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LETTERS

FROM THE

ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,

WRITTEN DURING THE MONTH OF MAY, 1864,

TO SEVERAL OF THE

SUPPLY CORRESPONDENTS

OF THE

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION,

BY

ALFRED J. BLOOR,

ASSISTANT SECRETARY.

WASHINGTON, D. C.:

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1874, Oct. 24.
From the letters
Sally Roberts.

It being found impossible, with due regard to time, trouble, and expense, to supply in manuscript the number asked for of the within letters, a few copies are printed for distribution among the supply correspondents of the U. S. Sanitary Commission.

LETTERS.

No. I.

UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION,
CENTRAL OFFICE, 244 F STREET,
WASHINGTON, D. C., *May 14, 1864.*

DEAR MRS. —: I have just come up from the rear of the Army of the Potomac; and there will, at least, be some variety in my correspondence with you if I tell you what I saw at Belle Plain, instead of, as usual, repeating my Oliver-Twistian cry of "More! more!"

The day before yesterday I started from Washington with four volunteers, two ladies and two gentlemen, three of the party being from your city, and several being accustomed to army travelling and hospital nursing. One of the ladies is the wife of one of our generals, and the other is the writer of that excellent little pamphlet "Three Weeks at Gettysburg." The steamer we were on was well loaded with supplies—somewhere about sixty tons—and a score or two of Relief Agents, to reinforce those already on the field and at Fredericksburg. Reaching Belle Plain—so called from its being a series of high hills—just as the twilight was settling on the beautiful and varied tints of verdure with which the last week or two of summer weather have covered its slopes, we found a repetition of the scenes I have before witnessed at the same place in the spring of last year, and at various other places on the Peninsula and elsewhere, during the dif-

ferent campaigns of the war. A couple of rudely constructed wharves, a mile or so apart, jut out into the placid waters of the broad creek, and lying against these, four or five deep, are steamers and barges of all kinds and sizes, loading and unloading so busily that you might imagine yourself on the docks of Boston, New York, or Philadelphia. Boxes, barrels, and bales pass from the holds and decks of the vessels, on the shoulders of long strings of contrabands, or on trucks, along the crazy wharf to the beach, and are there transferred to army wagons, which, after being filled, join the procession of similar vehicles, each drawn by four stout horses that, with few gaps in the long road up the ascent and along its crest, wind slowly and toilsomely, as far as the eye can reach, towards Fredericksburg and the interjacent camps. So far as the vessels and wharf are concerned, the scene resembles the unloading of vessels in a seaport town; but in a seaport town, one does not—in peace times, at least—see hosts of uniformed and armed men tramp from the decks along the wharves to join the hosts preceding them; nor does one see regiments of troopers tugging at the reins of unmanageable horses, that plunge fiercely among the swaying masses of humanity and the unflinching masses of merchandise that line their way. But what can there be to load vessels with in an out-of-the-way creek, running up into a country from the hills of which one may look all round to the horizon without one's eyes resting on a human habitation?—a permanent habitation, I should say, for every strip of land in sight that is not covered with trees is dotted with tents and bivouacs and army wagons, beneath the canvas and boughs of which are sheltered, as much as may be in the fast-falling rain, such multitudes of weary men as, if collected into houses and streets, would fill many villages, and turn the wilderness into a "populous No." Thank goodness, when the spectator next watches the loading of a vessel in a commercial town, he will see nothing of what he now sees at this warfaring port of Belle Plain. All day long, and the day before, and several days before that,

the ascending procession of wagons filled with rations, and of infantry and cavalry that have gone to reinforce Grant, has been met by a parallel line, a little way off—for the impromptu roads are too narrow to admit of vehicles passing each other—of ambulances filled with wounded men; and it is with these men, carried on stretchers from the ambulances, that the “outward bound” vessels are loaded.

It is indeed a sad sight; but there is a great satisfaction in reflecting that one is standing in the midst of all kinds of comforts and delicacies, to reinforce the stock which has already been provided for these very men, and in recognizing within hailing distance a handsome flag, inscribed with the words “U. S. Sanitary Commission,” streaming from its staff, on the deck of a portly barge, comfortably lined with numberless good things for wear and diet, at that very moment—we can imagine with a strength equal to conviction, for not even “with the aid of a powerful glass” can our point of sight enable us to discern behind the intervening boxes and barrels—under process of distribution to the poor fellows, as they are carried past to the boats that are about to convey them to Washington.

It is now dark. The rain has somewhat abated, but even if it poured as much as ever, it would not be possible to restrain the ladies from entering at once on their self-imposed duties. So I help them into a boat, and we are rowed to the dock, and are soon on board our barge, or store-boat as it is called. But the procession of wounded men is over for the night, and those that have come before are on their way to Washington, while those *in transitu* from the battle-fields are resting in wayside stations, or in the ambulances conveying them—a poor way for wounded and sore men to pass the night, but such as the cruel necessities of war render unavoidable. Dr. Steiner tells us that the nearest of the Commission’s feeding lodges is some half mile up the hill, and that its capacity will not admit of any more attendance than that with which it is already supplied. As the ladies come to render aid where it is needed, not to

supplant that which is previously provided, they think it advisable not to wade up to the lodge knee-deep in Virginia mud, nor do they consider that the cause of humanity demands the waking up of some poor fellows who are waiting the next boat, and the administering to them of pound-cake, pies, and surreptitious draughts of bad whiskey; so we presently get into the row-boat again, and the ladies are before long occupying the pilot house—the polite and ejected captain seeking other quarters—while the men dispose themselves for the night upon the decks, those that have rubber coats or blankets to keep off the rain, now descending faster than ever, feeling their great advantage over those who, rubberless, vainly seek dry spots wherever there are no leaking places in the ceiled roof.

The next morning—very early indeed, the sleeping accommodations offering few inducements to people of sybaritic tendencies—the Relief Agents are almost all started for Fredericksburg, and our small party enter the lists as Relief Agents on the spot. The scene of yesterday is renewed in all its details, and as the wounded men are borne in, hour after hour, in one long string, the pale and often blood-stained occupant of every stretcher is furnished, according to his needs, by one or other of the party, with crackers, beef-tea, coffee, wine, water, or lemonade. The wine and lemonade are given only on the advice of a medical man, and sometimes the one is intensified into brandy, and the other into the unmixed juice of the lemon. But for men exhausted with lying on the battle-field for many hours, sometimes for a day or two, without food or drink, thence passed to the operating table, and thence to the ambulance, the other things may be given, in most instances, in such quantities as they crave. Poor fellows, they clutch at them—but always with a “thank you”—as if they thought they could swallow the basket or bottle along with the contents, but a few mouthfuls is generally all they have strength to manage. It is best for each one of such a relief party to confine oneself to the distribution of a single article—the

cracker man never trenching on the lady's coffee pail, and the coffee lady leaving the beef-tea religiously to another. Infinitely more may be done by systematically pursuing this plan of speciality. If, when the beef-tea is being carried round, some poor fellow shakes his head, and imploringly asks for water or stimulant, one must not set down the beef-tea to be kicked over before one gets back, and rush off to spend half an hour in searching for water or stimulant, so depriving a hundred men of beef-tea, for the sake of trying to get one man something which will probably be furnished him by the allotted water or whisky bearer in three minutes after. One must humanely harden one's heart, and say with stern tenderness, "Yes, my boy, all right, a lady will be along with some delicious iced water in a minute or two;" and he will probably smile and say, "Thank you, sir, all right, I can wait. Say, mister, there's a fellow right acrost there—that one with his leg off and his head bound up, he belongs to my company—he ain't had nothing to eat since the day before yesterday. I guess he'd like some o'that 'ere stuff. Won't you please give him some?"

But the giving of sustenance is not all the work. One man complains of his head being too low, and his overcoat has to be rolled up—or, failing that, the straw around him has to be gathered up—so as to form a pillow for him. (The pallets and bedding have given out, though the first boat loads sent off were as comfortably provided for as if in the wards of a general hospital, and the men we are tending are lying on the docks on straw; but this they count luxury after the battle-field and ambulance.) Another wants a handkerchief, and another a pair of socks. This man's shirt is all torn and bloody, and must be replaced by another. One man complains of the intolerable heat, and some of his clothing must be removed; another is shivering with cold and more clothing, or an extra blanket must be provided for him. Here is one who feels the hand of death upon him, and the head of that one of our party who is tending

him is bent down to catch from his white lips his last message to his friends. Five minutes after, the blanket drawn smoothly over the face, and the quiet of the lately restless limbs, show that the weary soldier has fought his last battle and entered into his rest.

Continually through the day our party has met others engaged in a like work, but all too busy and preoccupied to notice each other, unless to render some necessary act of joint assistance to a sufferer, till one is met who labored with some of the party at Gettysburg, and perhaps elsewhere. He joins us in our rounds, and when at night I ask him if he knows what has been done with the bodies of those I have seen die through the day on the boats and on the wharf, he tells me that he has helped that day to bury, and has read the funeral service over—he is, or is going to be, a clergyman—the bodies of over sixty soldiers.

We have, thus administering to the poor fellows' needs, traversed the decks and cabins and every foot of superficies available for the outstretched or partially recumbent form of a man, of four vessels; and now, for some cause, there is a lull in the arrivals and the turmoil. This gives us time to look at our watches, and to our amazement, we find it is five o'clock instead of eleven or twelve, as we fancied. Thereupon we apprehend that it is no wonder we are faint, considering we have been working so hard all day on our six o'clock breakfast of crackers and ham. A sumptuous repast of crackers—not indeed the magnificent Boston edible, but a softer and inferior sort—and coffee is forthwith disposed of, and during the repast we discover that there is a suspension of ambulances and stretchers to allow the passage of some thousands of rebel prisoners from Dixie to the land of the free in Fort Delaware and elsewhere, the freedom of such strongholds being the kind they seem most to appreciate. Pretty soon there marched along, under guard, three men dressed in rebel gray, and unarmed. Except for the black feather, cavalier fashion, across the front of the hat, and for the three stars on the upturned collar of one of

them, they might have been taken, so far as dress was concerned, for privates; but these insignia showed the rank of a brigadier general in the Confederate service. This was General Stuart, a handsome fellow, some thirty-five years old, I should judge; and who endeavored to conceal his feelings beneath a jaunty and somewhat defiant manner. His older companion, wrapped up in a gray overcoat, without any insignia of rank visible, and whose grizzly hair showed through sundry rents the most "shocking bad hat" I ever saw, is Major General Johnson; and the third prisoner is his adjutant general. Being brought to a halt they sit down on some boxes, and Johnson draws from his pocket a copy of the Washington "Morning Chronicle," and, picking out the war news, reads something in a low tone to Stuart, who answers by a nervous laugh. Not placing implicit confidence myself in the war news of most of our newspapers, I fancy they may have discovered some slight mistake, and therefore feel no inclination to resent their raillery, but the crowd around are not so lenient, probably thinking strongly on the subject of Belle Isle and Fort Pillow, and the murmurs increase until there is, for a minute, danger of violence being offered to the prisoners; but a few stern words from the captain of the guard and the ringing of the bayonets of the latter soon restore order, and the generals and adjutant are marched quietly off to the boat that is to convey them to Fort Delaware, or wherever else. In a little while they are followed by a multitude of rebel officers—four hundred in number it is said—of every rank from colonel to second lieutenant, but none with any marks of rank detectable, except in the few cases where the coat collar was turned up, or where one or two, more dandyfied than the rest, had decorated the lapels of their coats with their insignia. At first I thought they were privates, for even apart from their dress, they presented, in the mass, little evidence of superiority to the rank and file of our men, but I was told that the large body of their fellow-prisoners of the rank and file who followed them—they came shortly

after, but I was too busy to look at them—were decidedly inferior to them in all respects. One of them, almost a boy, entered into a political argument with one of his guards, an old sergeant from New York, who stood by me, embracing the questions of slavery, the constitutional right of secession, &c., and which, notwithstanding my suggestion that if verbal argument had proved of any avail to settle the differences between the North and South they who were now disputing would not have been called upon to fight each other, finally grew general and warm, and was only finished by the party being marched off to their quarters.

The arrival of the prisoners had brought a new set of claimants on the stores of the Commission, not wounded nor sick, but very hungry men, who had been guarding the prisoners since the evening before, and many of whom had had nothing to eat during that time. Considering that the mission of the Commission, like that of quinine, is not only curative, but rather and mainly prophylactic, I dispensed to them of crackers, according to their needs, but they made no demands, of course, on the delicacies.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party had renewed on another boat, which was preparing to leave, and was fast being filled up with fresh arrivals of wounded, their labors of the fore part of the day. It was in my programme to start for Fredericksburg the next morning, but Dr. Agnew, one of the Board of the Commission, who had been at Belle Plain since our first boat got there, thought it best that I should get back at once to Washington to show Mr. Knapp, of large experience in the relief work of the Commission during the Peninsular campaign, the abundant reasons for his immediately leaving the office for this field; and so I returned hither with a boat load of wounded, leaving Belle Plain between ten and eleven, p. m., and getting to Washington in the early morning.

When I left it was quite dark, and after helping my last case on board, (a handsome boy who told me he would be "seventeen come next birthday,") and changing the shirt

he had not changed for three weeks—after washing away from a wound in his side the blood that soiled the skin looking so fair and white beneath the sun-burnt face and neck—I watched for a few minutes the scene spread out before me as the vessel receded from the dock. All over the water twinkled the lights from the many vessels, some stationary and some steaming to and fro, while far up the hill-sides gleamed the lights through the canvas of the tents, giving the appearance of a large city illuminated for some festival, the effect being heightened by the broad blaze and high flickering flames of innumerable camp fires, like so many *feux de joie*. So we steamed up the quiet river, passing, by and by, the house of the great man, who so toilfully won for his national children the rich heritage some of them would now rend asunder;—the moon—struggling every now and then through the clouds which still sailed across the sky—looking down on the white faces and ghastly wounds of those whom their brothers had stricken down. The night watch was but a repetition of the work of the day, and during its weary hours the same wonderful fortitude amid their wounds and sufferings was observable—hardly a groan or a sigh to be heard, except from two or three who were delirious; and even as I sat by the driver on the ambulance which conveyed some of them from the Washington wharf to the hospital to which they were assigned, I heard only a low moan now and then, as the horses struggled through the pitfalls of the city of magnificent distances.

My next letter will be written to you, I think, from Fredericksburg, and I will finish this very hastily written one by calling your attention to the care with which I have kept my promise of not asking for “more.” Nevertheless, after premising that the medico-military authorities caution us not to be too profuse at the beginning, for that the real fighting has not yet begun, I cannot do less than point my story with a moral—but what the moral is I will leave to your own application.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.

No. II.

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION,
STORE BARGE "W. KENNEDY," BELLE PLAIN,
Wednesday, 5½ A. M., May 18, 1864.

DEAR MISS —: Yesterday morning I left Washington in company with the Rev. Mr. C * * * and another gentleman, and after many hours delay occasioned by taking on a load of Government cavalry horses at Geeseborough Point, (deriving its name, I apprehend, from its having been in old times a borough infested by people who made a point of showing what geese they were in respect to the constitutional right of secession, slavery, &c.,) I got here this afternoon, finding Mr. Knapp in charge, and things going on just as I described in the letter of which I sent you a copy while I was in Washington.

Mrs. G * * * and Mrs. E * * * of New York, joined us at the Point; and on reaching Belle Plain (waiting a long time outside the dock to allow the taking on board of some hundreds of rebel prisoners, almost all, I noticed, sufficiently well shod and clothed, notwithstanding what I have heard to the contrary) we immediately relieved some of the Commission's regular relief agents, and set to work in their places.

The scene presented on the arrival of the wounded at the Belle Plain dock after their twenty miles ride from the battle-field over the corduroy roads and pitfalls of mud in Virginia is heartrending, and appears under present circumstances to be unavoidable. If the railroad from Fredericksburg were in operation the major part of this suffering *in*

transitu might be saved, for not only could the patients be carried then to Belle Plain in as many minutes as it now takes half hours, but by having the base of supplies within an hour's reach, as it would be if the railroad worked, the inconvenience and suffering arising from the long delays caused by occasional oversights in sending articles necessary for the restoration of wounded men in critical condition would be avoided, and they would commence the journey better prepared for fatigue.

FREDERICKSBURG, P. M.

Whilst I was writing the order came to move to this place and our party set out, one alongside each driver of as many ambulances, the same—empty—that brought the wounded yesterday from the field. The reason for this partitioning of our party was to save the poor horses, worn out with their hard labor of the last fortnight; but, besides us, they had to carry a couple of bags of grain for forage for the army. So we passed through the usual *melée* of wounded men on litters—rebel prisoners outward bound, reinforcements inland bound—army wagons, horses, boxes, bales, contrabands, &c., and through the two ranges of hospital tents “on the hill,” where the night before I had helped at the dressing of the wounds of so many poor fellows, and had had the satisfaction of leaving most of them some hour or so after midnight comfortably sleeping; for the surgeons had done everything that was possible, and the kitchen and feeding lodge of the Commission were conveniently located at one end of them.

This ambulance journey of ten miles gave us some faint conception of the horrors that accumulate with every rod to the unfortunates, who, with nerves that shrink from a feather's touch, are jolted, hour after weary hour, over the alternate corduroy and quagmires of these horrible tracks, for they cannot be called roads. In frequent danger of being upset, we jolted along, getting bruised at every step; and I could not help being gratified in reflecting that the proces-

sion of maimed and wounded men we met winding up and down the slopes—for the whole country is a succession of hills from which the trees have been cleared for army purposes, leaving however, the stumps for the practice of the teamsters in ambulance navigation—I could but feel gratified in the reflection that the poor fellows, who, with white contracted brows and quivering fingers, held up their bloody stumps, often undressed for several days, and crawling with corruption, to avoid the concussions caused by the jolting of their vehicles during the locomotary Pandemonium, were at least sure, on reaching the dock at Belle Plain, of nourishing beef soup, or stimulating wines and liquors and coffee, or cooling lemonade and iced water, to drink, or of fresh water, at least, to cool their wounds, in failure of time and opportunity to dress them before reaching Washington, and, I was going to say, of kind words and tender treatment from our people, but that they have had all through their sufferings. For here let me say, in opposition I believe to the general theory at home, that all who deal with them, the roughest men whose every second word is an oath without their knowing it, and who between their battles with the enemy, knock each other down in play to keep their hands in, all are as kind and tender with the wounded men as they are with their little two years old girls at home, in the few days' furlough they get through the war. The stretcher-bearers speak soothingly as they dislocate their own arms in lifting them up from the battle-field, and break their own backs in trying to hoist them gently up into the ambulances, or down from them into the surgeons' tents,—(I am finishing this on the 19th, at Spottsylvania, and have just come in with the ambulance people from the hospitals and from the field on which perhaps some five hundred of our men fell to-day)—the surgeons worn down with overwork, and the responsibilities resting on the conscientious man, in whose hands, under Providence, are the issues of life and death, use only so much firmness with their kind words as is necessary to make them submit to take chloroform, which

some of them seem to dread, before being operated on; the ambulance drivers, worn down with sleepless nights, return only the gentlest words and most conciliatory (and false) assurances of a short journey and a "bully" road round the next corner, to all their reproaches for carelessness in driving; the contrabands, who carry them along the dock, are as amiable and unctuous as it is possible for negroes to be, which is saying much, and when they are stretched out on the decks like a flock of sheep, the detailed nurses—some of them a little sick or slightly wounded themselves—step among them as gingerly as if they were treading on eggs.

Time, tide, and the mail bag wait for no man. I close therefore in haste.

Yours in the good work,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.

No. III.

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION,
CAMP NEAR SPOTTSYLVANIA, VA.,
FRIDAY, *May* 20, 1864.

DEAR MRS. —: You have, I suppose, by this time received the duplicate of a letter I wrote some days ago to one of the Commission's supply correspondents, giving an account of a trip I had just made to Belle Plain with reference to the relief work of the Commission in the field.

I left Washington again on Tuesday morning, and getting to Belle Plain in company with Mrs. G * * *, of army hospital fame, and of Rev. Mr. C * * *, of Washington, and others—and there, in their company, feeding and ministering to the ghastly crowds that were lifted out of the constantly-arriving ambulance trains into the boats assigned to convey them to the hospitals in Washington—I passed to the hospital tents “on the hill,” a little way from the dock, two long parallel rows of them, commencing on one side with the kitchen and feeding lodge of the Commission, whence they were without trouble constantly supplied with hot coffee and beef-tea, iced water and lemonade, milk punch, wines, and stimulants, farina, and whatever else in the way of prepared sustenance was needed. Bedding, clothing, sponges, toweling, bandages, lint, utensils of all kinds, and whatever else is required in a sick tent were bountifully dispensed by Mr. Knapp, of long experience in the Peninsular campaign and elsewhere in similar work, and his assistants, from the store barge a few yards off, alongside the dock, which barge is continually replenished

by steamers from Washington to the amount of some fifty tons a day. The steamer on which our people principally relied during the Peninsular campaign—the Elizabeth—has become a household word among sanitarians, and I may therefore mention that (true to all the experience of the Commission, whether as regards the intelligent collectors and forwarders or the inanimate vehicles of supplies, that the feminine element is their main support) the name of our new boat is the “Mary F. Rapley.”

It was an hour or two after midnight before I had gone the rounds of the hospitals, and then I had the satisfaction of leaving most of them comfortably sleeping, after the refreshment of having their hunger and thirst assuaged, their wounds dressed, and above all, perhaps, the cessation from their horrible journey over the rutty hills and interlying quagmires between the battle-fields and their present place of rest. By six o'clock the next morning (after a night mainly occupied, so far as I was concerned, in strenuous efforts to go to sleep in the midst of the hubbub, and in involuntary listening to the extraordinary remarks of the contrabands, who kept up a constant stream of boxes, barrels, conversation, and guffaws past the place where I lay on deck) we began the journey to Fredericksburg ourselves in empty returning ambulances, and as the hours and our bruises increased, we had an opportunity of testing the probable feelings of wounded men undergoing such an ordeal. But the fault is in the roads, not the vehicles. I think the four-wheeled ambulances as good a compromise as possible between the conditions desirable for wounded men, and the impossibility of using lighter springed wagons over army roads.

Arriving at Fredericksburg in the middle of the day we found it one vast hospital. Its principal street is some mile or more in length, with several parallel and a number of cross streets, and nine out of ten of the houses and shops, and all the churches and public buildings that are not demolished by shell or riddled by bullets, are filled with

wounded men. Even the store occupied by the "embalmers of the dead," has many living subjects among the dead ones; though accustomed, as they are, to death on every side, the patients do not consider the proximity in such an unfavorable light as civilians would. A few doors from the house in which Washington's early days were passed, (and the garden of which was, I presume, the scene of the cutting of the fruit tree by his juvenile hatchet,) Dr. Douglas, chief of inspection of the Commission, and the volunteer ladies and gentlemen who so zealously assist in the good work, have their quarters, and thither, on the day I was there, a number of patients requiring the constant supervision of some of them had been removed. Through the open windows of the rear rooms float the odors of the flowers of early summer to the patients within, and those whose cool pallets are in the wide hall, with its old-fashioned panelling of wood meeting the wooden block cornice of the ceiling, look out through the open back-door upon a wilderness of roses, a large basket full of which has just been distributed to the poor fellows throughout the town—most of them grasping at them more eagerly than at the milk punch—by one of the kind-hearted gentlemen of our party. If their time were not so much more valuable by the side of the impromptu cooking affairs and couches they have evoked from chaos, the roses should of course have been presented by the ladies; but at all events they came originally from a lady, not one of "our" women, but the owner of the house, a widowed gentlewoman who sighs that such evil days should have fallen on the close of her eighty years' pilgrimage, and, like Washington's mother, thinks that it may perhaps be a grand thing to be a great general, but that for her part she thinks that Lee and Grant had both much better be at home attending to their farms than engaged in such dreadful doings. The North and South have lived in peace all these years, and why can't they continue to do so? What dreadful things she could tell me of the division of families caused by this wicked war. So and so has two sons in the Confed-

erate army, and two in the Federal. Such a happy family they were once, and now trying to take each other's life; and for her part she has been stripped of almost everything—the houses and stores in the town from which she derived her income, have been destroyed or are appropriated to their own uses, without payment, now by one army and now by the other. I heard similar talk in Culpepper while our army held it, and one hears it everywhere throughout the border States; and it is only here that the full horrors of this "cruel war" can be appreciated. It is impossible—as I think it would be unnatural—for the majority of the old people either South or North to take the partizan view which is necessarily, for the purposes of Providence, taken by the young and middle-aged in the two contending sections.

Round the corner from the poor old lady's house is the storehouse of the Commission, besieged every day on the arrival of our wagon loads of supplies—generally some twenty—from the base, with such crowds as compel an officer of the Commission to enter by the back way, if he wants to get in without waiting for an hour or two. Next door to this is a large store used as a hospital by one of our volunteer ladies, and at the back of both, conveniently accessible to both supplies and patients, is the tent she uses as a cook house. A door or two off is a shop used as an office by the relief force, of which there are at present distributed throughout the army of the Potomac some two hundred members, under the superintendence of Mr. Fay, of Massachusetts, a volunteer throughout the war in such work.

Several other ladies and a number of physicians from civil life have charge of hospitals in different parts of the town, under the auspices of the Commission, and the relief agents zealously assist them in their labors, which are Herculean, as each fresh train of ambulances arrives from the field; and in those hospitals where the Government supply of surgeons is generally equal to the demand on their skill, they—the relief agents—still continue such ministrations as may be carried on without medical co-operation—and these are many.

We are in one of the church hospitals, we will suppose. The pews are set two together, and the backs taken off when necessary, to form couches for the patients. The vestry is turned into an operating room. In one corner of the church is a good woman who has not quitted the half-delirious patient, whose brow she is bathing with bay-water, for one hour in the last twenty. The altar is put to one side, and in its place two pews cradle a young boy who does not seem to be over fifteen years old. He was brought in, it was supposed, in a dying condition; but the good Samaritan, who is just directing to the Far West a letter he has written to the boy's mother at his dictation, has, with his good things and better words, brought such a light into the boy's eyes that he expresses the utmost confidence that he will be able to write to his mother himself the next day, and tell her that he is safe from the effects of this wound, and ask her to pray that he may be spared in future battles, and rejoin her and his sisters and brothers in their happy Wisconsin home "when his time is out."

Further down the town, and not far from the unfinished tomb of Washington's mother, standing ostensibly as a monument to her worth, but practically as a monument to the genius of the universal Yankee nation for chipping and whittling, is a large, old-fashioned mansion, rich in paneled wainscoting, carved wooden chimneys, plaster arabesqued ceilings and tablets, and landscaped wall-paper, and in one of its rooms lies a gray-haired man, looking dreamily out through the open window, by which his pallet is set, on a beautiful lawn, thickly shaded with fine old trees, that slope down to the swampy meadow and heights beyond, which drank up so much precious blood in the terrible charge of December, 1862. Perhaps the fair scene before him is like that on which he has so often looked from the porch of his quiet home, on his far-off little Vermont farm. But he will never look on it again, at least with his earthly eyes. He will never again look at the rising of the sun, which is now with its setting beams gilding the tree tops,

and falling through them, checkered with waving shadows, on the lawn beneath. The wound from which most of his life-blood has flowed has left him white and weak, but it does not pain him; so he looks quietly round, thanking one for having written his last letter to his "folks," another for shading his eyes from the sun with the fan which, until complaining of the cold creeping over him, has been used to cool him; and another for offering the further assistance which he does not need. He is only a sergeant, but "had just as lief be a private in such a cause." He was a deacon in his town, and "done the biggest part in getting up a comp'ny" from it, the captaincy of which was offered him; but he thought he hadn't "edication" enough to do the "writin' part of the business," and declined. But, thank God, he had "edicated" his sons, and one of them, who had entered the company with himself, had been promoted, grade after grade, from the corporalship to the captaincy. His wife had dissuaded him from "j'ining" the army at that time, but after the Penineular campaign "he couldn't stand it no longer," had helped to get up another regiment in his township, and now here he was. Well, he was satisfied; he was in the Lord's hands, and he would die in the faith that the Lord would stand by the Union and the stars and stripes to the end. He "hadn't a speck o' doubt about it." He'd like to know if his son, the captain, whose regiment had been in the fight with his own, was still alive, but he couldn't find out; and he would give all he was worth to see his wife and daughter once more. But he had always told them to prepare for this, and hoped the Lord would give them strength to bear the news.

I had intended to tell you of many other incidents which would interest you, but time fails. A mail carrier is about to take his chance of rebel scouts and guerrillas and this will go with him. If you get it, I will ask you to return me a copy, when I let you know that I have got back to Washington.

I left Fredericksburg yesterday morning by day-break,

and am now seated a few rods from the headquarters of Grant and Meade, in front of the tent of a hospitable young officer from your city. At this time yesterday the woods around reverberated with the cannonading and musketry of the fight on the right of our line between General Tyler's division and the enemy, and to-day the surgeons have been busy with several hundred wounded men. Another letter either to yourself or in copy, when I get back to Washington will tell you something more of what I have seen.

Very truly and respectfully, yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR,
Assistant Secretary.

No. IV.

CAMP NEAR SPOTTSYLVANIA COURT HOUSE, VA.,
5TH CORPS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
May 20, 1864.

DEAR MISS —: You have no doubt by this time received the copy of a letter I wrote to one of my correspondents, as the first of a series which I design to send them from the field, in a short campaign I propose to make with the Army of the Potomac *en route* for Richmond; having made up my mind that I can in no other way so well collect the information in regard to the operations of the Medical Department and its satellite, the Sanitary Commission, in the field, for which I have been and am— notwithstanding Reporter and Bulletin—so constantly asked by those to whom the Commission is so largely indebted for its continued existence; and which, in the informal and individualistic shape that alone is satisfactory to most unprofessional persons—and especially to women—has so long been a desideratum. Whether I am in the least competent to supply this desideratum is very questionable, but at all events I have set out with the intention of “doing my endeavors.”

A letter I began this morning, a copy of which I will send you, along with any others I write on the way, when I get back to Washington, will give you an idea of what I saw in Fredericksburg.

What I see at this moment, as I look up from the box-lid on which I am writing—the empty box itself forming my

seat—is an undulating field, skirted on one side by a forest, through the branches of the front trees of which gleams the tent occupied as headquarters by Generals Grant and Meade, while those of lesser dignitaries are scattered around them. A cluster of tents, the yellow flags floating over which indicate that they are used for hospital purposes, stands near them; and around that by which I am sitting are ranged a hundred or more of ambulances and army wagons, the horses and mules attached to which are tethered to the poles or to the wheels. The dignity of a separate stake driven into the ground, and of a greater length of rope than usual, is assigned to one of the mares; and the favoritism is accounted for by the presence of a young colt frisking around her, which is the pet and plaything of all the soldiers and teamsters in the neighborhood. In the absence of the little sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters they have left at home, they are much addicted to pets. One sees them pass on a march with pet dogs following them, or with pet squirrels and rabbits, and even kittens on their shoulders, or peeping out from under their jackets. A little squirrel picked up in the Wilderness, where it was cowering on the battle-field, terrified at the sound of the artillery, belongs to one of the officers with whom I mess, and divides attention with the colt.

A mile or two off towards the west, a large house, surrounded by a fine plantation, is burning slowly away. It has been burning most of the day; but except that the dome of fire formed by the flames meeting round and lapping over the cupola has been occasionally admired, the destruction of the home of some once happy family has excited no remark. It is only one of the daily bonfires with which an army lights its way wherever it moves. A couple of miles southward, on a lower and flatter plateau of land than that on which is our encampment, stands a city of tents, from which, last evening, as the sun sunk in the west and the full moon rose in the east, both red and large and dim, amid the smoke that circles the horizon like a rising

cloud when the evening camp-fires are lighted, emerged a host of armed men, some on horse but most on foot, and swept in two living lines, perhaps a mile long, past us, a few hundred yards off, pushing along the level places and the slopes to the northward-lying strip of wood, above which rose the thick smoke of our artillery planted on this side of it. And right past our tent, touching his hat in return to our salute, rode General Hancock, the leader of these men, with his staff, doubtless leaving the direct line taken by his command, to stop at army headquarters on his way to the field. In retaliation of an attempt made the night before, by our people, to turn the enemy's flank at one end of the line, they were making a desperate attempt to turn ours at the other end, but were repulsed, with the loss of several hundred men on both sides. It had been my desire to go on the field with the ambulances sent thither to fetch away the wounded, intending to aid them in such small ways as I might; but, owing to some wrong information given me, I had no opportunity to go till after the first load of wounded had arrived and been deposited in the hospitals. Then, jumping up by the side of one of the ambulance drivers—a youth of eighteen, and yet a “veteran,” like one of his comrades—now detailed as a stretcher-bearer—who informed me that he had enlisted in the West, when he was fifteen years old, in a two years' regiment—had served his time in Texas, and enlisted again, getting a bounty of six hundred dollars, which, with the money he had saved from his pay, enabled him to buy a house and lot and put something away in bank;—jumping up alongside of these specimens of military Young America, I was carried along past camp-fires around which stood or sat the sleepless guard, in every possible attitude of unconscious picturesqueness—however hot the day, the nights are always cold in the fields of Virginia;—among sleeping men, stretched in their blankets on the ground, with or without the little strips of shelter tents over them; over fields, ploughed or unploughed; across bridged or unbridged streams; through the under-

brush and tree-stumps of so-called roads in the woods, till we came to an upland field, where the white rays of the full moon fell on the greensward, reddened here and there with the stains that told where the sandy soil beneath had sucked up the blood of the brave; and on clumps of bushes—particularly where they grew in little dips and depressions of the soil, offering some security from missiles—among which the mortally wounded had crawled to die, and where they now lay, the death-damps mingling with the dews of the evening on the livid features—some placid and serene, with the eyes closed as if in quiet sleep, and some distorted, as if in agony—one clutching, with stiff, immovable fingers, at his beard, and staring with wide-distended, glassy eyes at the moon, as if in mute appeal to Heaven against the horrors which had left him there to die. But the wounded had all been carried away before we got there—some two dozen ambulances, I suppose, accompanied us—and so we started to return, the rough teamsters stepping softly past the dead, and now and then quietly straightening some distorted limb or covering their faces with their hats—one, however, substituting his own worse for the dead man's better—but ransacking the knapsacks and overcoats, &c., which lay scattered among the bullets and pieces of shell. On our way back we overtook numbers of the wounded who were able to walk, as we had also met them on our way out. To-day, in company with an officer who was in the engagement, I have ridden over its whole line, what I saw last night being but a small portion. The fight took place just outside our breastworks, in strengthening which I saw hundreds of our men busy. During the night, and early this morning, the dead were buried. In one field I counted thirty-two graves in a row, with three separate ones; and in the next field I counted a row of twenty-seven. Carefully shaped, smooth-spaded mounds they all were, with a head-board legibly inscribed with name, company, and regiment to each. On the slope of a hill near by, from which the enemy's tents could be plainly seen through a glass, were

fourteen graves, side by side, as neatly made as the others, but without head-boards, for they were those of rebels, and our men who had buried them did not know the names of the strangers. So we left those who had taken each other's lives lying quietly within a few paces of each other.

To-day I have seen some of the wounded of last night in the hospital tents, as well as others who were wounded a week ago or more in the Wilderness. Stretched on the yielding, sweet-scented pine boughs which the delightful grove, in which the hospitals are situated, yields in abundance, I found a couple of young brothers lying side by side, one wounded in the arm ten or twelve days ago in one of the fights in the Wilderness, and the other, the elder one, prostrate with fever, brought on, I verily believe, from anxiety about his younger brother. They had enlisted together in the same company, with their widowed mother's consent, they said, and the senior by two years had been charged by her to watch over his younger brother; "for, you see he's always been kind o' delicate, and him and me's always been fond of each other, and she knowed I was strong and hearty, and so she gin me charge of him like, and I promised to take him back safe to her if we was both spared; and when he was wounded I tell you I felt bad, for we had to be separated—he was took to the hospital, and I had to stay in the fight—and what with more fighting and marching, and one thing and another, I did not see him again for three days, and I did'nt durst to write to mother, for I did'nt know as he was going to live, and couldn't git no certain news of him, and when I did see him he looked so awful bad and was fretting so much because he could not git word to me, that I come very near crying. Well, then I had to leave him and wrote to mother the best way I could—for she'd made us promise to write her always the bad news as well as the good. Well, I worried and fretted, and at last I was took with a fever, but I'm glad I was, for I got the doctor to let me be in the same place with my brother, and he says we're gitting along right smart, and he'll let us out at the

same time. So I wrote to mother, and I guess she'll be easy now in her mind." I asked them if they knew where the clean shirts they had on came from. "O yes!" and they pointed to the stamp—"it was printed on them; they come from the Sanitary." They got some "bully" things from the Sanitary, and thought it must be a "big thing." They, the Sanitary, always had houses, and tents, and wagons and stores wherever they, my interlocutors, had been with the army in Virginy. Could'nt I tell them something about it? Which I did.

In another of the tents was a man belonging to one of the Union Maryland regiments. He was wounded in an engagement with a rebel Maryland regiment, in which were two of his cousins, "the same as brothers to him—they had all gone to school together, and lived on the next farm, to each other all their lives, till the war broke out." I asked him if it would not have been very disagreeable to him if he had learnt that either of them had been shot by a bullet from him. "No," he answered savagely, "he was on the look out for them all the time, so that he might aim at them. He was hoping and praying all the time that his shot might by chance reach them. He would ask for nothing better than to shoot them, or to stick them with his bayonet—curse the traitors." This is but one of many instances I have seen. When thrown together on picket or in hospital, the Yankee boys from Massachusetts or Ohio, and the Johnnys from Alabama and Mississippi are the best of friends; but the loyal Virginian scowls darkly on the rebel Virginian, and the rebel Tennessean has only a curse for the loyal Tennessean, and so of all the border States.

When you will get this depends upon the army mail-bag, the guerrillas, the movements of Generals Grant and Lee, and on Providence. Perhaps I may write you again before I get "out of the Wilderness."

Very respectfully and truly yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR,

No. V.

UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION,
ON THE MARCH FROM SPOTTSYLVANIA TOWARDS THE NORTH
ANNA RIVER, VA.,

SUNDAY, *May 22*, 1864.

DEAR MISS —: I have been bewailing the loss of a saddle horse I had expected to ride, on this march; but (besides the honor of occupying the same seat as that from which Mrs. Lincoln saw Hooker's grand review) a staff wagon presents advantages for purposes of correspondence quite above those to be derived from the back of a restive animal; and a halt, which promises to be a long one, being ordered by the officer in command of the ambulance train, the fortunes of which I am now sharing, bringing my vehicle to a little eminence, under the thick shade of a large tree, through the branches of which sweeps a delicious breeze unknown to the torrid temperature a dozen feet off, each side of me, I improve the opportunity to give you a word or two from the field, presuming that you have received a copy of a letter I wrote from Washington, before starting a second time for Fredericksburg.

Most of the wounded of Thursday's fight had been carried to Fredericksburg, to go thence to Belle Plain, and thence to Washington, when, yesterday morning, on rising with the sun, I found the city of tents on the left of the army had disappeared, and shortly afterwards orders were received by the officers whose mess I am sharing, to be ready to march

in an hour and a half. The interval allowed I employed in visiting the hospital tents a few rods off. They were set in a charming grove of trees, opening on an open space, covered with grass and herbs, across which, and through the open leaves of the large airy tents, floated every breath of air. Under the canvas, upon pliant beds of fragrant pine boughs, lay stretched the victims of the late fights in the Wilderness. The surgeon in charge, followed by steward and nurses, was going his rounds, speaking cheerfully to the men, most of whom looked comfortable enough in their cool, clean shirts and drawers, marked with the omnipresent words, "U. S. Sanitary Commission," and generally the name of the contributing branch or society in addition. By the way, one of the surgeons—worn, haggard, and dirty the night before, after the labors of the day, eighteen hours long, upon the poor fellows who had been mangled in the fight of Thursday evening, but now looking refreshed and strong again, after a few hours' sleep and a good bath—laughingly showed me the mark on his own shirt, and asked if I would report him for misappropriating our stores. His only shirt was being washed of the filth and blood of ten days' marching and operating, and he had borrowed a "San. Com." one till it should be dried. What better use could be made of it than this temporary "*misappropriation*?" Would any woman, if she reflects that, during the alternate marching and fighting of a campaign, during which every ounce of transportation, even for clothing, food, or medical stores—for anything except for what deals death—is grudged, even to a general; during which men and officers alike are frequently reduced to the condition of gypsies or wandering Arabs—would any such woman grudge the shirt she has made for a wounded soldier, to the temporary use of the man who is to save that wounded soldier's life, if his own be secured to him? A clean shirt on the surgeon's back, in place of one stiffened with blood, filth, and vermin, may go far towards saving the life of both doctor and patient.

In one of the wards is a young boy seventeen years old,

he says, supported against a pillow of pine boughs, with his overcoat for a pillow-case, holding in his single hand, browned and freckled with the sun, but small and finely-formed, a small photograph hanging by a piece of string—the ribbon that first held it has “played out,” he says, and he has not succeeded in getting another piece—from his neck. As I speak to him he lifts up a very handsome face, and as I pass my hand over his smooth white brow—for the vizor of his cap has saved it from the sun, that has burnt the rest of his face—and through his soft curly hair, his white lips quiver, and tears fill his blue suffering eyes. It is not his sweetheart’s likeness, he says sadly, he was not old enough to “keep company” when he left home—it is his mother’s. He would not care if it were only his left hand; and as he lifts up the stump of his young delicate arm I notice, alas! that it is his right one. He has sent “most all” his pay to his mother and “reckoned on” supporting her when he should get back from the war, for his mother is a widow, and he is the oldest of the family. She is not fit for work—“she had everything comfortable while father lived,” and now——. He is nearly breaking down, but conquers himself as he looks down on the others around him, and goes on nervously. He can’t even write to his mother now to tell her what has happened, and he has always written to her twice a week, and she will think he is dead, and—and—. He nearly breaks down again. I tell him I will write his first letter for him, and that he will find plenty of kind women and men in the comfortable hospital to which he will be assigned as soon as he can bear removal, who will be only too glad to write as often as he likes to his mother, and that Uncle Sam, and San. Com., and other kind friends will take good care of him, and that people soon learn to use their left hands when their right ones are gone, and their feet when both are gone—that I have seen a man without arms, write, and cut watch papers, and sew, and do many other things with his feet—and that the good people in the Pennsylvania town where he came from will

find something for the left hand of a good son of a good mother to do, &c., &c. So I leave him quite happy, and disposed to consider a duality of hands, and particularly the right side of the duality, as rather an anomaly and incumbrance than otherwise.

It is a little after nine when "our division" of the 5th corps begins to move, but according to military usage, we only move a few rods and then rest for an hour, for no cause perceptible to the outsider, but doubtless well considered in the sacred precincts of headquarters. While we wait, Generals Grant and Meade ride past with their staffs, accompanied by "Headquarters" Guard, partly cavalry (or "calvary," as with unconscious irreverence it is called in the rank and file,) and partly infantry, the latter a detachment of Zouaves in red trowsers and fez caps, and otherwise very showy and picturesque uniform; and very fine it all is, with flags and guidons streaming, and music sounding. We begin fairly to move at last, and slowly we move along for several hours, I do not know in how long a procession, but certainly as far as my eye can reach both before and behind. Our road is on the skirt of woods most of the way, and sometimes through them rough clearings have been made in advance by an engineering party, to save long distances by the turnpike; and for the same reason, or because the bridges have been burned by the enemy, there are temporary bridges of logs over runs and streams. Corduroy roads also abound. The country is not so hilly as that I have heretofore passed over in Virginia, and in some places where the army has not yet been, the well-fenced fields ripening with corn and grain of all kinds remind one of the thrifty farms of the northern States. But one is soon recalled in looking at them, from one's visions of peace, by the booming of cannon every now and then, where some distant portion of our force is contesting the ground with the enemy, or by the smoke and flame ascending from some burning farm-house, or by the rattle of musketry where the skirmishing lines of ourselves and the enemy have met. There are frequent

halts of five, ten, or fifteen minutes in the long train of wagons and ambulances, to allow time, I suppose, for some re-arrangement in front, or for the passage of a regiment or brigade across our line, and in these pauses I watch the procession of equestrians and pedestrians on each side of me. How bravely the poor fellows, with their knapsacks on their backs and their muskets slung across their shoulders, commence the march, and how they droop and wilt in an hour or two beneath their heavy burdens, in the fierce sun-rays, when they cannot get into the shelter of the woods. How often the canteen of water is applied to the mouth, and how invariably, when they come to any sort of aqueous manifestation, no matter how muddy, they stoop down to see if the water is drinkable, and cooler than that they already have in their canteens. If so, they go at once through the process of emptying and re-filling. Here comes an officer on horse-back, holding the reins loosely with one hand, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the other. Behind him is his orderly, a young porker confiscated at the last past farm-house, squeaking on one side of his saddle, and two or three confiscated chickens cackling on the other. A confiscated bunch of Virginia tobacco is under his arm, a confiscated peacock feather waves from his hat, and a huge bunch of confiscated roses adorns his button-hole. Here comes a couple of young soldiers—brothers evidently, for they look so much alike, that is in features. Otherwise they differ very much. The elder is strongly built and robust; the younger looks weak and delicate. I have passed them, or they have passed me a dozen times during the march, and every time they have been together, and the elder has been carrying the knapsack, and sometimes the musket of his younger brother. There they are at this moment; the younger one is lying down by the fence under the shade of the large tree on the rubber blanket which his brother has spread for him, and is waiting for the draught of fresh spring water with which his brother is filling his canteen at the foot of yonder little hillock. Here comes a

donkey led by a soldier, and laden with the box, the sack, the frying-pan, the kettle, and the etceteras which comprise the establishment of the officers' mess, to which he is cook; and here is a small drummer boy, his red-covered ragged little legs bestriding at right angles to its broad back the huge ox which is to be converted into beef for his regiment, and which he guides with admirable dexterity by a rope fastened to each of its horns, and a switch he carries in his hand. Now there gallops by in hot haste, with some message from headquarters, a young staff officer, followed by his orderly, proudly conscious that all have to stand aside to let him pass. Close behind him follows a dilapidated steed, evidently under the impression that its broken-winded shambling is nothing less than the stately gallop of its former days, and as his accoutrements—amid the wrecks of chickens, leeks, and tobacco leaves—rebound from the pommel and back of his riderless saddle against his flanks, I fancy I recognize among them the coffee-pot and frying-pan, on which my gastronomic destiny has lately hung. Sure enough, I soon recognize a well-known voice behind me—"Stop dat hoss—lorra-gorry! stop dat dar hoss." A glance round the corner of the wagon now reveals the unsaddled rider, despair on his sable countenance, and his grizzly wool upright with terror. But the frantic charger is caught, and the bow-legged rider limps up, obsequious explanations of the accident addressed to the military public at large, mingling with objurgatory remarks to the horse, and tugging at the rope bridle; and amid the acclamations, ironical or otherwise, of his fellow-contrabands, is with much labor hoisted up to his former place in the saddle. And so we move on again, between two rows of skirmishers—soldiers in single file, five or six feet between each man—in the woods or fields at our side; and under the shade of every tree or bush, in every angle of the snake fence, or out of it, almost in the middle of the road, lie groups of weary men, their heads pillowed on their knapsacks or their muskets, many of them asleep, and all resting

for a little while before recommencing the tramp of their exhausting march.

Our march yesterday continued till the afternoon, and then we halted for several hours in a beautiful open grassy space opposite Massaponax Church, running into the woods like a bay into the land. And then the stretching out beneath the trees and wagons, the cooking of coffee and munching of hard tack, the search for spring water in the forest, the musket shots startling us at first, as we thought them a surprise of the enemy, and turning out to be but the death-stroke to certain pigs and goslings in a grotesque chase after them for fresh food, the hurried burial of the blanket-ceremented and uncoffined body of the soldier who had died on the way in one of the ambulances; what was all this in our little camp-world in the wilderness but a repetition of the game of life in the great world? Starting again between four and five, p. m., we journeyed on between our skirmish lines and the noise of cannon seldom out of our ears for fifteen minutes at a time, till one o'clock in the morning brought us to a halt, with orders to move again at four, a. m. Many preferred sleep to food, and flung themselves down on the ground in their blankets, among the hoofs of the horses and mules. But for those who preferred food first a hundred camp fires, made of the rails from around the ploughed field in which we were packed, sent up their flames in the twinkling of an eye; and the mules welcomed with discordant melancholy cry, their half rations of grain. The next morning at day-break all was ready for the march, but there we waited, no one knew why, the fierce rays of the sun reflected from the sandy field and almost blinding us, till past one, p. m. And now here we are, not many miles from the North Anna river, where it is expected the enemy will make a determined stand against the further progress of the 5th corps. In the wide field to our left, so near that I can almost see their features, a large body of our men, a division I suppose, is drawn up in line of battle, and what the day may bring forth God only knows.

This will be in readiness for any courier that may leave for the rear, but perhaps I may be in Washington (or Richmond) long before you get it, and perhaps you will not get it at all.

Very truly and respectfully, yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.

No. VI.

UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION,
IN BIVOUAC NEAR JERICO FORD, NORTH ANNA RIVER, VA.,
Tuesday, May 24, 1864.

DEAR MISS —: Leaving, yesterday morning, our pleasant bivouac in the pine grove near St. Margaret's Church, a quaint, hundred-year-old building, with a wing jutting out for the use of the negroes while worshipping—our weary march, under the burning sun and over the dusty roads of Virginia, had brought us to the close of the third day, when, last evening, about five o'clock, we halted in a ploughed field, ("as usual," the drivers angrily remarked,) and I had just made myself as comfortable as possible on the seat of the staff-wagon I had been riding, and had begun a letter to you, when I observed that the intermittent cannonading which had accompanied us throughout our march was succeeded by a steady booming, accompanied by an unceasing fire of musketry, and on looking up I perceived an unusual stir and excitement around me. Speedily discovering what was the state of the case, I made my way through a strip of woods into a field beyond, where I found a large body of reserve troops waiting the word of command to advance towards the scene of action. This was presently given; and as they filed off to the right, I joined them, and found myself in the road from which my wagon had a short time before turned aside. The fields on the right side of this road were filled with large bodies of troops, screened from the enemy

by two intervening hills. As the fight progressed, this reserve was led off to the field by regiments, as they were needed. Ascending the slope, I found myself on the crest of a hill which I afterwards discovered to be the best position for observing the conflict; but, anxious to get as near to it as possible, I went on, keeping on the field side of the fence so as to be out of the way of the hurly-burly in the road. In my descent I met many wounded men, those who were unable to assist themselves being carried in stretchers on the shoulders of six men, and those who were able to do so walking by themselves or by the assistance of each other. Some of the cavalymen were still able to bestride their horses. Pointing out to them where to find a surgeon on the top of the hill, and occasionally refreshing those who were ready to faint with water from a borrowed canteen, I pushed on, stopping every now and then to watch the quick fire flashing and the thick smoke rolling up from the batteries on the hill before me across the river, or to wonder what thoughts were passing through the brains of those who, with compressed lips and fixed onward gaze, tramped forward with heavy, steady tread to their doom. By their side I reached the foot of the hill, and after wading through a lane of mud, turned suddenly to the right, along the course of the river, and so, through a covered way by the side of an old mill, gained the pontoon-bridge—planks laid on canvas, stretched over wooden frames shaped like boats—with which, in their crude condition on a couple of frame carts, the march had rendered me repeatedly familiar. Scrambling over the bridge, another steep lane of mud presented itself, and this achieved, found us on the top of a sort of bluff, stretching back on the level to where the woods skirted it, some distance off. Between the top of the eminence and the woods was planted the battery—perhaps there was more than one—of cannons, the operations of which I had watched from the hill across the river; a considerable way off within the woods themselves the rebels glanced and dodged among the trees like so many gray squirrels; and a short distance within them—as

nearly in line of battle, I suppose, as the trees would permit—were our men, loading and firing so quickly that, though many dropped dead or wounded to the ground—several I saw leaping high up into the air before reaching it—the rattling of musketry broke sharply on the air, not in a series of concussions, but in one prolonged roll that mingled with the far heavier booming of the cannon, almost as incessant, and with the less frequent, rocket-like whiz of the shells that burst in the air with a flash and small thick cloud of smoke that slowly diffused itself in space, or fell to the ground and exploded, with an outbreak of flame and smoke and fragments and earth, first ploughing up the ground and tossing up the soil to each side as if they were huge moles. But, beneath all these sounds and the “Ha! ha! of the war-horses as they smelt the battle and pawed in the valley, swallowing the ground with fierceness and rage, and rejoiced in their strength and in the glory of their nostrils, which was terrible”—and beneath the dull measured tramp of the detachment I had accompanied, as it filed off into the woods, the impression left on my mind was not one of noise and tumult, but rather of intense stillness. The soldiers, as they marched past, held their breath; the few orders of the officers were given in undertones, but they sounded, nevertheless, as clear and distinct as if uttered at the top of the voice—the few groups of officers scattered about (I saw no one in civilian’s clothes but myself) spoke in whispers if at all—the gunners worked as noiselessly as swiftly at their posts—the wounded men who emerged from the wood and straggled off, limping and holding their hands, when their use was left to them, against their wounds, in broken irregular file, towards the shed, where, as I afterwards found, the first surgical operations were performed, spoke no word and uttered no sound—even the many birds that stunned by the reverberations among the woods and along the hill, and driven downward by the thick smoke above, swept in long circles close to the ground, did so without chirp or twitter, only their wide opened eyes expressing their terror.

Neither did the sense of danger impress me, except when there was really none—when I started for the field. The nearer I advanced the less I thought of it, except to reflect now and then that as long as I kept out of the range of the enemy's musketry I was tolerably safe from musket shot, and that the chances were many to one against my being hit by a cannon ball or shell. But others did not seem to think so, for while I was still intent on observation a staff officer stepped out from a group surrounding a general, and premising that, perhaps, as a civilian and unaccustomed to "this sort of thing," I was not aware of the great risk I was running, advised me to get back at least as far as a certain range he indicated and trust to a glass to see the rest of the affair. Thanking him for the caution, but determined, now that my curiosity was satisfied, not to lose sight, which in the excitement I had done, of my principal object, viz. : to test how far, without foolhardiness, I could, in a small way, carry the succors of the Commission into an engagement—I retreated, but presently struck off a little to one side, and crossing a fence, found myself in a pretty safe position, in a depression, almost a ditch, behind it. Here, after startling away several rabbits and squirrels which had sought the same shelter, the first thing that struck my eyes was a figure lying face downwards near a clump of bushes, among which it had evidently intended to crawl. Going forward to it and turning the face up I found it to be that of a young soldier, dead. A small orifice in the forehead, with scarcely a trace of blood around it, was all the wound visible. The letters on his hat lying beside him indicated that he belonged to a Wisconsin regiment, but I searched him in vain for any clue as to his further identity; and, unless afterwards recognized by some of his living comrades, he doubtless lies buried in the same trench with the other "unnamed demigods," (as Kossuth called the rank and file of the Hungarian patriots with whom he fought,) who gave their lives for their country on this battle field by the North Anna river. Giving up the fruitless search I stretched his arms by his side and covered his upturned face

with his hat, weighting it with a stone; and had just risen from my stooping posture beside him when I caught the eye of a man, who sitting against the stump of a tree, had been watching me, and patiently waiting till I had got through with the dead. Going up to him I found he had tied, with the help of a comrade whom he had left in the ranks, a piece of his overcoat and a very dirty rag which he called his handkerchief, round the fleshy part of his arm, and he showed me a minnie ball which he said had passed through it. He complained of being "kinder faint," and wished to pull the stauncher off his arm "it hurt him so bad"—but I dissuaded him from doing this, although sorely tempted to replace the abominable rag by one of your clean handkerchiefs, a small stock of which I had in my pocket; and a little color replaced the lividness of his cheeks and lips after I had emptied into them some precious drops from a small flask which I had secretly borne in the bottom of a capacious pocket throughout my campaign, in anticipation of just such a use as this. Another pocket contained soft crackers, and a few mouthful of this and some sweet chocolate-cake as a relish, together with a draught of water, so completely "set him up," as he termed it, that with my assistance, in giving him one shoulder to lean upon and carrying his knapsack on my other, I speedily got him into the file of rearward-straggling wounded, and consigned him to the sympathy—if not to the efficient care, the other being nearly as badly wounded—of a comrade, by whose side he had been fighting, and whom he hailed with infinite and mutual delight; but not before his comrade had shared in the strength of my pockets, and in my promise to hunt them up in the hospitals that night or next morning, which I did, and found one with his right arm off, and the other with his left, but both very jolly at finding their lives were not in danger and at being permitted to stay together. Before they left me, and almost before I had finished "setting up" the last one, they were both, as they expressed it, completely "taken down" by the gift of one of your handkerchiefs between them; for, knowing

what great demands there would be on my small stock, I could afford them only one, and they marched off to the hospital, or operating shed I should call it—the locality of which I had by this time found—with many one-handed flourishes of the clean handkerchief, the like of which they had probably not seen since their last furlough, and numerous applications of it to their foreheads and noses.

I had by this time given up my intention of going quite up to the line of battle, for I found that my work was really where I was, and I desired, moreover, to leave myself time to get back to bivouac before it should be quite dark, lest in my citizen's clothes I would have trouble with the guards and sentries. Accordingly I made the best of my way back across the pontoon bridge, helping the wounded along with cheerful words and the contents of my flask and pockets; and partly by bribery and partly by assuming the exercise of a military authority to which I had no right, I impressed a number of idlers, (it is astonishing how many idlers collect around any scene of excitement, even a far-away battle field,) chiefly negroes, belonging to the country round or the servants of officers, into the service of the exhausted men, by getting them to carry the knapsacks and muskets—though most of the muskets had been thrown away—and lend the aid of their arms and shoulders to the clinging grasp of the poor fellows. I thought of a similar experience I had had two years ago, when the trains brought in the wounded from Fair Oaks to White House; but I must do the negroes and what few whites there were the justice to say that in both instances there were large numbers, perhaps most, who required neither money nor threats, but only a little direction, to give their help heartily to the wounded men.

Getting back to the top of the eminence from which I had first witnessed the fight, I found it occupied by a number of general and staff officers, with field-glasses in their hands and cigars in their mouths; their horses, held by a crowd of orderlies, tossing their manes and pawing the ground as they smelt the battle afar off, and trembled with the excite-

ment produced by the reverberations of the artillery, which sounded even more terrific than when I was close to the cannons, while the sulphurous smoke rolled across the valley and floated up, growing thinner and thinner, till it met and mingled with the dense, compact little clouds emitted from the bursting shells. Across the fields was stretched a line of mounted men, with drawn sabres, to turn back run-aways and stragglers from the infantry, and on talking to several of them I found that the duty assigned to them was exceedingly distasteful to them. Large detachments of men continued to pour forth along the road, from the reserve stationed behind the hill on its right side, but the shades of evening were now beginning to close in and they were probably too late to share in the engagement that night. On the crest of the hill on the right side of the wood, and but a few yards from it, was an old house, so broken down and full of holes that any amount of shells, if they had reached it, could certainly have made but little difference in its appearance. On its broken door-step sat an old woman—rejoicing, I found, in a name so picturesque that I am greatly tempted to intrude on her privacy by repeating it—who rocked herself to and fro as she bemoaned the probable loss of her tenement by shell and fire. She was a widow, she told me, and had not seen her son “for four years a’most—did not know where he was”—which in the confederate vernacular, means that all the men of the family are in the rebel army. I had discovered a little in the rear of the house, under a tree by the fence, the surgeon who, in himself, formed the half way hospital between that on the field and the tent hospitals that, as I learned, were being established in a field some half mile to the rear, and had replenished the exhausted supply of old linen in his saddle bags with the single roll of bandage I had left, and which I had brought with me all the way from Belle Plain. But seeing the look of disappointment that overspread his face—notwithstanding the cheerful, kind, and encouraging words with which he always spoke to his patients of their wounds—at their invariable negative an-

swer to his question as to whether they had any water left in their canteen for him to sponge and dress their wounds, I determined to see whether this want could not be supplied. So after setting a couple of negroes to the work of pointing out the surgeon's nook to the wounded men, I ingratiated myself with the old woman, and entered into business relations so satisfactory to her that she not only showed me the spring a few paces off, where she drew her water, and placed her water pail and gourd in the hands of the two boys whom I engaged to supply the doctor, as well as the wounded men's canteens for their refreshment, but offered me the hospitalities of her home and furniture on similar terms. The whole of the latter consisted of one rickety table with some tin pans and broken crockery on it, the bench on which stood her water pail, the inevitable spinning wheel, a bed with the inevitable check coverlid, and two or three broken chairs. On the chairs I installed as many men, who said they could not walk to the rear hospitals without resting first, and they sank to sleep with their heads leaning against the wall, in a moment. On the bed we laid a young sergeant from a Pennsylvania regiment, who said he had not had any sleep for thirty-six hours, and his head did not touch the pillow before he was sleeping profoundly, but still mechanically holding up the finger and thumb which the surgeon had just dressed. Having got things into this satisfactory train, I accepted the old lady's invitation to go up to the top of the house "to see the fight," and ascending a rickety staircase and ladder, and threading several rooms containing only cobwebs and the corn-cobs with which I had observed her making a fire on the hearth of the big chimney below, I passed through an upper floor into a cockloft, from the unglazed window in the gable end of which I watched through my glass the last of the engagement—for in a little while, after a prolonged cheering, or rather yelling, which I took to be that of the confederates, but (as I am told that the Yankee boys have lately got into the habit of mocking the peculiar cry of the rebels) may have been

am told that the Yankee boys have lately got into the habit of mocking the peculiar cry of the rebels) may have been uttered by our men, or perhaps by both, just as the last shadows of twilight melted into night, the artillery and musketry fire suddenly ceased—that is the prolonged fire, for occasionally the roll of a cannon or a discharge of musketry continued to be heard. So I turned my face towards my quarters, intending first to see the tent hospitals that, I heard, were being put up—but what with being stopped by wounded soldiers for various purposes, and guiding ambulance drivers with loads of wounded through a piece of woods, the rough-cleared path across which, having gone over it when I started for the field, I knew better than they did who had been over it only in the dark, and trying to find surgeons for several who seemed to be dying, and persuading soldiers to rise from their sleep in the dust or mud—both at once are common in Virginia roads—to put their shoulders to the wheels of ambulances stuck in pitfalls, and finally with finding my quarters, which had been moved back a mile since I left them; what with all this, it was too near midnight, and I was too much worn and sleepy to get to the hospitals—so, after a supper of hard-tack and unlactified coffee, and exchanging notes with the messmates who for so many perilous hours had been “all scattered in fight,” I laid my blanket down in a spot where my head at least would be safe from the hoofs of the horses and mules, and wondering how many such scenes of carnage, on the same field, the stars that twinkled down on me had looked upon in the past ages, when the red man and his predecessors occupied the soil, I fell asleep.

I have made the round of the hospitals this morning, and witnessed many interesting incidents; but I must reserve them for another letter, not only because I am afraid I have already bored you with this long one, but because I can no longer have the use of the single bottle of ink; and after the enjoyment of such a dignity I cannot immediately descend to pencil. It would perhaps be wiser for me to keep

it in my pocket till I get to Washington, but I think I will risk it in the Army mail-bag; and if you do not get it for five or six weeks, I hope you will at least have the satisfaction of finding it post-marked "Richmond, 4th of July."

Very truly and respectfully yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.

No. VII.

IN BIVOUAC NEAR THE NORTH ANNA RIVER, VA.,
May 24, 1864.

DEAR MRS. — : My last letter (a copy of which I will send you, along with the others I have written from the field to my several correspondents, when I return to Wash-ton) gave an account of the way in which I “assisted,” as the French would say, at the fight between the forces of General Warren of the 5th corps with the help of part of the 6th, and the rebel General Hill, on the evening of yesterday, the 23d inst. After our day-break breakfast the next morning I made my way to the hospitals, which had been established while the engagement was going on, in an open grassy space interspersed with bushes and young trees, and skirting the road which crossed the North Anna River about a mile and a quarter (I should think) ahead. They consisted of a number of good sized tents spread with pine boughs, and scattered about the grounds were the operating tables, portable dispensaries, &c. I met a number of the wounded men I had helped along the night before, and was glad to hear many of them express their appreciation of the kindness and care with which they had been attended to by the surgeons. These latter had been up all night, but there was as yet no relaxation to their labors, for the ambulances were still coming in with the wounded. I do not know that I shall have a better opportunity than the present, and I desire therefore to record here my conviction—in opposition, I think, to the general impression in the

community, and particularly the female portion of it—that there is nowhere to be found a body of men who, as a class, are more untiring, devoted, and self-sacrificing in the discharge of their duties—the most responsible, exacting, and exhausting—than army surgeons. There are exceptions, too many of which I have encountered in an official intercourse with them of three years' standing; but during that time my estimate of them as a body has steadily increased, and this my last experience with them in the field has confirmed and heightened all my previous good impressions. I take pleasure, as a non-medical man, in expressing emphatically my opinion as to the high standard of mental and moral qualities they apply to their professional duties, (without being competent to judge of their professional qualities pure and simple,) the more so because my official correspondence has shown me how much they have been suspected and undervalued by the home-staying community; while in general culture they compare most favorably with any class of officers in the army.

Thanks to the untiring zeal of the surgeons and their assistants, and to their being well stocked in the field with Governmental medical supplies, those of the patients who had been already operated upon were lying on the fresh, soft, fragrant, pine boughs, with which the tents were thickly strewn, in a condition of tolerable comfort, those at least whose wounds admit of any comfort, and fortunately where well cared for, these are the majority. Well washed and dressed in clean shirt and drawers—every one marked with the "U. S. Sanitary Commission" stamp, for the lack of these was one of the gaps we had bridged over—and many of them enjoying their pipes or cigars, and chatting over their experience in the "eminent deadly breach of the evening before," the scene of the whole, however terrible, was not altogether unrelieved in parts. It is amusing to see the affection they bear for their pipes. One man I saw grievously wounded in most of his limbs, lifted out of one of the ambulances that had just arrived. His first thought

was for his pipe, but he had no hand in which to carry it, so he desired it to be put in his mouth; and, carrying it between his lips, was himself borne to the operating table.

One young lad I found reading a hymn-book, which he said had probably saved his life the night before. It was in his waistcoat pocket during the engagement, and a minié ball, which would otherwise have gone into his breast, had glanced against its cover and fallen to the bottom of his pocket. He showed me the ball with much satisfaction, and told me he hoped he should live to get back to Wisconsin and show it to his mother, who had given him the hymn-book. He had, however, a few minutes before been shot in the leg. A man lying, with one of his arms off, next the narrator, was very anxious that I should provide him also with a hymn-book; but whether he was influenced most by piety or by prudence I shall not pretend to say. There was one young fellow from your section of country, though I cannot recall the name of the town or village he mentioned—he was severely but not painfully wounded—who, seeing some clean linen rag which one of the doctors had left on the ground a little distance off, asked me to tear him off a piece that would serve him as a pocket handkerchief. Thinking the surgeon might have set apart the linen for some special purpose, and preferring in any case to give him a *bona fide* handkerchief if I had one left, I felt in my pocket, and there at its bottom was the last of my small store. It was rather a nice affair; the cambric not of the finest, but with quite a stylish border round its edge, and he pronounced it “bully” as I handed it to him. The outside fold had, as usual, the Commission’s stamp, but it soon appeared that there was still another mark on it, for he had scarcely unfolded it and held it out for an admiring inspection, before he uttered quite a shriek of delight, and asked me if I knew his folks at home, and if they had given me the handkerchief to hand to him. It appeared that besides our mark there was worked in thread the name of the relief society in his native place, and he gave sundry reasons for his positive assertion that the

marking must have been done by none other than his little sister Lizzie. Without, perhaps, fully appreciating his arguments, I saw no good reason for disturbing his impression, and left him quite happy in its indulgence.

Passing from one tent to another, I found a chaplain standing by two stretchers, the occupant of each lying with stiff out-stretched limbs, and the quiet, upturned face covered with the blanket which was now to serve as a winding sheet. Another chaplain appeared in a moment, with two men bearing another stretcher, the corpse covered with the old grey overcoat which had shielded him from so many storms and served him so often for blanket or pillow. The bearers pick up the stretcher, and they, the two chaplains and myself are all that follow the warriors to their grave. A few paces off in a little space between two clumps of bushes and saplings, the wide grave is being dug—there is but one for the three comrades in battle and death—by three men who take their turn in digging and resting beneath the burning rays of the unclouded overpowering sun. It is evidently a matter of pride and conscience with them to dig deep, and make, as one terms it, “a handsome grave.” Their oaths and rough talk are silenced. The youngest of them, rather a smart young sergeant, is obviously bent on making a good impression on the chaplains, and talks somewhat learnedly and sentimentally on the way in which they must have received their wounds, and on our all having to come to this, on the field or in our beds, he does not see that it makes much difference, but he talks quietly and soon stops, working steadily with the others, who have nothing to say except to interchange some undertoned remark as to the earth being loose in this spot, or a stone being in the way there. Just as they are giving the finishing strokes, some one hurries up, claims one of the bodies to be sent home to friends, and the two men with him carry it off. The diggers agree to leave a third of the space unfilled with soil, for some other body—“there will be a many graves wanted through the day”—they leap up from the grave and tell the chaplains

it is ready, then lean on their spades and uncover their heads. We also uncover, and one of the chaplains reads aloud from his little pocket Bible, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept—for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead," and the rest of the chapter. He is followed by the other chaplain in a short address, followed by a prayer; then the uncoffined forms are lowered, the fresh earth covers them more closely (and more kindly it seems to me) than a wooden box would—the empty space left by their side for whoever shall come next—wooden boards inscribed with their names, companies, and regiments, are placed at their heads, and there we leave them to their long rest, one wrapped in his blanket, while the other—

" — lay like a warrior taking his rest,
With his martial cloak around him."

Coming out of the enclosure, I stopped to talk to several of a crowd, some three hundred, of rebel prisoners, who stood or sat in two groups under guard, some of them in great trepidation lest the shells sent by their own people should reach them. (The shelling and musketry, but more especially the cannonading, goes on more or less all the time.) One of them was a South Carolina Colonel—named Brown, I am told—who sat on the ground whittling a piece of stick with his penknife, which induced a fat officer who stood over him, and probably resented the cutting down from its maximum proportions of even a piece of wood, to inform him that he would certainly be taken for a Yankee if he persisted in whittling. The Colonel only grinned, however, and went on paring; perhaps beginning to entertain the idea that worse things might befall him than to be taken for a Yankee. One of them, an innocent-looking, mild-eyed young lad—as many of them are—is the son of the woman who lives in the log cabin by the side of which I am now writing, and is now therefore a prisoner within a

few yards of his mother's house. The poor woman has been to see him, and declares, with many tears, that he was led away by his neighbors against her entreaties. Her trouble is shared by the boy's grandfather and by several young sisters, very pretty and delicate looking, notwithstanding that they have no shoes, and wear such uncrinolined gowns of striped home-made stuff as a Bidley would scorn to use for a scrubbing cloth in the North, and live in a cabin of two rooms, log-ceiled, and log-walled inside as well as outside, and with hardly anything in it but an old wardrobe, a rickety table, a couple of beds with the inevitable counterpane of checkered stuff, and the equally inevitable spinning-wheel.

An ambulance train, loaded with wounded, leaves here probably this afternoon for Fredericksburg or Port Royal, whichever way is most free from guerrillas, and by this, if it goes, I shall seek an outlet from the field; but I shall trust this to headquarters' mail bag rather than carry it myself to Washington, for I think it likely it will thus pass through there on its way to you sooner than I shall reach the place.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR,
Assistant Secretary.

No. VIII.

UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION,
CENTRAL OFFICE, 244 F STREET,
WASHINGTON, D. C., *May 30, 1864.*

DEAR MRS. —: The hills and woods along the North Anna river, some distance to the left of the place where the engagement of the previous evening took place, every now and then gave back the echoes of the cannonading that indicated how General Hancock was fighting his way towards Richmond, when early in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 24th of May, in company with an officer who, in charge of some men that represented a regiment twelve hundred strong three years before, and now reduced to little over a hundred, was on his way to Washington to be mustered out, and thence North to return to civil life, I started from the front for the base, with a train of some thirty ambulances and some wagons filled with the wounded from yesterday's field, in charge of one of the officers with whose mess I had been on the march. The fiercest rays of the sun mingled with the hot breath that floated across the fields from a burning mansion some little distance off, as we slowly moved off, under the escort of a body of cavalry, to our unknown destination, for it depended upon the movements of the enemy, and upon the conditions of the respective routes as to guerrillas, whether we should journey to the old base of Fredericksburg or the proposed new one of Port Royal, the latter place some thirty miles lower down the Rappahannock river than the former. We moved on

therefore, only so far as our road led to both points, and then waited for further orders. Then came a short military delay of only a couple of hours or so, during which my companion and myself, desiring to leave as much accommodation as possible for the wounded men, shifted our quarters from the seats of an ambulance to the hay and bags of grain of an army wagon, to the manifest delight of the little squirrel, heretofore mentioned as picked up from the field during one of the engagements in the Wilderness, which he was carrying to Philadelphia as a gift and pet from its owner to some young fair one, and which evidently considered the wide and moreover edible range of the wagon's hay and grain a great improvement over the narrow, barren, and inhospitable, however dignified and shining, black leather of the ambulance. Finally the word came for an advance to Port Royal, and we recommenced our slow progress, extending the hospitalities of our vehicle shortly afterwards to a gentleman belonging to the Christian Commission and to a soldier—not wounded, but not well—who would otherwise have been obliged to join the pedestrian throng of stragglers of all kinds who, as usual, were taking advantage of an escort to traverse the dangerous roads. So we went slowly on, the scorching day in an hour or two yielding to the cooler shadows of the evening, and those to night, when we took such snatches of sleep as we could for the jolting and bouncing (with occasionally a round among the ambulances, to see if the inmates were properly supplied with water to drink and pour over their wounds by the men detailed to fill their canteens from the springs and streams on our way) until the stoppage of our wagon, after some uneasier lurches than usual, the scraping of wheels, the cracking of whips, the strong language of teamsters and drivers, the stamping of hoofs, the shaking and jingling of harness, and above all, "the quartermaster's call,"—that is, the many-keyed, grotesquely-sad cries emitted by the mules when the end of a journey and the beginning of their feed-troughs are reached—all these Babel-like sounds, and many other indescribable

ones, startled us from our troubled slumbers, and proclaimed that we had come to a halt. It seemed to me that, as I was waking up, I heard the voice of a driver, in answer to a request for tobacco, say, "I don't use tobacco, Ned, in no shape. Didn't you know that?" but, reasoning with myself, with as much self-severity as a due indulgence towards my semi-somnolent state would allow, I decided that such an anomaly as that of a man in the army, guiltless of tobacco in any shape, could not by possibility exist; and when, through the day, I occasionally recurred to my impression, I rejected it as the hallucination of an unwaked, wagon-jarred brain. The next night, however, as I sat with my party round our camp-fire at Port Royal, I gave loud expression to my astonishment at discovering that no less than three persons round it repudiated tobacco in any form, when from a group of teamsters about the next fire came the voice of my supposed dream, crying, "Here's another man that don't use tobacco in no shape." If ten righteous men sufficed to save a city full of wicked ones, shall not four *eschewers* of tobacco in the 5th corps of the Army of the Potomac avail to save the *chewers* from reproach?

When the sun rose we found our train parked on a large field skirted on one side by the road and sloping down on the other to a ravine from a brackish spring at one end of which tolerable drinking entertainment was procurable for man and beast, while several very fair sized houses stood not far off, and scattered among them were the tents of the remnants of several homeward-bound regiments whose time was out.

One of the wounded men had died through the night, and there in a corner of the field where it began to slope towards the little valley, before the first rays of the rising sun had had time to dry up the heavy dew-drops that lay thickly on the sod as the delvers marked it out with their spades, the grave of the soldier was dug, while the young officer in command of the party sat on a log by its side, and carved his name, regiment &c., with penknife, on a piece of

plank. Some officers from the neighboring tents stood uncovered among the group of men from our train while fitting services were said by our Christian Commission friend—a clergyman;—then, wrapped in his blanket, the soldier was covered with fresh cut branches of pine and various bushes, the earth was thrown over them, the head-board put in place, and we turned from the dead that knew no more pain in the body, to the living that lay in every form of corporeal anguish around us.

Crackers and coffee, I was told by some of the detailed attendants, had already been carried round to the wounded men; but the round I made revealed the fact that there had been an insufficiency of the first, and that the latter had not been fit to drink—"dirty water," one man told me, "with some grounds at the bottom." An examination and tasting of the rejected remains of the coffee showed that this definition was hardly an exaggerated one.

There was some grumbling when the blame of this neglect was impliedly brought home to those who deserved it, and a half drunken stream of invective was noisily poured out on the wounded men—several of whom were dying. They were discontented and exacting, it was said, and so conceited that they were not satisfied with what pleased their betters—just as if a well general might not, when hungry, eat or drink, without repugnance, what the delicate, morbid stomach of a sick private would reject. But I let these criticisms go for what they were worth, knowing that charges of discontent are generally brought without reference to its manifestation or retention, against those who are known to have abundant cause for it, and that they are always repeated with most virulence, by the very ones who feel most guilty in giving cause for its just indulgence; and knowing too that accusations of egotism are, quite as often as otherwise, mere attempts to cover the counter egotism and superadded jealousy of the accuser. "By —, its enough to make a fellow turn disloyal," was one of the remarks I overheard, "to see how they fool with these

wounded men, and don't care a curse whether we go starving or not. I guess I'll stick myself, and come in for a share of the petting."

Without heeding anything of this, however, we proceeded in the work of feeding—that is, our friend of the Christian Commission, the attendants who preferred working for the sick to idling and grumbling at them (who were very grateful for our aid) and myself. While he made coffee after his own recipe, and the attendants cut up some meat, I went round with the cracker-pail and promises of the approaching other things. As a delicacy, some soup made of beef-stock was prepared for the very sick, who refused the other nourishment; but either they were too sick to relish anything, or there was some fault in its components, for it was not generally acceptable. With many of the men I had become acquainted in the hospital tents, and with some I had still stronger ties, dating from the battle-field, and these latter were especially glad to see me whenever I made my appearance by their ambulances. One of them, a poor fellow shot through the windpipe, was evidently dying; and when in the course of the evening he died, I was glad that I had been instrumental in acceding to his wishes at this time. Seeming to be pretty strong and comfortable when he left the hospital, he had been placed in one of the wagons, and had now written on a slip of paper, which was handed to me, these words: "I can neither eat nor talk. The jolting of the wagon makes me feel very bad. Please move me to one of the ambulances," signed with his name and, as always with soldiers, his regiment and company. So I made the necessary arrangements with the surgeon who was in medical charge of the train, and, with the aid of a stretcher, had him moved to an ambulance driven by an old Irishman, whose favor I had propitiated during a ten mile drive with him the first day of my entrance into the army.

It takes a long time to attend to a mass of wounded men, but at last all had been fed, and the surgeon had ceased his visitations; so we renewed our journey about 9, a. m., our

train swelled by the addition of several wagon loads of contrabands, who sought freedom with an eye on our cavalry escort, and took into their sable protection, before we had gone many miles on our journey, two more—a small boy of seven, with a little stick and a bundle of the smallest dimensions, and a youth of fifteen, his “guide, philosopher, and friend,” a mentor of highly senior-fraternal air, but who informed me that the small boy, of inky features, white-rolling eyes, and snowy, grinning teeth, was not his brother, “wasn’t of no account to him as a relation, but that he had known him ebber since he was done born, and that they come from the same plantation.”

The turnpike we traveled on all day, with but one short corduroy exception, was a very good one, for which, on behalf of the occupants of the ambulances, I blessed Providence. It was lined on each side by good fences, enclosing rich fields of grain, now trampled down where the hoofs of the horses of our escort made a narrow track on each side, or the equestrians, not on guard, shot across the intervening space to the flocks of sheep, the herds of swine, and the poultry-yards, that tempted their powers of appropriation. About 1 o’clock we passed through Bowling Green, between two files of female unsympathizers, and as it was beginning to get dark, we entered Port Royal. The enemy had evacuated the place, I was told, in the middle of the day, and an hour or two after there steamed up to the wharf the little fleet of the Sanitary Commission, consisting of two steamers and several barges and tugs, loaded with supplies of every kind, in charge of Mr. Anderson, with some seventy or eighty Relief Agents to prepare and distribute them to the wounded men as fast as they should arrive. Our train was the first to get there, and the ambulances and wagons were scarcely parked before the agents were swarming about them with pails full of soft crackers, coffee, farina, milk-punch, beef-tea, &c. With the help of a lady, these things were being prepared in an old house at the other end of the field where the train was parked. The clapboards from the

whole of one side of the building had been torn down to light the fire that blazed on its wide hearth, and its ruddy gleam fell on the kind woman's face that bent over the kettles that hung over it, and on the agents that assisted her or bustled about from barrel to box as they filled their pails, and on way-worn or wounded soldiers, who sat with their backs braced against the wall, and their legs—sometimes only one to a man—stretched out on the floor, while with heads thrown back they slept the blissful, unjoggled sleep of those who slumber not in wagons on the move; or eyed the preparations for supper with the happy consciousness that their turn for the good things would come in due time, and their patience be rewarded. All this showed like a picture through the wide-spread joists, stripped of inside and outside covering; and through them the light from the hearth flickered out into the damp night, and fell on the motley scene outside, and where a little apart lay the three heaped-up blankets, whose dim rough lines suggested, rather than shaped themselves to, the still, stiff forms of those who had died on the way since the morning.

The next morning I rose from the ground and thankfully "assisted" at a breakfast of chicken, confiscated and cackling the day before, and therefore fresh, if tough and still feathery; and of fresh milk—not the condensed article, but genuine cow-milk not ten minutes old, and honestly purchased of a friendly negro whose cottage stood by the field where we were posted. I "assisted" the more thankfully because under the fond delusion—derived from information received the night before—that I should find a boat for Washington at an early hour; so, after going the round of the ambulances and finding that our people had been up all night with the wounded, including those brought by other trains which had arrived during the night, I made my way to the provost marshal, who had established himself in a tumble-down, once-nice house, (like most of the houses in the place,) standing, with others, well separated, at each side of it, on a beautiful natural terrace of the greenest sward,

overlooking the river and sentinelled at its edge with a long row of the decayed trunks of what had once been poplar trees. Like my convoys, the Christian Commission and the military man, I got a pass for Washington easily enough; but the possession was like having a saddle with never a horse to put it on, for the early boat turned out to be the merest myth, and there was not the faintest prospect of one before the middle of the day. Neither could I, for some hours, get aboard the "Mary F. Rapley," our headquarters' boat, which lay out in the stream. The interval I employed in "taking a look" at the town or village, whichever it calls itself;—the houses, deserted of all save the negroes, telling of ancient opulence, or at least great comfort, and of present decay, like most in the small towns and villages of eastern Virginia. But a tremendous fall of rain put a stop to my antiquarian investigations, and I sought the provost marshal's again, where I watched and talked with some seven or eight score of contrabands, who had followed the various fragments of the army from different points, that now filled the town. Some of the rooms in the house had been allotted to the women and children, but numbers of both sexes and all ages had collected under a large shed a little way off. There were many staid-looking matrons, with the decorous colored handkerchief wrapped round their heads; but the girls and younger women—without exception, I think—had topped their often shoeless feet and their tight-fitting ragged dresses of dirty, striped homespun (though here and there one wore silk and lace throughout) with the most elegant bonnets and round hats of silk, and velvet, and straw, streaming with ribbons, laces, and feathers. Seeing an old man habited in an overcoat that descended to his heels and remained demurely buttoned up after the sun shone out again with renewed and intensified fierceness, solemnly relieved at the neck by a white cravat and surmounted by the only stove-pipe hat I had seen since leaving Washington, supporting himself on the huge umbrella—also unique in the Army of the Potomac, and which had been

kept carefully closed, so that it should not be spoilt by use, I presume, during the heavy rain—and gazing gravely from beneath the spectacles perched on his sable nose, which gave the finishing touch of dignity to a deportment suggestive of decorum in every fibre of the body, and to a visage unctuous in every line, with such a perfection of respectability as no white man could by possibility attain to—seeing him gaze gravely at these bonneted young women, I asked him if he approved of such vanities? He answered with asperity that “Sich frolickin’s and cuttin’s-up” were highly obnoxious to him; and he was particularly severe on two girls who had come from the same plantation as himself, pathetically lamenting the “inconvenience” to which his two late young ladies would be subjected for want of the bonnets the former were sporting. He furthermore informed me that though his late “mas’r” was a “tol’ble easy man—not a Christ’n—did’nt go to church scursly never—though sometimes he listened to his (the speaker’s) preachin’—he felt a call to preach sometimes to the colored brethren and sisters—though mas’r was tol’ble easy, he nevertheless thought it no more nor right to come away when he had a chance ter; the Scripters told us to be cunning as a sarpent as well as harmless as a dove, but he should keep on prayin’, mornin’ an’ night, that his mas’r might be brought to be a Christ’n, an’ he should continny, as long as he was with ’em, his spirit’al ministrations to the foolish chil’en who had took their young missus’s hats,” and he wiped his oily forehead with a cambric handkerchief which had evidently belonged to his master, and concluded by offering to sell me some more of the confederate money which he had seen me purchasing from the other contrabands. When he had taken himself off, which he soon after did, with others who were carried down to a Government boat, and with a very pretty yellow girl—with not only a silk bonnet but a silk dress pendant from it—leaning confidentially on the arm he extended to her, with an air of mingled sanctimoniousness and gallantry, I was quite prepared to find that he had “sold” me,

in a double sense, as regarded the Confederate currency I had taken from him.

Afraid to lose sight of the shipping, lest my opportunity for returning to Washington should slip through my fingers; (in the army a movement is as likely to be made three hours before the time anticipated as three days after,) I could not go back to the place where the ambulance trains were continuing, as I heard, to arrive, to help our people with the wounded; and in the exhaustion of my writing paper, was reduced to studying the likenesses of public buildings in the city of New York, with which the whole house was impartially wall-papered—not cuttings from “illustrated weeklies,” but *bona fide* paper-hanger’s repetitions, as gorgeously colored as the subjects would admit of—Trinity, St. Paul’s, and Grace church, the Exchange, Custom House, City Hall and Stewart’s marble palace, the latter painfully suggestive of Delmonico’s opposite, for it was now high noon, and our five o’clock breakfast had been tough, hurried and meagre. But now, as kind fortune would have it, an opportunity presented itself for gaining the Mary F. Rapley, and hurrying down to the wharf and into a row boat, we—my traveling companions and myself—were soon on board, and *at* the board of the welcoming commander, in company with officers, soldiers, newspaper reporters and other hangers-on of the army. And were they fed luxuriously on crackers, tough beef, ham and coffee from the stores of the Commission, furnished by the liberality of the public? Certainly. Would the public have them starve? No, but had they not money in their pockets? Could they not buy? In the village? No, because it is a deserted one; there are neither sellers nor goods in it, and one’s money is of as little use as if one were in an uninhabited island. From the Commission’s agents? No, because the Commission has nothing to sell; it has only to give. Besides, in the army, and especially in the van of the army, before the supplies have come up, the law of *meum* and *tuum* is necessarily almost abrogated, by common consent, otherwise those who have not food with them would

starve, and those who give to-day know that their turn for asking may come to-morrow. The agents of the Commission away from their stores, are as often obliged to live on others, as others are on them when with their stores. Before leaving this subject, I will revert to two other points of a like nature, both affording examples of the ease with which stories are got about affecting the reputation of the Commission's agents for honesty, sobriety, and rectitude of appropriation.

I will first premise that we succeeded, in the middle of Thursday, May 26, in getting on board a Government steamer, loaded with some four hundred wounded men from Fredericksburg; that Dr. Harris, one of the Sanitary Commission, stored it well with supplies, which, however, owing to the want of sufficient stove accommodation on board, were cooked—those that required cooking—slowly and with much extra trouble; that instead of hurrying on to Washington, as the condition of the wounded demanded, we lay in the stream, owing to some conflict of authority between the captain and the medical officials on shore, all that day and the following night, when it rained heavily; that after sending ashore to be buried, under charge of a chaplain, the bodies of five men from our own vessel and from another one alongside, we steamed off about eight o'clock on the morning of Friday, in consort with the other vessel, passing several fine houses and estates, especially one with a large and elegant modern structure on a fine lawn and two or three dozen comfortable two-story houses—negro quarters, I presume—ranged along the river's bank; steamed through Chesapeake Bay in the twilight; passed the bar in the Potomac about nine o'clock, (during which I had to put out the lights carried by the attendants, to prevent their constant collision with the irascible captain, whose eyes were dazzled by the shifting glare from the lanterns as he was sounding, and who rightly, if petulantly, opined that it was better the patients should be clumsily waited on in the dark for half an hour than that they should be subjected to the risk of going to the bottom,) and finally reached Washington about two o'clock in the morning of Saturday, the 28th, where I found our people on the dock in readiness to receive the wounded, and supplement the excel-

lent arrangements as to feeding and carrying provided for by Government, and where I bade good bye to the German surgeon in charge—a civilian and volunteer—with the highest respect for the untiring and sleepless devotion with which he had fulfilled his terrible duties, and in which with one exception, (but that one enough perhaps to give a bad impression of all to a casual or careless observer,) his assistants had borne a most creditable part—duties involving immense mental, moral, and physical labor, with little reward in thanks or reputation, “and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.”

What I was going to say is this: One of our lady agents, after living on crackers and dirty lukewarm river water for a couple of sleepless, hard-working days and nights among the wounded on board this boat, owing to her conscientious scruples against appropriating to her own use anything that might be acceptable to the sick, came to me and confided the fact that she had become so weak and faint for want of nourishment that she at last felt it to be her duty to take a hearty meal of substantial food. I recommended her to continue the practice every few hours, and I could but think that it would have been much better, both for herself and those she waited on, if she had arrived at this sense of duty before allowing herself to become exhausted, and perhaps lay the foundation of illness which might prevent her pursuing her self-imposed duties in the future. There was also on board a gentleman connected with a benevolent organization for the behoof of the army, who was for the greater part of the trip very indignant that the nurses were allowed to partake of the stock of the Commission, and expressed his determination to report to the public the *misappropriation*, as he termed it, of their stores, but his zeal abated, and his charity (towards himself at least) increased as the hours waxed and his haversack became depleted, and before we reached the end of our voyage he sat meekly among the “pampered” agents of the Commission, and was fain to eat in silence, and I hope in gratitude, the soup and beef and crackers with which they broke their long half-fast. Mayhap he eyed wistfully the farina, and milk punch,

and canned peaches which he saw prepared—but if he did he was disappointed, for they were only for the sick.

One other kindred instance. I had been down stairs, while we were steaming down the Rappahannock, initiating the preparation of sundry gallons of tea for the sick, when, on reascending to the upper deck, I found several of the men drinking the beverage out of their tin cups. Wondering where they had got it, I made inquiries, and found they had bought their portions for ten cents from the hands of the cook-house on board the boat. I therefore explained to them that everything distributed by the Sanitary Commission was absolutely free, but that its agents had no more power to prevent the boat hands from selling of their own stock than they had to prevent the soldiers from buying. Yet I do not doubt that the careless, the gossiping, and the malicious, among those men, have circulated the report that the Sanitary Commission sells its tea to sick and wounded soldiers at ten cents a cup.

Taking into consideration the acknowledgments I have already received of the previous letters of this series, I am certainly not without encouragement to commence future ones from other portions of the field, worked by the Commission, and perhaps opportunities may serve for my doing so.

Meanwhile, I am, as always, very truly and respectfully,
yours,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.