

Work of the Sanitary Commission before Petersburg.

Letter from Dr. Anderson of San Francisco.

CITY POINT, Va., October, 1864.

EDITOR BELLETRIN.—It was my purpose to have dated this note from Petersburg, or Richmond, but owing to peculiar circumstances, I think it best to write it down here on one of our San. Com. boats. On my visits to the trenches on our front centre, the former city is in full view; and from our extreme right the spires and Capitol of the latter are visible. The intervening space, however, is, in soldiers' parlance, "an unhealthy location," and hence, with due regard to my health, my visit to these sacred cities is deferred for two or three weeks, perhaps four. Before this reaches you I sincerely hope and confidently believe that one, if not both of them, will be accessible to inquiring and enterprising travelers like myself.

City Point, so called because it is the point of land at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers, is a far busier place than Montgomery street, even in Waboo stock times. The supply base of an army of 150,000 men must of necessity be a busy place; all the recruits, all the Commissary, Quartermaster and Ordnance stores are landed here. Just fancy, if you can, 200 or 300 transports of all possible kinds, from the largest ocean steamer down to the barge and 20-ton schooner, crowded into a river one mile wide. The Government wharf, which must be 600 yards long, is literally lined with vessels unloading army stores or troops. The unloading process is quickly done by the hands of as many contrabands as can possibly crowd on or around the vessels. Often the freight is rolled directly into railroad cars, which flank the entire length of the wharf. When unloaded, the vessels are immediately pulled into the stream and others take their berths; and thus it is, day and night, night and day.

Near the lower end of this crowded wharf, the Quartermaster has given the Sanitary Commission a very desirable place, and there we are. At this time the Commission has two large river barges, one steam tug-boat and one steamer of 300 tons. The barges are used for storing the goods, for officers, for eating and lodging rooms; the tug carries supplies for the relief stations on the James and Appomattox, and is on hand to tow the barges out of danger in case of a reverse to our arms; the steamer is constantly employed in transporting sanitary stores from the Eastern cities. From the barges these stores are carried by four-horse teams to the several relief stations of the Commission, and thence distributed to the sick and wounded soldiers in hospital or on the battle-field. The relief stations are always in charge of experienced and responsible men, who issue the supplies upon order of the surgeons in charge of the field and base hospitals, or, in time of battle, directly to the wounded. During this campaign the Commission has been aided in the work of distribution by some 60 or 70 theological students, mainly from Princeton and Union Universities. These young gentlemen have been very faithful in ministering both to the physical and spiritual wants of the wounded and sick. The system of distribution is very complete, and the most economical one I have ever seen in operation. In the church institutions, when the salaries of the corresponding secretaries, agents, clerks, office-rents, printing, stationery, etc., are cast up, it is found to equal 10, sometimes 15 per cent.; while the entire cost of distributing the millions of dollars worth of supplies by the U. S. Sanitary Commission varies but a fraction from 3 per cent! I hope that the noble California supporters of this Commission will not withhold their hands. I have witnessed its workings at Gettysburg, where it distributed \$80,000 worth of supplies in three weeks, at Nashville, Chattanooga, City Point, and all along the twenty-mile front of the army now operating against Petersburg and Richmond, and I assure them that the Sanitary Commission is doing all that its most earnest friends could ask or hope for. Since the beginning of the present campaign it has distributed \$1,000,000 worth of supplies to curbed and wounded soldiers, and although it makes no loud claims to special sanctity, the ministrations of the theological students, ministers and many pious laymen who are in its service are very acceptable to the wounded men, and doubtless to that Savior whose example they are following in their labors of love.

The celebrated Anaconda which was to have appeared under the ministrations of the late Gen. McClellan, and did not, has turned up at last, and Gen. Grant is using it to some purpose, you may rest assured. It lies at present with its head on Chapin's farm, and its tail about three miles northwest of the Weldon railroad, and the head is about 25 miles long. It is a prodigious reptile, you may depend; and if the head would lie still it would not be so bad, but it is continually throwing forward its tail and head. On my arrival at City Point it lay nearly straight, but by its several contractions it is now almost a semi-circle, with the sacred cities of Richmond and Petersburg for its diameter—Butler is at the head and Warren at the tail; and it is to be feared, that by poking and annoying the head, they are contributing to its constant change of position. We know they did so on the 31st ultimo and again on the 6th and 7th instants. I was out at Warren's myself on the 30th of September, and can testify to the fact of his interference, using as his agents the Fifth and Ninth Army Corps.

Everything here is just as the most ardent lover of the Union would wish it to be.

I will give you some incidents of battles, hospitals, San. Com., etc., in a few days. W. C. ANDERSON.