

CORRESPONDENCE.

HOSPITAL EXPERIENCES IN SANTIAGO DE CUBA.

Santiago, Sept. 2, 1898.

This has been a particularly trying day, to both patients and nurses. While several of the men are at death's door and many others far too ill to be moved, a number of convalescents are openly rejoicing in the promise of speedy departure. It cannot be denied that the happiness of the fortunate ones adds a deeper tinge of blue to the home sickness of their comrades who have no such bright prospects in the near future. Yet more unselfish mortals were never met than those soldiers of Uncle Sam. An example of this is the young lieutenant from northern Michigan, who occupies a cot in the hospital corridor, and whose minutes on earth are numbered. He came through the battle unscathed, though weakened, of course, from its days of hunger and hard experiences. Afterwards, like all his company, he had "the fever"—out in camp where the men were lying on the rain-soaked ground, alternately sweltering at noon-day, drenched in the afternoon downpour and shivering with cold at night. They had low dog tents, nearly enough to go around by close crowding, but no cots, and in most cases not even a blanket, the men having been compelled to throw away their kits before the fight. No wonder that for days together only two men out of a regiment were able to report for duty! An overworked army surgeon made occasional rounds, but his only medicine was quinine, and for men dying of dysentery there was no food but the usual beans, bacon and hard-tack. It would have required the entire time of a strong man to satisfy the demands of the fevered for water—the nearest well being half a mile away. This young lieutenant and the chaplain of his company did heroic service, forgetting their own sufferings in the care of others, spending their last penny to procure necessities for needier comrades, writing home letters, taking farewell words for distant loved ones and closing the eyes of the dying. The chaplain read the burial service for eighteen men in one day—all of them his personal friends. Shortly afterwards his own turn came to join "the silent majority;" and now the young lieutenant is dying.

Another hero in the same row, who is slowly recovering from a dreadful wound received at El Caney, is best introduced to you in the words of Doctor Winifd Egan, the Red Cross surgeon from Boston. Said he: "Mr. George Kennen and I were tramping over the field, thirty-six hours after the battle, doing what we could to relieve the agony of men who yet lay where they fell, unattended through the long hot days and longer nights. The handful of army surgeons were working like Trojans in their improvised hospital miles away, but the field was a very big one and their force woefully insufficient. Among the former I recognized a former college chum—a young New Yorker, who might draw his check any day for several hundred thousand dollars.

Shot through the body and writhing with pain, he lay in the wet grass, without even a blanket; it was raining in torrents and a chilly night was coming on—the third night after the battle. I managed to secure a rubber poncho, (the modest doctor did not say that it was his own), and spread it over my wounded friend. "No, no," said he, "take it to that poor fellow over there. I am only hurt—he is dying." Obe-

ying his earnest request, we left him uncovered and took the poncho to the man indicated. The latter was a private soldier, whose throat had been plowed open by a mauser bullet. During the first twenty-four hours his pleadings for water agonized all within hearing.

There was no water at hand, had any of his suffering comrades been able to give it to him. Now his cries had subsided to low moans and life was almost extinct. When we bent over him with a canteen of the long-desired water, he was past swallowing, and died with a grateful smile while we were bathing the poor, swollen throat. And still my friend refused the poncho, but insisted that it was more needed by a strapping 19, who lay near crazy as a loon and babbling of home and mother. I am happy to add to Dr. Egan's account that this brave rough rider, of whom New York may well be proud, will not die, though he may be permanently disabled.

Although there is so little selfishness among the brave boys who faced death together, the hospital attendants say that whenever a new lot of men start for home, the sight of their exuberant happiness has a correspondingly depressing effect upon the stay-behinds, raising the fever-pulse fully fifty per cent. The poor fellows are so homesick that "mal de las," as the Spaniards call it, has become a distinct and often fatal disease, which medicine cannot touch. Suddenly the strains of "Home, sweet home" invaded the silence of the hospital and an electric shock could not have produced a more marked and instantaneous effect. Every man who was able sprang to his feet and the dying raised their feeble heads; tears coursed unchecked down bronzed and pallid faces and busy nurses and doctors paused, spell-bound in their weary rounds. So, even from his grave, does the homeless poet still touch the hearts of the world with his tuneful praise of home. Under the circumstances, however, it was thoughtless, not to say unkind, in the jubilant fellows headed for "God's country"—to make that music within hearing of their disappointed comrades.

The surroundings of the hospital are always interesting, though never inspiring; vile-smelling, greenish water close under its corridors; ships at anchor in the harbor—transports, men-of-war, merchant vessels, Spanish prizes;—the sea-ward view interrupted by the crumbling pink and yellow walls of the old Morro de San Jago. On the shoreward side an amphitheater of low, green hills, topped here and there by a now dismantled Spanish fort; in front, the gray, poverty-stricken town, shambling up its steep declivity. The "suspect" pen—a smaller boat-house a few rods from our hospital, also built out over the water and reached by another long pier—continues to send its frequent cargoes of yellow fever patients and corpses to Siboney. Day after day, as I sit in our corridors—keeping the flies off this sick man, reading to that one, or feeding another—I see the little boat, with its tell-tale yellow flag, come up to the stairs of "the pen." I put myself between it and my patient's range of vision; but though we both pretend to ignore it, we know too well what is going on. Some stiff, still shapes, lashed to planks, are brought down the stairs and put aboard the boat, followed by a

mournful procession of soldiers, sick unto death. If the latter are alive when they reach Siboney, sixteen miles distant, they will go into the great yellow fever hospital, with perhaps one chance in ten of recovery; and the shapes are bound for cremation somewhere down the river.

One of the near-by hills, greener than the rest, with gruesome suggestions of exuberant verdure, is faced on its waterside with the high adobe walls and massive gateway of a Campo Santo. It needs no funeral urns and carved crosses to indicate the purpose of that enclosure—the vulture—that continually circle above it, attracted by the odors they love, tell its horrible story of bursting vaults and shallow, rented graves from which bones are evicted to make room for new tenants. Nothing affects our sick men so unpleasantly as the sight of these disgusting buzzards, which abound everywhere in tropical countries and have increased a hundred fold in Cuba within the last three years. Impelled by their uncanny instinct of approaching death, they often fly so low over the open corridors of the hospital that one could almost touch them with one's hand and occasionally a gorged bird drops into midst a reeking chunk of carrion from its tired claws. Such is the soldiers' horror of these most loathsome creatures of the air that a near-by glimpse of one will sometimes throw a nervous invalid into convulsions. And no wonder—for they have seen them on battlefields, perhaps tearing at the faces of dead comrades. I have heard the men talk among themselves about the vultures and tell each other stories of personal experiences. They all feel that the nauseous birds form the chief horror of war and know too well the meaning of their approach when the dead are lying in the underbrush. One man says that after the fighting at Barikurri, he lay two days on the field, wounded in the thigh, shooting at the buzzards as they settled down to their feast—and that he believes another hour of it would have left him a raving maniac. Do you remember that horrible old picture of the Jewish mother madly beating off the vultures from the bodies of her five sons, hanged in a row? There is a wounded rough rider in the hospital who looks the personification of courage, but who trembles and shudders whenever a vulture is seen, even afar off like a black speck in the sky. They say that he fought like a tiger in the taking of Santiago and never flinched in the face of Spanish guns but afterwards, when he lay in the long grass with a bullet in his breast, he went into a hysterical fit when he saw the vultures coming, cowering away from them and crying like a frightened child. He knew they would not molest his own body so long as life lingered in it; but there were still shapes lying all around, upon which the evil birds settled in clouds. There was a sound of tearing—and when the black clouds lifted, there was nothing left of each shape but clean-picked bones and bloody rags of uniform. Yet there is a good deal to be said in favor of the vultures, the scavengers of the tropics. Without them the pestilence which follows close on the heels of war would claim more victims than shot and shell. Their work of sanitation, though terrible to think of—guided by unerring instinct to corpses hid in the chapparel which the burial parties fail to find is as necessary as that of their fellows above the Persian Towers of Silence.

Immediately in front of the hospital is the new "immune" camp—their white tents strung in triple rows half a mile or more along the waterside streets of Santiago. When the sun shines, the men appear to be having a pretty good time—cracking noisy jokes, pitching quilts and playing cards, grouped in-