

Gettysburg and the Christian Commission

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Review

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Do Unto Others

Competing groups offered aid to the dying

Throughout history it seems the best in people is often brought out during the worst of times. The Civil War is just one example in our nation's history when in the middle of all the killing and maiming there is evidence of good in many of us and the battle at Gettysburg is just one of the numerous moments when individuals put their feelings and politics aside to aid those in need. **Gettysburg and the Christian Commission** by Daniel J. Hoisington is a collection of essays, which describe the many efforts made by the Christian Commission to bring aid and comfort to people no matter what their beliefs might be. Mr. Hoisington is the president of Edinborough Press in Roseville, Minnesota. He has an M.A. in American History from the University of Virginia. He has written over a dozen books and is the editor of *Our Army Nurses: Stories from Women in the Civil War* by Mary Gardner Holland.

The United States Christian Commission was formed in November 1861 as an independent organization from the Young Men's Christian Association. At a time when our country needed organizations to bring aid to many, organizations were in competition with one another. One such organization, which the Christian Commission seemed to compete with, was the Sanitary Commission. The Christian Commission was interested in bringing comfort to the soldiers and taking the time to listen to their stories, write letters for them and provide that last shoulder to cry on while they prepare for their final march to heaven. On the other hand the Sanitary Commission was interested in numbers and figures instead of sentiments.

The essays in this collection speak mostly to the horrors after the battle. The piles upon piles of men left to be buried in unmarked graves was just as disturbing as those left on the battlefield in need of medical treatment. However even if a soldier made it to the hospital the chance of survival was not that much better. John Calhoun Chamberlain kept a journal of his experiences during the aftermath of Gettysburg. Chamberlain is none other than the brother of Lieutenant Thomas Chamberlain and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, the hero of Little Round Top. John Chamberlain did his duty at Gettysburg but was later accused of being a spy and locked up for a night. Having left his journal in Washington he wrote of his adventures on July 21st after all was calm in his world.

This collection also gives the reader a taste of the social history of the Civil War. The number of pages seems to be perfect because one does not need to hear the same thing over and over just to fill space. It also opens the opportunity for the historian to read other works such as *Hospital Days: Reminiscence of a Civil War Nurse* by Janet Stuart Woolsey and *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* by Roy Morris, Jr. *The Better Angel* provides another view to the organizations that provided aid to the suffering. Mr. Whitman was not shy about his observations.

Gettysburg and the Christian Commission is a work that is very easy to recommend to anyone who enjoys the study of social history.

Jory Reedy lives in Topeka, Kansas and holds a B.A. in History from Washburn University. She is presently Assistant Manager at Dillard's in Topeka and is the editor of The Trans-Mississippian for The Civil War Roundtable of Eastern Kansas.