

Western Sanitary Commission to Abraham Lincoln

6 November 1863.

Broadside, 1 page.

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

