

The following report of Chaplain Van Burkelow embodies the difficulties he is obliged to encounter in the performance of his duties :

WEST'S BUILDINGS GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Baltimore, Maryland, August 24, 1864.* G. S. GRIFFITH, ESQ., *Chairman U. S. Christian Commission-*.

gIR :—In compliance with your request, I take pleasure in giving you an account of my work for your forth-coming Annual Report.

This Hospital was established on the 19th of September, 1862. and I reported for duty in it on the 20th of the following October. It was then filled with patients, who were wounded at the battle of Antietam. An extensive field of usefulness was open before me, but there was very few conveniences for my work. There was no chapel, nor Chaplain's office ; and for lack of room none have been given me yet. I commenced to hold Divine Services in the *Dining room*, but, as it was not heated, I was soon driven by approaching winter to the wards, where, without any seats gave the beds, and a few chairs, I have had to hold all our meetings ever since during cold weather. Until very recently funeral services were not allowed in the dining room, and, saving the use of a small tent a short time, they had to be held in the open air, without shelter, shade, or seats. From these unfavorable facts, together with many embarrassing circumstances, I have found it difficult to keep up a religious interest and an elevated moral tone. But, while I have often been mortified at the meagre fruits of my labors, I have the pleasant conscientiousness of having endeavored to do my duty, and am rejoiced to know that all has not been altogether vain in the Lord." The greatest harvest of spiritual good has been reaped at the sick bed ; and I expect to meet many a one in heaven who was born again in " West's Buildings" under my pastoral care.

After the battle of Gettysburg, ours was made a distributing hospital; and for a month the wounded poured through its portals by thousands, sometimes, only staying long enough to have their wounds dressed, and to be refreshed by something to eat, and —"tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep." The Union soldiers came first, and then the Rebels. When this stream of bleeding humanity subsided, we retained enough to fill the hospital. The most of those remaining were Rebels. Many were professors of religion, and they generally attended Divine services well. Indeed, they urged me to hold extra meetings, and to gratify them, and at the same time keep up separate prayer meetings for Union men, I had to establish a system of double duty in this respect, and for nearly four months I held two meetings for each party of evenings, and one for both together on Sabbath afternoon every week.

On the 1st of January last, a Reading Room was opened in one end of an empty ward. We fitted it up with carpet and flags, maps and engravings, and furnished it with about thirty papers, daily and weekly. The most of the weeklies and the two German dailies of Baltimore were sent gratis, by the publishers. We already had a small library, collected by ladies of the Union Relief Association. This was considerably increased by a number of liberal contributions from booksellers in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston. With all these attractions, it had many daily visitors and proved a great blessing to the hospital. But, alas ! it was a short-lived institution. The room had to be taken for a ward again in the spring, and we have no other appropriate place for the books, and papers.

On the 18th of April, we received one hundred and five released prisoners of war from Richmond. They were mere living skeletons, the most emaciated and cadaverous set of human beings I ever saw, and they were literally covered with vermin and filth, while some had no shirts, and what clothes they wore were in shreds. Nearly all, when captured, were well, but when released they were almost dead. Their condition were striking contrast with that of the Rebels remaining here, who were brought from the battlefield severely wounded, but who were then well, fat, and fit for the field again, while our men, who were in robust health when they fell into Rebel hands, were then, from slow starvation, ready to tottle into the grave. Nearly half died in less than a month after their arrival, and others went home to die ere long. Oh! shame where is thy blush? But, thank God I there was some relief to the dark picture. A large majority of those who died, were lead by their sufferings to seek the Saviour, and were renewed in righteousness, while passing through the fires of affliction, kindled by Rebel cruelty and crime. Some had been Christians for years and had kept the faith ;-" but the most "laid hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel/" after reaching our hospital. One of the most triumphant deaths was that of John S. White, an Ohio soldier. His fatal disease was consumption. He was so weak when he arrived that he could not walk, and lie gradually wasted away and went down to the grave. But he could say with one of yore, " when I am weak, then I am strong/" He was "strong in the Lord," and happy in the hope of Heaven. His faith was unwavering, and his "peace flowed as a river/" He often expressed to me a lively hope of a blessed immortality, and when the hour of his dissolution came, his joy was truly ecstatic, and after I had prayed with him, he exclaimed, while gasping for breath, " Blessed Jesus ! Precious Saviour! Oh! that I had strength to praise Him ! How I long to be with Him above !" Thus he passed away in holy, signal triumph.

We now have over three hundred rebel patients in hospital, who were wounded in the battle of Monocacy. Many of them are professors of religion, and the convalescents are generally regular in attendance upon Divine services. They even attended preaching on the day recently set apart by the President for *public humiliation and prayer*, and listened respectfully to a thoroughly anti-slavery sermon. True, some left the room instanter upon my pronouncing slavery a great national sin, and the chief cause of the Avar, but the most kept their seats until I closed. At their request, I am holding two special meetings a week in their wards, besides the two regular services. A few take part in the exercises, with humble manner and modest fervor; and, however paradoxical it may seem, I am sure that some of them are truly pious, notwithstanding the unparalleled political wickedness of the cause in which they are engaged. It is charitable to suppose that the-power of prejudice and social influence produces moral disability on some subjects, in some sections, and that, in such a case, sin is not imputed. However, the most of those who are unmistakably walking in the narrow way of life, have, with more or less explicitness, assured me that they were opposed to the rebellion, and that but for compulsion, they would never have taken up arms. One of evident piety, told me so a few days ago upon a dying bed. He died yesterday in the triumphs of grace, and his disembodied spirit is doubtless to-day in the paradise of God. I met quite a number of Union men among the prisoners of war last year, and I have long since learned to pity a large proportion of the privates in the rebel army as poor sheep led to the slaughter, and unwilling agents of treason and death, under the iron despotism of the South.

Our hospital is greatly indebted to the *Christian Commission* for various stores, from time to time. The papers, pamphlets and tracts, which I often receive, are generally read "by the men, and do much good. Your recent loan of books is highly prized, and will be the means of moral elevation and enlightenment to many a young man, I trust, through the grace of God.

Hoping that the *Christian Commission* may still prosper in its labor of love, and asking pardon for my prolixity, I will now come to a close.

Yours truly,

J. T. VAN BURKALOW,

Chaplain, T.J. S. A

*NOTE: Other lists show him as "James T. Burkelow (Del.)*

Source: <http://books.google.com/books?pg=PA69&dq=van%20burkelow&ei=4MAKTbuXOMKt8Aa0ldmhAQ&ct=result&id=-iypbKBua0YC&output=text>