

A Visit to the Wounded on David's Island

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The Way the Patriotic may Aid the Defenders of the Republic.

To the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle:

BROOKLYN, Sept. 23, 1862.

Will you allow me to say a few words through your columns, to the citizens of Brooklyn, concerning the military hospitals lately established by the Government on Davids' Island, and the modes in which the benevolent and patriotic among us may render to the sick and wounded soldiers there assembled important assistance? I am the more bold to ask your permission to do this, since many private inquires have been addressed to me on the subject, indicating that a general though somewhat vague interest is extensively felt in it. Indeed, how can any of us help feeling an interest most keen and urgent in those institutions? TWENTY FIVE HUNDRED MEN are collected at one point within twenty five miles of us—and arrangements are already nearly completed for doubling the number, bringing to the same point FIVE THOUSAND MEN—every one of whom is suffering from sickness contracted, or from wounds received and mutilation incurred, in the service of our country, in fighting our battles, and not merely his own—and seeking to establish on solid foundations our liberties and our childrens' for all time to come. We must be unworthy the name of men if such a fact does not appeal to our deepest sensibilities.

David's Island, which has been leased by the Government for several years, and devoted by it to hospital purposes—is in all respects excellently well adapted to this use. It lies five or six miles above Fort Schuyler, in Long Island Sound, just opposite the village of New Rochelle. Resting upon a rocky base, it contains, probably, eighty or ninety acres, and is at the same time high enough to secure pure air, fresh breezes, and a pleasant outlook over the waters, while near enough to the shore to be in some degree sheltered by it from the severity of storms. The buildings erected upon the island are of wood, and have been hastily built, but they are well arranged, ample in dimensions, well lighted, well ventilated, and sufficiently substantial; and with paint and green blinds on the outside, and a copious outlay of whitewash within, they are as neat and attractive to the eye as they are, in all other respects, inviting and commodious. There are not yet enough of them to accommodate all who are on the island; and those who have more lately reached it are therefore, for the present, provided for in tents. But new buildings are rapidly going up, and it is expected, as I have intimated, that sufficient room will ere long be furnished in the houses for five thousand beds, in addition to all the other buildings which are needed for mess-rooms, kitchens, store-houses, officers' apartments, etc., etc.

The management of the hospitals by the officers in charge is intelligent careful, and admirably systematic. Each hospital, or "pavilion," as it is called on the Island, is a building two hundred and fifty feet in length, by twenty-five in width, and twenty in height. It is divided into several wards, with a nurse and dresser for each; and to each pavilion is assigned its own physician and surgeon, while all collectively, are under the constant supervision of Dr. Simmons, the physician-in-chief, and his assistant, Capt. R. C. Morgan, of the regular army, a courteous and intelligent gentleman, and evidently an indefatigable worker, has charge of the supplies, and exercises a general oversight and authority over all on the island. The supplies of food and clothing furnished by the Government, as well as the buildings with their equipment and furniture, seem to be entirely ample and liberal; the men look bright, cheerful, and well-cared for, and express themselves without exception as satisfied and gratified with the attention paid to them, and with the generous arrangements made for their comfort. Several whom I conversed with, who had been for weeks in the Richmond hospitals and tobacco warehouses, could hardly express strongly enough their exceeding relief and delight at the change. One of them said to me, "When I got to this place Sir, and into this delightful bed, after having slept for weeks on the wet and filthy floor at Richmond, and when I saw the breakfast they brought me, after having had the little allowance of hard and poor bread which the rebels gave us, I tell you Sir, it seemed as if I had got so near to heaven, that the next step would carry me into it!"

At the same time, however, that the Government does so much for these men, and aims to meet its obligations to them so fully, it is obvious that there are many things delightful to a sick man, and even important to his rapid recovery and complete convalescence, which can only be provided for him by private assistance. Roast beef or stewed beef and boiled potatoes, which are the usual fare on the island, may very profitably in many cases be exchanged for, or supplemented by, more delicate soups, or more toothsome meats and more various vegetables. Tea and coffee made by the barrel-full, and distributed by the pint measure, is by no means the same thing with a cup of coffee or of tea made by a lady, and given at the bed-side by her own hand; and puddings, jellies, preserved fruits, fresh fruits, smoked meats, oysters, chickens, and a thousand other delicacies which the Government of course cannot undertake to furnish, but which are eagerly desired and sought for by the men—especially by those who have been accustomed all their lives to comfortable homes and the constant care of mother or wife, and who are now just feebly rallying from the exhaustion of fever or the weakness of wounds—all these must be furnished, if furnished at all, by private benevolence.

To meet this want, therefore, three voluntary "Kitchens," so called, have been established on the Island; one of which is carried on by ladies from New Rochelle, another by ladies from Yorkers, and the third by ladies from Pelham, assisted by friends from New York and this city. This Voluntary department moves on in entire and happy harmony with the general Governmental administration of the hospitals; and through it any who wish may contribute effectively to the comfort and benefit of their inmates. The "Kitchens" are buildings erected for the ladies by the Government; and the office of those who have charge of them respectively is to furnish—on the order of the attending surgeons, and not otherwise—such delicacies as I have mentioned, to those who need and will be benefited by them. They distribute also books, papers, pamphlets, writing materials, and clothing when it is needed; and in their personal intercourse with the men, which is frequent, they seek in every way to cheer and profit them. Too much honor cannot be awarded to these refined and cultivated ladies who have left their homes—some of them remaining all the time on the Island—and have devoted themselves to the by no means holiday-task of ministering in the general modes I have suggested to the wounded and sick. One hardly knows which is the grander sight: the rows of beds occupied by men who have periled their life and almost lost it in the cause of their country, or the Kitchens, in which these delicate women toil and plan to minister to their comfort. Either spectacle ought to make the veriest misanthrope think better of his kind.

Having said thus much concerning the island and its capacious hospitals, and especially concerning this Voluntary department which is connected with the hospitals, let me earnestly solicit from the benevolent contributions of such articles as I have mentioned as being constantly distributed by the ladies,—under the direction, be it understood, of the physicians and surgeons. Books, papers, pamphlets, stationery, apples, pears, peaches, grapes, tomatoes, preserved fruits, sago, farina, rice, coffee, tea, sugar, butter, hams, tongues, oysters, wines—none of these can be sent without being directly, discreetly, and effectively used; and if directed to the "PELHAM KITCHEN, David's Island," and entrusted to Westcott's Express company, or sent to the Quartermasters office, No 6. State street, New York, they will go at once to their destination, without danger of damage and without expense. Contributions of money, too, may be sent to Rev. Mr. Dillon, of Pelham, with the certainty that it will be wisely expended.

Let me add a word more, to say that if any who read this article can make a trip to the Island themselves, they will be well repaid for their time and trouble. To the thoughtful eye, this Brigade of the Wounded seems to me more impressive than any number of marching regiments. And the most despondent must take fresh courage from the uniform hopefulness, and the bright elastic buoyancy of spirit, which even those most sorely smitten by the blast of fever or the bolts of the battle-field there evince. If, in addition, the skies be as bright and the company as delightful as I enjoyed in going thither on Monday, the day devoted to this service of love will be one to be long and joyfully remembered. S.

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