, or comfort of the soldier. Many of the difficulties might be removed through information given by large posters. I would suggest that the Commission furnish such for the hospitals, the department, and the offices of the Paymaster for the instruction and warning of soldiers. But this relief does not bear upon the soldier confined to his bed, scarcely able to write his name, and, in too many instances, only going home to die among his friends, or of others desiring to husband their strength for the journey before them, or of others still too feeble to go to

the Paymasters with their papers. The forms which have been printed to facilitate the business and make the whole intention plain to the sick soldier answer the purpose very well. One, an order on the commander of the post for his papers, another on the paymaster, and a third, a certificate, to leave with the soldier when his papers, duly signed, are taken to the paymaster.

I was only able to commence this work on the 24th ult., but in the seven days since I have conveyed to these discharged soldiers more than seven hundred dollars. The first money I carried in this good work was to the bedside of a poor man in hospital at New Albany, and indeed the most of the above amount has been carried to these hospitals, they from their distance availing themselves the more readily of the kindness. I was glad that the first case was one of so great charity. He was very feeble and obliged to support his head by a pillow to make the necessary signatures. He had evidently only got permission to go home to die. His brother had been with him over two weeks waiting impatiently for his discharge. It would have done your heart good to have been the means of giving this aid and comfort to these two men.

I learn that one of the State agents has procured an order that no one shall collect anything for a soldier of his State except himself and the soldier. This may work well against sharpers, but it also interferes with this good work of the Commission, and I should think it would be desirable to procure a general order that exceptions be always made in favor of the Commission against any sectional policy.

GRAVES AT NEW ALBANY.

Upon inquiring about the manner in which the graves of soldiers were marked at New Albany, I found it was only by a board placed at the head of the grave. This being but a very temporary means of designating for friends the places of their dead, I suggested to the surgeon in charge that the ground be surveyed, the blocks measured carefully, and the graves numbered and a register kept of future interments. This he very cheerfully undertook, and a record of the place of burial of each soldier is now kept.

FUNERALS.

Many have no doubt noticed the manner in which soldiers have been carried through our streets to the burial. It seemed a very rude way, unsuited to the character of the person buried, and the Government that was conducting his funeral services. The body was met at the grave in the beautiful cemetery near the city by a United States Chaplain, and was lowered to its final resting place with the Christian ceremonies of the Episcopal Church. This passage from the hospital to the grave was the only thing that marred the proprieties of a Christian community. I presented the subject of the remedy of the evil formally to the Kentucky Branch of the United States Commission as a kindness to the living relatives for which they would ever be most grateful. I learn by inquiring from their secretary that they have secured such attention hereafter as they think will meet the neglect.

SOLDIERS' PAPERS AND CLAIMS.

The whole business of the army is a new thing to almost every one connected with it, and in every department it is an immense work. A proper plan should be adopted, and

the work should be systematized, and as thoroughly organized as any of the departments at Washington. The exigencies of the times, or local convenience often crowd one department with the business that belongs to another. In the work that relates to the discharged soldier and his claims, the making out his final papers, and the filing of those needing correction, is an accumulating business with accumulating papers. Adequate fixtures should be furnished, and rooms enough to separate the work and the papers from all possible confusion, and large enough to do the work conveniently.

To say nothing of the unnecessary distress that may arise from the loss of a single paper, or the making of a single mistake which could with care and conveniences and additional help now, be easily avoided, the government might save itself in after years from endless prosecutions for claims, and relieve many a case of distress that it was surely not its intention to aggravate.

LETTERS WRITTEN.

I have written letters to Captains, urging them in cases of distress for the sake of charity, to forward to surgeons of hospitals the descriptive rolls of their men, and have often gotten the surgeon or steward to write again, when it seemed almost useless. I have written and answered letters concerning the death or extreme sickness of soldiers.

In two instances letters were sent to the postmaster of this city, in despair of any other plan of reaching their destination. They were referred by the postmaster to the Commission, and I took upon myself the duty of answering. One was to convey to a mother the sad news of the death of her son, whom she knew had been sick in one of the hospitals of the city. The other was to communicate information from a wife to her husband, who was at a hospital in the country, and, more important, to convey to her the knowledge that he was alive. She knew he was in the battle of Murfreesboro, but had not heard from him since; and, finally, she had come to such a condition of suffering that she could neither eat nor sleep. The letter was written for her by a relative. Judging from the pleasure of the husband, who had been equally unsuccessful in hearing from home, the wife must have been overjoyed to know that he was still living and moving about the hospital as a convalescent.

BURIAL OF DISCHARGED SOLDIERS.

Discharged soldiers that die in a military district of the active army, while on their way home, still under the care of the Government that has furnished transportation and not yet fulfilled its obligations, ought to be buried with soldiers instead of citizens, where the Government has a burying-ground, and should be buried, it seems to me, at the expense of Government. The soldier has requested his discharge, and has thus voluntarily relieved the Government from the expense of caring for him in his last moments, and burying him, if he is fortunate enough to arrive at his home.

Again, the fact of his death is presumptive evidence that he has given his life for his country, and in so small a matter it is not generous to turn over his little effects to make out the price of his burial. And further, the cases are comparatively few. A number of instances have come to my knowledge, and in one I was forced to retain from the widow's

mite his funeral expenses. The undertaker tells me that his orders are now to bury them with soldiers, but to take the amount from their effects.

CONTRACT NURSES.

The design in having civilians for nurses is to relieve the army of the care of its own sick. But these nurses, many of whom volunteered with more of patriotism than some in the army, have, with it may be a few exceptions, never received their pay, and, as was to be expected, they have, after waiting for many months, left, one after another, till there are few remaining, and these are still with their families suffering. The business of taking care of the sick of its armies, that they may be restored to health and take their places again, is entered upon by every government as a matter of necessity, humanity, and duty. Everything is managed with reference to these purposes, and among other necessary things it is intended that there should be good nurses.

It is not good for a convalescent to take care of the sick, nor is it good for the sick man to be waited upon by a convalescent. Good nurses among the hearty and well are not always to be found. For the benefit of the sick a process of selection should be going on all the time till there is a first-rate class of attendants in every hospital, and these should be changed only as the good of the sick require.

The keeping of good men from their regiments is a source of aggravation to the captain of every company, and is the reason, many times without knowing the condition of the soldier, that he keeps back his descriptive roll, hoping thereby to force him back to his regiment for his pay.

LODGE.

I learned from Mr. Frederick N. Knapp, who has been accomplishing so much in Washington for the invalid soldier as special agent for the Commission, that lodges in different and distant parts of the city for invalid soldiers passing through to their homes were found to be a great comfort. He suggested during his visit the probability of a like necessity at Jeffersonville and New Albany. I visited the former place with him, and as the result of our observations a card was printed which will, through the attentions of Dr. W. F. Cullum, test the need of further efforts. I saw the doctor yesterday, and he thinks a room large enough for from ten to twenty beds would be a very great kindness to the invalid waiting for the train.

At New Albany I found, upon inquiry, a like or greater need, and as it was difficult to obtain a place near the depot, upon consultation, a card was arranged referring the invalid to Mr. D. Snively, at the U. S. Sanitary Rooms of the New Albany branch, for a place of rest and food without charge. The design is not only to furnish the discharged soldier with food and rest near the depot, but to keep him from falling into the hands of sharpers who are constantly hovering around to devour the little pittance which, with a ruined body, he is carrying to his home, an amount in too many cases which will but partially pay for the funeral expenses that must in a short time fall upon his family.

Another branch of kindness that may be undertaken by the Commission here suggests itself—that of informing persons of the place of the burial of their friends and giving such

information with reference to their disinterment as they desire.

KINDNESS TO PATIENTS.

A surgeon told me that he or his steward devoted two hours a day, if necessary, to writing letters for the patients. This is a very great kindness and much appreciated by the sick man ultimately, though at the time he can scarcely say yes to the question. Much more of this kind of attention could be shown to the sick than they generally receive. Every surgeon, as he feels the pulse physical of his patient, should try also his mental pulse; should ask whether he got his pay at the last muster; whether his family are suffering or in a poorhouse, as was the case of one who had not been paid for months. These men are not generally insensible to such acts of kindness. Even the man who can only make his mark for his signature, though he has neglected his intellect may have cultivated his affections till he suffers more from separation from his family, or from their distress or death, than the intelligent physician who has cultivated his intellect at the expense of his heart. There is a continual necessity for exertion on the part of all, to keep in its best discipline and condition that which has required so much effort and watching to bring to its present perfection. A single week of indifference on the part of the surgeon and attendants will bring into the utmost confusion the whole machinery of the best regulated hospital. Surgeons are not always attentive enough to make their requisitions complete, and to use that reasonable foresight that meets the difficulty before it arises. A man well fitted for his position as the guardian of sick men, whose lives depend to some extent upon his management, should know not only all the difficulties of his own department, but of every other connected with it. He should persist in accomplishing his purpose till he has all that is allowed to the number of sick men in his charge.

LAUNDRESSES.

Scarcely anything is more necessary to the health of a hospital than cleanliness. When a soldier enters a hospital he should not only have a thorough change given him of hospital clothing, but also have his clothes, which he has not had the opportunity or strength to wash for a long time, thoroughly cleaned. This is no doubt the business of the soldier when on duty. But whenever a convalescent is turned out of the hospital for the barracks or his regiment, he ought not to carry away clothing that has been piled away in its uncleanness for months. Some way should be provided to overcome this evil, even though the expense is added to his descriptive list. Some of the hospitals now try to have this work done. Laundresses do not have the ordinary washing of a family, and yet every family pays more than \$6 a month and rations for services of this kind. But now even bandages that would have been thrown away in former times must be washed, and the other differences between the washing of a hospital and a family can be easily conceived. I know that Surgeons who are trying to accomplish cleanliness so necessary to any hope for the sick in some cases, do exert themselves to the utmost to overcome the difficulty. Besides this trouble, these women have been kept so long from their pay, that, as they were not enlisted and feel that they must manage in some way to support their children, they have

in almost every hospital gotten up something like a strike or rebellion, and many times some of them have been forced to leave, greatly to the discomfort of the sick and the annoyance of the physician. I suppose this difficulty of the pay already due them will soon be obviated.

It is, considering all the difficulties, wonderful that surgeons have managed to keep their hospitals in such a cleanly condition. I may speak before I leave the subject of that which may happen without great care in any hospital and has occurred in some—the giving out of damp clothes to the sick. Sometimes they have been thoroughly dried but have been sprinkled for ironing and not again dried. And of another matter connected with the approaching warm weather—the allowing patients to change at their own discretion their woollen for cotton clothing. It may seem of little importance, but the lives of many may depend upon care in this respect. I have spoken of the matter because I recently heard of the case of a soldier sent from one hospital to another who had his flannel clothing changed for cotton just before the journey, and the consequence was, in the opinion of my informer, his death in a very short time thereafter. I did not examine the evidence, but I can affirm that the closest attention to these matters is necessary, and that in some diseases the life of the patient may hang upon this care of the nurse.

HOSPITAL DIRECTORY.

In connection with the Directory I have hunted up information generally very sad, and I would allude, in passing, to the good work done at this office. The few items connected with the names in its books are oftentimes of tragic interest, and the exciting scene happens frequently in the office—sad as when a father learns most unexpectedly of the death of his son, or joyous as when a wife who has been trying in vain to obtain a pass to see her sick husband in Nashville, is referred to the Directory and finds that he is in a hospital in the city. Or sad again when a mother writes to know if they can inform her about her son, last heard of in a hospital in New Albany, and is informed, as I was forced to return answer to the Directory, that he had been buried four months already.

CONDITION OF THE HOSPITALS.

There are now in the hospitals of the city and vicinity some 2,600 patients, leaving about 1,500 vacant beds. Since the establishment of these hospitals they have never been apparently in so good a condition. The hospital fund is now confined exclusively to the diet of the sick, and, well managed, the soldier can have, according to his necessities, better fare than generally he could have commanded at home. The condition of the sick has also greatly improved; so many of the patients are able to leave their beds that some of the hospitals upon a sunny day have the appearance of convalescent barracks. I may speak here, in closing, of the uniform courtesy with which I have been received in my visits to the different hospitals and departments. I undertook this work with the approval of the General in command and the Medical Director, but I have had no occasion to use their indorsement, as the interest generally in any good work for the suffering soldier has been a sufficient motive to furnish me every facility.

With much esteem, your obt. serv't,

F. H. BUSHNELL.