

LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

ROOMS WESTERN SANITARY COMMISSION,
St. Louis, November 6th, 1863.

HIS EXCELLENCY, A. LINCOLN,
President of the United States.

SIR:— The undersigned, members of the Western Sanitary Commission, most respectfully represent, that the condition of the Freed Negroes in the Mississippi Valley is daily becoming worse, and calls most loudly upon the humane and loyal people of the Northern States for help. There are probably not less than fifty thousand, chiefly women and children, now within our lines, between Cairo and New Orleans, for whom no adequate provision has been made. The majority of them have no shelter but what they call "brush tents," fit for nothing but to protect them from night dews. They are very poorly clad—many of them half naked—and almost destitute of beds and bedding—thousands of them sleeping on the bare ground. The Government supplies them with *rations*, but many unavoidable delays arise in the distribution, so that frequent instances of great destitution occur. The army rations (*beef and crackers*) are also a kind of diet they are not used to; they have no facilities of cooking, and are almost ignorant of the use of wheat flour; and even when provisions in abundance are supplied, they are so spoiled in cooking as to be neither eatable nor wholesome. Add to these difficulties, the helplessness and improvidence of those who have always been slaves, together with their forlorn and jaded condition when they reach our lines, and we can easily account for the fact that sickness and death prevail to a fearful extent. No language can describe the suffering, destitution and neglect which prevail in some of their "camps." The sick and dying are left uncared for, in many instances, and the dead unburied. It would seem, now, that one-half are doomed to die in the process of freeing the rest.

Our purpose is not to find fault, but to seek for the remedy. Undoubtedly, Congress must take the matter in hand, to mature plans of permanent relief; but, judging from past experience, a good many months will elapse before its final action, and there will still remain a great deal that properly belongs to private charity, and for which legislation cannot provide.

To meet the present exigency, and to prevent or lessen the sufferings of the coming winter and spring, we offer our humble but active services, asking no reward of any kind, but the opportunity and encouragement to work. Our experience for two and a-half years past, in the sanitary cause of the sick and wounded, has taught us the lessons of economy and prudence, and we are too much accustomed to difficulties to be discouraged by them. It may not be unbecoming in us to say, in recommending ourselves for the work proposed, that in the two years from October, 1861, to November, 1863, we have received and expended for the sick and wounded of the Western Army, in stores or money, to the amount of a million and a quarter of dollars, and that the total expenses of distribution, including all salaries and incidental charges, has been but little in excess of *one per cent*. For the manner in which the work has been done, and the good results accomplished, we refer to Major-Generals Grant, Sherman, Steele, Schofield, Curtis, Fremont, and to the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Halleck. We also refer to Assistant Surgeon-General, Col. R. C. Wood, and to all members of the Medical Staff of the West, with whom and under whose direction we have always worked.

We now respectfully ask permission and authority to extend our labors to the suffering freed people of the South-West and South. If you will give us your endorsement in the undertaking before the people, we think we can raise large sums of money, and accomplish great good. Nor would it be only a work of philanthropy, but equally of patriotism, for it would remove an increasing reproach against the Union cause, and by lessening the difficulties of emancipation, would materially aid in crushing the rebellion. At present, hundreds of the blacks would gladly return to slavery, to avoid the hardships of freedom; and if this feeling increases and extends itself among them, all the difficulties of the situation will be increased; while, at the same time, a most effective argument is given to the disloyal against our cause.

We most respectfully leave the subject before you, feeling sure that you will agree with us as to the necessity of prompt and energetic action, And have the honor to remain,

Your cordial friends and obedient servants,

JAMES E. YEATMAN,
GEORGE PARTRIDGE,
JOHN B. JOHNSON,
CARLOS S. GREELEY,
WILLIAM G. ELIOT.