

A BRIEF PLEA

FOR

AN AMBULANCE SYSTEM

FOR THE

ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES,

AS DRAWN FROM THE EXTRA SUFFERINGS OF THE LATE
LIEUT. BOWDITCH AND A WOUNDED COMRADE.

BY

HENRY I. BOWDITCH, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL MEDICINE IN HARVARD COLLEGE.

Box
1319

BOSTON:

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

1863.



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THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

The American System is a system of government which is based on the principles of liberty and justice for all. It is a system which is based on the principles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It is a system which is based on the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution. It is a system which is based on the principles of the American people and the American way of life. It is a system which is based on the principles of the American dream and the American spirit. It is a system which is based on the principles of the American flag and the American people.

BY
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TO THE LOYAL AND HUMANE HEARTS OF NORTHERN MEN AND
WOMEN.

SOME extra copies of this Plea for an Ambulance System in the United States Armies, are printed from an Appendix to a Valedictory Address, delivered before a Class of Medical Students.

I know of no other way, in which any man can fully act up to the duties of the hour, than by a faithful expression, in thought and action, of whatever his mind or his hands may find to do towards assisting the country and our brave army in their present trials.

Provisionally, as I deem it, I have been twice brought to know the wretched want of system now existing in the arrangements for taking care of the wounded on the field of battle, viz: — during my visit to Centreville, in September last, and from the dying statements of my son.

I am fully sensible of the imperfections of this appeal to the men and women of the North. I make it, however, under a solemn sense of responsibility. I should be faithless to what I deem a high trust, were I to allow any fear of making an imperfect statement to deter me, and, on that account, should keep silence.

Let me earnestly appeal to all loyal and humane hearts to look into this matter for themselves, and then, I am sure, *something* will be done.

The responsibility for allowing these evils to continue, rests with *you*. I pray you not to fail of using your most active exertions to overcome them.

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

A BRIEF PLEA

For an Ambulance System for the Army of the United States, as drawn from the extra sufferings of the late Lieut. Bowditch and a wounded comrade.

The foregoing address is printed, as will be seen by the annexed correspondence, in accordance with the wishes of the Graduating Medical Class of Harvard College, as expressed in its vote of March 11, 1863. The publication has been delayed, in consequence of my journey to the camp of the First Massachusetts Cavalry, to bring home the dead body of my eldest son, who had fallen, while leading a charge in this war for free institutions, and for liberty.

I little thought that, in less than one week from the hour at which I, in a few words, at the conclusion of my address, begged of the earnest youths, then before me, to do everything they could to alleviate the sufferings of the sick and wounded soldiers, I should have presented to me the terrible thought that my own son would, perhaps, need the care of stranger surgeons and soldiers for his own relief in his dying hour.

Since his death, I think that I stand in different, and, may I not say? somewhat wider relations, than

those I enjoyed from the teacher's chair. Resting as I now do under the solemn cloud-shadow of a great but benignant sorrow, I hope that some words I may now write, will reach beyond the confines of my profession, and touch other human intellects and hearts, — intellects and hearts of men and women, who will have influence upon those in power, and who will, with me, endeavor to *persuade our leaders to do simple justice toward every wounded soldier in the armies of the United States.*

May I not believe that now I can, of myself, exert a greater moral influence upon those in power, and that I can *now* do something — as all my previous efforts seem to have been vain — toward persuading the authorities to take *some* measures, that will secure to our wounded soldiers the *Nation's* fostering care, from the *first* moment of their fall upon the bloody field, until they arrive in our well supplied and most excellent hospitals.

This is not the case at present; for, under the want of all proper arrangements by the Government, a wounded soldier is liable to be left to suffer, and *die, it may be*, on the battle-ground, *without the least attention*, save what *common humanity* would lead one soldier to bestow upon a comrade.

This happens, first, because Congress steadily refuses to establish any definite and efficient Ambulance Corps in the armies of the Republic; second, because the War Department declines to do anything in the premises.

As an illustration of, and in addition to what has been already published by others, as well as by my-

self,* I beg leave to state that Lieut. Bowditch, having been mortally wounded, in the first charge made after leaving Kelly's Ford, lay helpless on the ground, for some time, by the side of his dead horse. Two surgeons saw him, but they evidently had no means for carrying off the wounded officer, and it is believed *no one connected with an Ambulance Corps ever approached him there.*†

A stranger horseman, — probably from the Rhode Island forces, — finally assisted him to get into a saddle ; and he rode off, leaning over the neck of the animal, — a terrible mode of proceeding, considering his severe wound in the abdomen. All this happened *when he was in the rear of our victorious army*, or, in other words, at just the place and time, at which a thorough Ambulance Corps should have been busily at work, *seeking out*, and relieving, with every means *a great Government should have had at its disposal*, the wretched and, perhaps, dying sufferers. But what, in reality, does the Government do to meet such an emergency ? It provides a carriage, which a perfectly healthy man would find exceedingly uncomfortable to drive in, even for a few miles, and one driver, sometimes not the most humane. There are, also, I doubt not, various articles of surgical dressings, etc., for the wounded ; but these articles are generally far in the

* Appendix A.

† Three days after the fight, I heard several staff officers, — one of whom, certainly, was a surgeon, — talk, not as if they approved of the fact, but as if it were a matter of course, — saying that they “thought” a flag of truce ought to be sent over the river, to see to our wounded, many of whom were then, as they believed, still lying on the field !

rear of the army. The United States Government did not then, and never does, provide *any men*, whose duty it is to hasten to meet and to relieve these hours of poignant suffering. After Lieut. Bowditch arrived at the ambulance carriage, there was no water to be found in the casks, connected with it, although, by law, there should have been. The driver was wholly ignorant of the names of those whom he was carrying. He actually, and in answer to a direct question from Col. Curtis, denied that Lieut. Bowditch was one of them. He did not get any water for the Lieutenant and his still more suffering comrade, although both *longed and asked for it!* *A wretched and dying Sergeant begged much for it, and in vain!* Had it not been for the kindness of Col. Curtis, who, after *much difficulty*, found out where my son was, no water would probably have been procured for either of the parched sufferers. As it was, it arrived at last, *too late* for the Sergeant, who was so much exhausted as to be unable to avail himself of the cup, finally proffered him by his wounded comrade.

I mention these shortcomings, as I deem them, of the Administration and of Congress, with great reluctance, and without a trace of any feeling, save of sorrow. A few months ago, when treating of this same subject, I felt, and may have, at times, expressed, indignation, — not an unrighteous one, however, I hope, — at such neglect. Now, with the solemn memories of the past few weeks resting on me, I am sure that all will believe that sadness, not anger, must be uppermost in my mind. But I would fain plead, with all the earnestness a stricken father might be supposed to have,

when in sight of the mangled dead body of a darling, first-born son, that *such enormities, as are now liable to happen, under the present want of any proper ambulance system in the United States army, shall not be permitted hereafter.*

So far as the ensuing summer campaign is to be considered, it is already too late to do anything. The Senate of the United States, under the leadership of the Chairman of its Military Committee — an honorable Senator from Massachusetts — refused, a few days before the late Congress adjourned, to concur in the passage of a bill, previously passed, unanimously, by the House of Representatives. I am not an advocate of any *particular bill* or *special plan*. I only ask for *some system*. The Senate considered the plan proposed “impracticable,” and therefore declined doing *anything!** If all things were managed by mortals, according to such a mode of reasoning, very little progress would be made, very little humanity be practised, in this world. *The Senate and Government of this free people, decline to do for its citizen volunteer soldiery, what every despot of Europe carefully looks after, with reference to his conscripts or his hirelings!*

Some have asked, “But does not the Government do all it can? What do you want?” My reply is, a corps of detailed soldiers, or, what may be deemed better, a corps of honest, brave, and humane men, enlisted for this special duty, is needed. Such a corps exists in every army in Europe. I have now before me a pamphlet devoted solely to giving an account of the French and English ambulance systems. From it I will quote the following table :

TABLE A. General table, showing the formation, in the number of men employed, the amount and character of materials used, and the means of transportation, of an active ambulance service for a division of 10,000 men, and the sections of said ambulance service, that should follow the advancing columns of any smaller force.

	AMBULANCE SECTIONS FOR COLUMNS OF												OBSERVATIONS.				
	Ambulance Division for 10,000 men.		8 to 9,000 men.		6 to 7,000 men.		4 to 5,000 men.		2 to 3,000 men.		15 to 1800 men.			1,000 men.			
	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.		Number.	Transport. Mules.		
Surgeon-in-Chief.....	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Head Apothecary.....	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
First Assistant Surgeons.....	4	..	3	..	3	..	2	..	1	..	2	..	1	..	1	..	..
Second Assistant Surgeons.....	10	..	8	..	8	..	6	..	4	..	2	..	1	..	1	..	..
Chief Executive Officer.....	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	..
Assistant Executive Officers.....	6	..	4	..	4	..	3	..	2	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	..
Subordinate } Sergeants.....	6	..	4	..	4	..	4	..	3	..	1	..	1	..	1	..	..
} Corporals.....	8	..	6	..	6	..	4	..	4	..	2	..	2	..	1	..	..
} Soldiers.....	90	..	75	..	65	..	55	..	40	..	25	..	23	..	23	..	..
Total.....	127	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

	MULES AND ARTICLES NEEDED FOR AMBULANCE CAMP.																
	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.	Number.	Transport. Mules.					
Cases for the Surgical Department.....	8	4	6	3	4	3	4	3	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
“ for the Dispensary.....	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4
“ Exec. Dept., implements and furniture,	12	6	10	5	10	5	10	5	8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
“ of supplies for the Health Service.....	18	9	14	7	12	6	8	4	7	6	8	4	6	6	3	3	3
“ “ “ “ “ Exec. Service.....	22	11	20	10	16	8	14	7	8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
“ “ “ “ “ for the Health and Executive Corps,	26	13	22	11	22	11	18	9	14	7	8	4	4	4	4	4	4
“ “ “ “ “ Ambulance Casks.....	10	5	8	4	8	4	8	4	6	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	2
“ “ “ “ “ Letters.....	20	2	16	2	12	2	12	1	10	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0

The amounts given here apply to the ambulances of the piles of columns, and are within the limits of our outposts; that is to say, within reach of the centre of supplies.

The pamphlet from which this table is taken is one of 70 pages octavo, and is written by Mons. Boudin, Chief Physician of the Military Hospital at Boule, Paris.*

From the table, the reader will see the number of officers and men and apparatus, connected with the ambulance service of the French army.

That service, it appears, is capable of being divided so that a certain portion of its effective force and supplies can be readily selected, at a short notice, for any number of regiments or brigades, &c.

The United States, doubtless, provides freely of supplies, but it steadily refuses to have any drilled corps to administer these supplies, in the most humane and most efficient manner. All is left, in a great measure, to chance!

A chance man carried Lieut. Bowditch from the field. Nothing scarcely was known until Col. Curtis sought for and found him, in the last carriage. The driver knew not whom he was carrying, though both of the wounded men were fully able to report their names and regiments. He had shamefully neglected to have water in his vehicle, or to get it for the sufferers, when one of them earnestly asked for it.

It may appear an absurdity to a military man, that a civilian should pretend to have any opinion upon the subject. But it seems to me that our immense armies need a corps of men for these special duties, of looking

* *Système des Ambulances des Armées Française et Anglaise; Instructions qui règlent cette branche du service administratif et medical, par M. Boudin, Officier de la Legion d' Honneur, Medicin en chef de l' Hospital Militaire du Boule. Avec trois planches. Paris: J. B. Bailliere. 1855.*

after the wounded soldier, as much as we need a special surgical corps, special paymasters, a special engineer corps, special men for cavalry, infantry, artillery service, &c. Certainly, the object is sufficiently great and humane. When thousands of men are inevitably to be wounded, it would seem to be perfectly suicidal in the Government, even in a selfish point of view, not to have a corps enlisted or detailed, to save as many as can be saved. As it is now, if a soldier be once put even temporarily, *hors du combat*, it would seem as if the Government were wholly indifferent whether he lived or died.

Again, by having such a corps, the number of combatants would not be so rapidly lessened, as it is now, by several men taking one wounded from the field.*

Such an ambulance corps should consist of able-bodied, brave men, — men not afraid to go to the front to save a fallen fellow-man. They should have a distinctive uniform. Arrangements might be concluded whereby the ambulance corps, in both armies, should be considered as the laws of war usually regard pickets, that is, as not to be molested in their specific duties, save perhaps, under extraordinary circumstances. Doubtless, many of such a body would fall, but it would be from random shots, and not from the voluntary barbarism of either army. It would be a brave, and noble, Christian death. Such a corps should take its place near the battle-field. It should be well trained to march, immediately to raise and carry off the wounded

* One surgeon told me he saw eight men carrying off one wounded soldier! Four were bearers — and four were intended for “relief” — and were walking by the hill, doing nothing. Few if any of these men returned to their posts.

with the least suffering possible. It could attend to minor points of surgery, and act as nurses, or cooks on the field, in tent, and in hospital, &c. Is it too much to hope that, at some future day, similar corps, from any two belligerent armies, will, under certain restrictions, be allowed to mingle together, upon the field, more immediately after the termination of a battle, than is now allowed? If, by mutual agreement between two contending parties, this object could be gained, a *vast* amount of *extra* suffering would be prevented, and, doubtless, many lives saved. There are hundreds of details, that might be named, in which such a corps would be invaluable. Every great European nation has such, in its armies, thoroughly trained. Why cannot we have such?

There *is* no *valid* reason. On the contrary, I have good reason for believing that it is the arbitrary will of one mind, and to which even Senators bow, that has prevented all action. Many persons have vainly appealed to the President. The Medical Societies of some of the large States have appealed to him, and to the War Department. Committees, and private citizens of New York and Boston have earnestly asked of Congress, of General Halleck, and of Mr. Stanton, to do *something*. All efforts, thus far, have been fruitless.

I now make one more appeal, but this time not to any one man, or to Congress, but to our Imperial "Cæsar," the People! The People must take this matter into its own hands, and *compel* the Government to look fairly at the whole subject.

The people are willing their sons should dedicate their young, heroic lives to this Holy War, this Blossom-

ing-out of Centuries. We have, even in our bereavement at their death, a certain triumphant joy, if they, as instruments of High Heaven, be accounted worthy to be martyrs in so sacred a cause. But we have a right to demand that they shall not be *needlessly tortured*, or thrown aside, like their own wounded steeds, to die perhaps by the wayside, for want of proper care from our Government. If any government under Heaven ought to be *paternal*, the United States authority, deriving, as it does, all its powers from the people, should surely be such, and should dispense that power, in full streams of benignant mercy upon its soldiers, when wounded in its defence.

I look forward, with dismay, at the *extra* suffering that may fall on thousands of the splendid youths, now in our army, during the ensuing summer campaign. Fortunately for the Army of the Potomac, as long ago as August last, General McClellan established a certain ambulance system of detailed soldiers, and under the enlightened suggestions of Dr. Letterman, Medical Director of the same army, I learn that much good was accomplished by it after the Fredericksburg fight. But the facts of my son's case have proved that the arrangements of the Army of the Potomac are still imperfect, and there are other armies, in which not even this imperfect system exists. I am authorized to state as the deliberate opinion of General McClellan himself, that the arrangements in vogue in the Army of the Potomac, while he was in command, might still be improved, he does not consider that by any means as complete.* It

* Appendix C. See letter from General McClellan.

was evidently introduced to meet a want, not radically to supply the deficiency. I rejoice however, to think that, under the present enlightened chieftain of the brave army, thus alluded to, Major-General Hooker, aided by members of his professional staff, an immense amount of suffering will be prevented. But this statement only brings out into bolder relief the utter chaos, that exists almost everywhere else along our lines; a chaos only relieved by the fact that man's sufferings, the world over, always appeal to man. The wounded soldier *will* be taken some care of, *even when forsaken by his government!*

Let me not be misunderstood, I claim to be *intensely* loyal to this Administration. It is the government of my choice, I have been striving to get such a government, for over twenty years. I will ever do what I can to sustain it. But it will never do for me, with my views of honorable loyalty to a government, to keep out of sight such plain shortcomings on the part of those in power. More especially, do I feel called upon to speak and write plainly on this subject, because I believe that all that is really wanted is an enlightened public sentiment upon the matter. When that comes the Government will, of course, be compelled to attend to it. Let me not therefore be considered disloyal, when, while endeavoring to enlighten the people, I would also strive to make the Government, truly noble, generous, and humane, in this department of its administration. Those individuals are the really disloyal, who would check such endeavors.

I care, however, very little what interpretation may be put upon my conduct at the present time and in the

past, but I wish it fairly understood that I *cannot* do otherwise, and be true to the instincts, implanted in me as I believe, by God, for my guidance. Such being the fact, I shall always, on all proper and perhaps, on what, some may deem, improper occasions, continue to urge upon the public and upon the Government attention to this matter.

In conclusion, let me, therefore, earnestly appeal to every man and woman in this country, to do his or her share toward bringing about a better state of things. Let the hapless sufferings and bleeding forms of thousands of our noblest youth, wounded or slain in this holy war for the Republic's Life, and for human liberty, plead for this cause. Let every one, who has a friend now in the army, remember what that loved one may be called upon to endure, in consequence of this culpable neglect of those now in power. Every one of you has some influence. Let that influence, however great or trivial it may seem to yourself, be brought to bear, either by letter or by personal conversation, upon every member of the Government, the President and his Cabinet, and Senators and Representatives. Let the press be made to speak. The blessings of "him who is ready to perish," will fall like Heaven's own dew upon your hearts, if ye steadily and faithfully pursue this subject, and do your share toward its perfect accomplishment.

Even at this very hour, while these pages are passing through the press, the moans of thousands of our dying youth have been rising from the battle-fields of

Fredericksburg, begging each one of you to do your duty to them ; and demand of our Senators that they shall no longer decline to do *anything* toward establishing *some* ambulance system in the armies of the Republic. Do not, I beg of you, believe that Massachusetts has done all her duty in this particular. On the contrary, she stands convicted of the fact that one Senator reported against a bill, and the other stood by at the time, and said not one word to prevent the atrocious neglect of a most plain duty on the part of Government. Our present State Executive has urged this subject, *again and again*, upon the President and those in power, but all in vain. Both Senators from Massachusetts are either dumb, or in open opposition to all action in the premises.

I am well aware that, when the cause itself rises, by its magnitude, far above all special individual relations, any *personal* remarks are usually to be avoided. There are times, however, when justice and humanity demand them, as in the prophetic days of old. I come as no prophet, but simply as a *man*, and while thus singling out the Massachusetts Senators, I do so from no other motive than to bring, more forcibly, to the minds and hearts of the loyal North, the gross dereliction of duty, evinced by *every* Senator from the Free States.

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

Boylston Street, May 22, 1863.

A P P E N D I X .

A

The following are Reports of Drs. Stedman and Bowditch, who went with an ambulance train to the battle-field at Centreville. They are taken from Dr. Gay's Report to the War Committee of Ward IV. In introducing them, Dr. Gay says :

“The statements in reference to the ambulance drivers demand universal action to instantly correct this brutal custom.”

DR. GEORGE H. GAY : —

Dear Sir, — I beg to submit the following as a report of my experience during my late visit to the battle-field near Fairfax Court House, Va.

At 10 o'clock, Sept. 5, 1862, a message came to “Willard's,” in Washington, from Surgeon-General Hammond, that two surgeons were much needed at a spot between Fairfax Court House and Centreville, where many soldiers lay wounded and starving. Dr. Bowditch and myself immediately volunteered our services, and at 11 P. M., we started in a train of fifty ambulances for the scene of suffering. The distance to be travelled was about twenty-two miles. The halts on the way were numerous, and some were prolonged most unnecessarily, as it seemed to us. The horses were stout, the weather cool till after sunrise, and then warm, but the heat not exhausting. At the end of the journey we were to find men dying from starvation and neglect of surgical attendance ; and yet the horses must be allowed to walk a great portion of the way, and be watered every few miles, while the freight of each wagon was light. Beyond all example, the driver of the ambulance, in which it was my lot to ride, was the most vulgar, ignorant, and profane man I ever

came in contact with. But in contrast with him, the driver of the ambulance in which I returned, was one of the most humane men. He had been a soldier in the regular army for nine years — had been wounded in one of our earliest battles — and since his recovery had been employed as Government teamster. On the wagon-master's command to him to drive faster, and keep up with the ambulances ahead of ours, he remonstrated, saying the men in his wagon were suffering intolerably already, and he did not intend to make them suffer more if he could prevent it. His expressions of sympathy were frequent, and doubtless afforded some consolation to the wounded. One or two other drivers, who came under my notice, behaved themselves with becoming humanity and gentleness in their assistance of the sufferers; though, as a body, these drivers were such as would disgrace, it may be, any menials ever sent out to the aid of the sick and wounded. The wagon-masters themselves, of whom we expected better things, were not overborne, apparently, by any deep sentiments of compassion for the sufferers. I noticed that in going to the battle-field they took no pains to hasten on the train. On the contrary, as before said, the halts were too frequent and prolonged. But in returning, though admonished by the groans of the soldiers, which were continuous from one end of the train to the other, they often urged the teamsters to drive faster.

On arriving at our place of destination, *lying about on the grass or in an old house and its out houses*, we found about one hundred and fifty soldiers, suffering from gunshot wounds of every description, inflicted five or six days before. Two had been shot through the lungs; one through both thighs and scrotum; some through the abdomen. In short, no part of the body had escaped. Four surgeons of the army were in attendance; but from want of food and sleep they were nearly exhausted; and being unable to perform but little duty, they requested me to remove some limbs, which operations were necessary to the more favorable transportation of the wounded to Washing-

ton. These were an amputation of the thigh, for a wound of the knee-joint and compound fracture of the former; and an amputation of an arm, for compound fracture and extensive laceration at elbow-joint.

And here let me notice the kind and assiduous attention to his wounded, of Dr. Joseph W. Hastings, Assistant-Surgeon, 21st Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, who was indefatigable in his service to all under his care. It was evident that his readiness, gentleness, and quiet cheerfulness, as well as skill and capacity, had won the gratitude of his regiment. I would not depreciate the merits of the other surgeons at this station. I speak thus of Dr. Hastings only because of my more frequent opportunities of witnessing his conduct.

On the following morning, after dressing many wounds, I accompanied Dr. H. to the rebel hospital, about four miles farther, on the Warrenton road, for the purpose of removing Capt. Kelton, of the 21st Regiment, whose thigh had been amputated by Dr. Miller, the rebel surgeon. We found four of our soldiers there, and about seventy-five wounded rebels, lying on the hay in a very comfortable stone barn. I observed that the medicines and surgical appliances used there had Philadelphia labels. Had they been captured, stolen, or smuggled? Our men expressed themselves gratified with the attention they had received from the rebel doctor; for which I could do no less than thank him. We then placed Capt. K. in the ambulance, and returned to our hospital.

In the afternoon we loaded the ambulances with the wounded, and at 4½ o'clock started for Washington, which, after a night of horror, made such by the cries and groans of the sufferers, the drunkenness, profanity, and inhumanity of the drivers, we reached about four o'clock the next morning. The men were deposited in the various hospitals in the city, and at noon I found some of them, those two especially upon whom I had operated, contented and cheerful as possible under the circumstances.

I shall never forget the anxiety with which I watched for the

safety of those two men. But one ligature had been required in securing the artery in the thigh. Suppose from the constant jolting of the wagon, or from any other cause, that ligature should have come off; or that such should have been the case with the man whose arm had been lost, how could life have been saved? No one ambulance would have been allowed to stop, as the whole train would have then been compelled to wait, and the sufferings of all the other wounded would have been increased or prolonged. Thank Heaven no such accident occurred, and I hope no one was permanently afflicted by this sad journey.

It will appear from this narration that our expedition to Virginia was not unattended with good results to those whose distresses we were called on to succor. For my own part, I feel that should the sad opportunity again offer itself, the experience I have thus gained would avail for a more satisfactory service than any before rendered.

Respectfully, your friend and servant,

C. H. STEDMAN.

At a meeting of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, held Sept. 22, 1862, Dr. Bowditch remarked as follows:

“ I desire to bring before the Society a subject of great importance to the future welfare of our wounded soldiers; although, at first sight, it may not seem exactly appropriate for a meeting of this Society.

“ During my recent visit to Washington with other physicians, summoned there by the Secretary of War, I was brought immediately in contact with the abominable system, or rather no system, of ambulances now in use in our army. The atrocities I saw committed, are, I think, a sufficient reason for bringing the subject before you, in order that, either by the individual effort of the members, or by the united action of the Society, public opinion may be made so strong as to force the Government to devise some plan more in accordance with common humanity, and more truly military in its discipline.

“ On the evening of Friday, Sept. 5, at the request of the surgeon-general, I joined an ambulance train that was just starting to go to the relief of our starving and wounded men, near Centreville. There was a train of fifty carriages. I subsequently learned that three of the drivers, afraid of entering the enemy's lines, escaped with their ambulance wagons before we reached Long Bridge. This was easily accomplished, as there was no escort; and, as it subsequently appeared, no power to prevent such an event. It is true that an army-surgeon accompanied and gave general directions to the train, but he was in the first wagon, and could not know what was doing towards the end of the long train. I soon perceived that the drivers were men of the lowest character, evidently taken from the vilest purlieu of Washington, merely as common drivers, and for no other qualification. Their oaths were flaunted forth without the least regard to the presence of superiors, and with a profusion that was really remarkable, even in the vicinity of Washington. The driver of my ambulance became sleepy as the night wore on, and as his zigzag course over a Virginia road was rather perilous, and as he informed me that he had been overturned a few weeks previously, I thought it more prudent to drive myself, rather than to allow him to do so. While the moon was up, this was comparatively easy. He accordingly slept inside of the carriage until 3 or 4 A. M.; he then reluctantly again took the reins, because I was unwilling, owing to the darkness, to drive further. His whole deportment during the night showed a disregard for everything save his own comfort.

“ Early in the forenoon, however, appeared on the part of the drivers of nearly one half the train, a total want of discipline, and a forgetfulness of the object and character of our mission, that seemed to me atrocious. Suddenly, I perceived one half of the train was stopping, and all the drivers leaving their carriages, rushed into an adjacent field, and there spent some minutes in stoning and shaking the trees in an apple and

peach orchard; and all this in the presence of part of the family of a Virginia planter! These individuals made no resistance. They apparently thought it would be of no use; for over all this road had the two armies swept again and again. In vain I pleaded that we were breaking the sacredness of the flag of truce, — that we richly deserved death for plundering private property. In vain I urged the inhumanity of leaving our suffering, starving soldiers, in order to fill their own greedy stomachs. I appealed to one of the three leaders who rode on horseback, and pretended to be the leaders of the train. He only smiled a smile of ineffable contempt, and munched his stolen apple with perfect *nonchalance*. Meanwhile the flag of truce was lost afar off in the distance, and our party was obliged to drive, for some time, with great rapidity in order to overtake it. Just as my carriage started, a heavy stone struck it not very far from my head. It had evidently been hurled, and *justly* hurled, at us for our infamous conduct. I remarked that hereafter I should know why our ambulances were fired upon by the enemy. The only answer I obtained was an oath.

“About mid-day we arrived, and found our men in a most piteous condition, lying everywhere, inside and outside of every building connected with a small farm-house. The negro-quarters was a palace, — the manure-heap was a soft bed. The fairest place was under a wide-spreading tree. I found the drivers did not feel it to be their duty to help the sufferers, but sulked, or swore, or laughed, as it pleased each. On the following morning, it is true, I did persuade my own driver to bring to me water, as I was dressing the wounds of the soldiers; but it was difficult even to get that, and he aided me because I asked him to do so, and not because he had any heart in the work.

“On Saturday, P. M., we started for Washington, — all the sick having been arranged in different ambulances, under charge of various surgeons. That night I shall never forget. I had taken one of those most severely wounded under my own

special charge. The ball had passed into his chest, and caused intense difficulty of breathing. He was a German, and one of the most uncomplaining of sufferers; and his broken words of gratitude for the slightest token of kindness, were most touching. None but a brute could have failed to be kind to him. He could lie only on one side, and consequently his head was placed directly behind my driver. During the first part of the way, I did not think that the driver paid the least attention to the road with reference to the comfort of the patient. In early night, his tongue ran glibly on in loud, indifferent talk, or the vilest profanity,—thus preventing all sleep. As the night progressed, I was distressed to find that the whiskey, with which he probably had supplied himself, was having its usual soporific effect, and he fell back upon the panting form of my patient. I lifted him up, and told him I could not allow such treatment of the sick man. The only response I got was a muttered oath of “men complaining,” &c. But it was all in vain. Again and again did he fall back, until at last I took the reins, and drove most of the night with one hand, while with the other I supported this snoring drunkard!

“Of course, I repeated all these facts in a letter to the Surgeon-General. He assured me that I could not tell him anything new—that he had, months since, foretold to the Secretary of War the horrors, that would occur with such a set of wretches as usually were found in a body of ambulance drivers—that he had vainly endeavored to obtain *some system*, but there was none now. The whole of the ambulances are under the Quartermaster’s department. He (the Surgeon-General,) had not the control of a single carriage. All his efforts had been in vain.”

“I want now,” continued Dr. Bowditch, “through this Society, to create a public sentiment that will compel the Government to attend to this matter, and to have a real ambulance corps. Dr. Hammond (the Surgeon-General) is not wedded to any plan; but he has suggested the appointment of six am-

bulances to each regiment, and three men to each ambulance, viz: one driver and two assistants. The latter would take the wounded, in a careful, methodical manner, from the field. This would prevent, in some measure, the soldiers from leaving their ranks, and would likewise be more humane for the wounded. All the corps would be under strict military discipline. But I repeat, all that is desired is, that some plan be adopted. Now all is chaos. I make no motion on this matter, but leave these facts before the Society, hoping that they will, in some way, tend to relieve our suffering soldiers."

Dr. J. Mason Warren moved that Dr. Bowditch be requested to reduce his remarks to writing, and that the facts be laid before the public in the journals of the day.

Dr. H. W. Williams moved that Dr. Bowditch be a Committee to report some plan of address to the Secretary of War, to be sent by the physicians of Massachusetts, in furtherance of some plan for the establishment of a United States Ambulance Corps.

S. L. ABBOTT, *Chairman of Meeting.*

FRANCIS MINOT, *Secretary.*

B

MR. WILSON, OF MASSACHUSETTS :

“THE Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, to whom was referred the bill (A. R. No. 719,) in relation to Military Hospitals and to organize an ambulance corps, have instructed me to report it back with a recommendation that it do not pass. I will not make the motion for its indefinite postponement, but let it go on the table.

“I will simply say that this bill has passed the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Military Affairs have considered it with a great deal of care. There is great interest in the country in regard to it, but we think it an impracticable measure to organize such a corps at this time.”

[In the Senate, February 24, 1863.]

From Washington Globe.

C

NEW YORK, *February 21, 1863.*

HENRY I. BOWDITCH, M. D., Boston.

MY DEAR SIR: I owe you an apology for my long delay in replying to your letter of the 2d, but it was mislaid, and I could not conveniently reply without the letter before me.

You ask me —

“1st. Is there at present any uniform ambulance system in the army of the United States?”

There is not, unless quite recently introduced.

“2d. Do you deem *any system* necessary?”

Clearly so. I think that any general officer who has served with troops in the field will declare such a system as essential, not only in regard to the comfort of sick and wounded, but to secure efficiency.

3d. Should the men in the ambulance corps be detailed soldiers, taken from time to time from the ranks ; or should they be men enlisted for the purpose and taught their especial duties ?

There are many self-evident objections to the system of taking men temporarily from the ranks for this duty ; they need instructions in their peculiar functions, as well as the ordinary discipline, and should have a distinctive uniform. I am of the opinion that men should be enlisted especially for duty in the ambulance corps.

4th. Do you think the establishment of such a corps would increase the number of non-combatants ?

I think it would *decrease* the number of non-combatants especially during battles.

In conclusion, I would beg to repeat what I have previously said to you in substance, that is, that I regard the formation of a well organized ambulance corps as one of the great desiderata for our armies.

Again, expressing my regret that I have so long delayed replying to your letter,

I am dear sir, very truly yours,

GEORGE B. McCLELLAN,

Major-General U. S. A.

