

Our Daily Fair.

PHILADELPHIA, JUNE 18, 1864.

THE SANITARY COMMISSION.

ITS ORIGIN, ITS OBJECTS, AND ITS WORK.

IT has been a principal object of the conductors of this little journal to give it permanent value by making it a record of the Fair movement throughout the loyal States, as well as an exponent of our own Great Fair. To this end we have published a series of articles relating to all the great Fairs in aid of the Sanitary Commission of which we could procure satisfactory accounts. Being well assured of the value of such a record, we took an additional step and sent a correspondent to the Army of the Potomac to procure authentic accounts of the system, and the means by which the bounty of the people, contributed through Fairs and otherwise, is distributed among the soldiers, and applied according to the design of the donors, in actual practice in the field.

The letters of this correspondent, giving full and satisfactory details on those important points, are now in course of publication, the one printed this morning being the sixth of the series. We now propose to advance another step in the same general direction. In this and in the future numbers of the paper, we shall endeavor to present in brief and clear form, such editorial statements as will explain the origin of the Sanitary Commission, the nature of the organization, its original and present duties and objects, its means and opportunities for doing good, and, so far as our restricted limits will allow, the beneficent results which have attended its ministrations in the army and elsewhere. This will give some completeness to the design of our paper, and we trust will aid one of the noblest schemes of human benevolence the world has ever seen.

The idea of a Sanitary Commission first came to the official notice of the Government through a letter written in June, 1861, by Dr. R. C. Wood, then acting Surgeon-General, to the Hon. Simon Cameron, then Secretary of War. In this letter Dr. Wood suggested the appointment of "a commission of inquiry and advice in respect to the sanitary interests of the United States forces." Such a Commission was made necessary by the pressure which the sudden and large increase of the army had imposed upon the Medical Bureau. It was not intended to interfere with the existing medical organization of the army, but to cooperate with and strengthen it by "introducing and elaborating such improvements as the advanced stage of medical science might sug-

gest, more particularly as regards the class of men who, in this war, may be called to abandon the comforts of home, and be subjected to the privations and casualties of war."

Such was the original idea of the Sanitary Commission, and its appointment was authorized by the Secretary of War, on the 9th of June, 1861. In the official order the Commissioners were directed to inquire into the principles and practices connected with the inspection of recruits and enlisted men; the sanitary condition of the volunteers; the means of preserving and restoring the health, and of securing the general comfort and efficiency of the troops; the proper provision for cooks, nurses and hospitals; and other subjects of like nature. They were ordered to communicate to the Medical Bureau, from time to time, their views and observations.

By virtue of the authority thus conferred, the Commission was organized on the 16th of June, 1861, and its first business was to set to work to improve the sanitary condition of camps, quarters, hospitals and men, all of which were sadly in want of just such attention as it was the object of the Commission to bestow. Indeed, there was, for a while, well grounded fear of epidemics breaking out in many of the camps, on account of the inefficiency of inexperienced officers, and the general neglect of sanitary measures and precautions. In a very short time after the Commission got fairly to work, there was visible everywhere, in the camps and in the hospitals, and in the persons of the men, a most salutary change. The ventilation and cleanliness of camps and quarters were closely observed; the provision for the removal of offal and filth was made certain and efficient; the quality of the water-supply, of food, and of the cooking, was carefully looked after; the salubrity of the camp site was inquired into; the hospitals were put on an effective footing; the men were constrained to observe habits of personal cleanliness; and inexperienced officers were warned of the perils to which unclean and unwholesome camps, bad ventilation, and bad cooking, exposed the men entrusted to their charge.

But these excellent changes were not the only immediate fruits of the workings of the Commission. Its efforts brought the influence of the medical profession throughout the United States to bear upon the Government; they effected the extension and invigoration of the Medical Bureau, and secured the recognition of the important principle, that the *prevention* of disease in the army, as well as its cure, is one of the highest duties of the Medical Staff.

The extent to which attention was awakened to these vital matters, has been, and is of incalculable benefit to the army and to the country. The amount of disease has been lessened to an extraordinary degree, and the percent-

age of mortality largely reduced. In all this, the Commission was working directly toward its first great object: "to economise for the National service, the life and strength of the National soldier."

But, as the war advanced, other duties devolved on the Sanitary Commission. The Government was doing all that any Government had ever done for its soldiers, and a great deal more; but even this was not enough to satisfy the patriotic desires and large-hearted liberality of the people. They wished to supply the soldiers—who were their sons, brothers, fathers, kinsmen—with as many of their home comforts and home attentions as could possibly be engrafted upon army life.

With this view they sent forward from all parts of the country large quantities of food, fruits, delicacies, and appliances for the sick and wounded, much of which was lost, some of it rotting away and perishing in storehouses for want of adequate and organized means of distribution. In course of time the Sanitary Commission became the Great Almoner of this popular bounty—authorized by the contributors and recognized by the Government; and in this capacity it has distributed relief to the value of about fifteen millions of dollars—money better spent than any money ever was in the history of war.

Having thus traced the origin and objects of the Commission, we shall next consider its organization, its means, its necessity, and its most happy effects.

LIBERALITY.

It is said by people who know, that it is much pleasanter to give than to receive. Our own experience being confined principally to the former, we cannot pretend to be a judge in the matter, but we take the maxim on trust, and are duly grateful that we are not subjected to anything less pleasant than giving. The various devices in the Fair enable us to gratify our desires in this respect to the fullest extent and at the very lowest price. We daily make some handsome present to the most distinguished men of our country. We are constantly giving silver vases, swords, canes, baby houses, Afghans, screens and coverlids to Presidents and Generals, and have acquired, by the occasional expenditure of fifty cents, quite a patronizing air in speaking of these celebrities. There is really nothing in the world like associated capital. It effects all the great objects of the Commission, and elevates us, by the disbursement of postage currency, into a liberal benefactor of our species.

PEOPLE GENERALLY value most what they have least of. Every young man affects to be older than he is; every old man younger; every poor man richer, and every rich man poorer.