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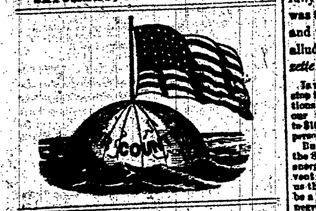

SANITARY CONDITION OF THE ARMY.

It is an undisputed fact that more deaths happen in an army in time of war from disease than from the bullets of the enemy. It was the experience of the American Army in the war with Mexico, and of the allied French and English troops in the Crimean war. It would be of immense benefit to us, if the experiences of the last named war were laid freely and fully before not only the military authorities and surgeons of our army, but before every soldier, to show him the importance of thorough cleanliness of person, and necessity that every camp should be strictly policed. It would be an eminently instructive study, and save thousands of lives, and millions of dollars. The great requisites of an army, are sufficient clothing, well cooked food, pure air in and around their tents, and capable surgeons. Incompetency as regards officers, will be regulated sooner, than these matters, which are hardly less important.

To show the importance of this matter, we need but glance at a few facts connected with the prosecution of the Crimean war. That war lasted, without intermission, for twenty-four months. The total number of French troops sent to the East, at different times, amounted to 309,268 men, of whom 200,000 entered the ambulances [An ambulance in the French service means an establishment for the temporary succour of the sick and wounded. It follows the movements of the troops for the purpose of affording the first attentions necessary. Each ambulance has at its disposal eighteen complete tents, a large quantity of bed furniture, and six hundred dressings for the wounded. Thirty-four men are attached to it, surgeons, apothecaries, administrative officers, and male nurses.] and hospitals to receive medical aid; 50,000 for wounds, and 150,000 for diseases of various kinds. The total mortality was 69,229, or 22½ per centum. Of these 16,320 died of wounds, and nearly 53,000 from diseases. A large proportion of the mortality is attributed to cholera, to typhus, and to scurvy, complicated as they were with other diseases and with wounds.—A consequence of the presence in the army, of the scorbutic influence was the loss to it for several months, of the time required for its treatment, of the services of a very large number of the oldest and best trained soldiers, who were those principally attacked.

In cholera, the effect of the influence of the peculiarities and hardships of the soldier's life was seen not in producing the disease as in scurvy and in typhus, but in enormously increasing its mortality. Cholera it seems, acquires an extraordinary power of destruction by association with ordinary great disturbing and disorganizing morbid causes, as ill-ventilated habitations, the concentration of animal and vegetable miasmata, overcrowding, great fatigue, excited passions, and painful privations—in other words with the conditions almost necessarily attending, it would appear, the life of the soldier in active service, and yet which we contend, can be obviated to a great extent, by care, intelligence and prudence.

As an instance of the fatal ravages of cholera among the troops in the Crimea, we will make the following extract from "A Medico-Chirurgical Account of the Crimean War," by Dr. Scrive, Surgeon-General of the Army in the Crimea. It is a picture of the landing of the French troops, suffering from cholera, on their return from Dobruscha, at Varna, where they were carried on steamers:

"I never assisted at a more frightful spectacle than the one we witnessed on the beach at Varna, when these poor soldiers were landed, rendered unrecognizable by the terrible pestilence that had attacked them. Once in particular, it was evening, and the uncertain light of the moon added still more mournful shades to the picture. The sick were hoisted from the boats by sailors and deposited on the sand of the beach; some, completely collapsed, allowed themselves to fall heavily; others having preserved a remnant of strength, walked a few steps like drunken men, or crawled along on their hands, and soon fell motionless in their turn, from complete exhaustion of their strength. Some were naked, or almost naked, or only with pieces of dress thrown over them that did not belong to them. Officers and private soldiers lay together pell-mell on the sand; all ranks were confounded in the presence of death. Many of them begged for drink in that broken, sepulchral voice peculiar to the disease; others cried out or groaned from the excruciating pain of the cramps. Those who died while being carried ashore were placed in a line on the bank, each one in the position in which the agony of death had left him."

This it will be understood, was in a climate unfavorable to cholera, and as healthy as that of Corsica, of Italy, and of the south of France. Whenever the sanitary regulations of the troops, were loose, then they were decimated by epidemics.

The English suffered at the commencement of the campaign almost as severely as the French. They sent to the Crimea 93,959 men. Of these there were killed in action and died of wounds, 4,446; the deaths from disease were 16,298; and 12,903 were invalided. The whole mortality was therefore, over 22 per cent., or nearly the same as that in the French army. During the second winter the health of the men was perfect, mainly owing to the fact that they were well clothed, well sheltered and fed, and that great sanitary improvements had been made.

In the war with Mexico, in a ten months' campaign, as to our volunteers, the total loss was 21.31 per cent., or 2.13 per cent. a month, and their loss from disease relatively to that of the regulars was as 4.7 is to 1.

We are engaged in a war which requires the massing of hundreds of thousands of men, and the facts which we adduce in reference to the other campaigns, prove that upon those employed in furnishing, receiving and distributing the necessary supplies for the army, and upon the medical officers attached to it, will depend in a great measure, the health of our troops.

The necessity for scrupulous care in the selection of medical men for our army, is therefore, most evident. In the way in which diplomas are given in this country, men become members of the medical profession who are altogether unequal to the duties they may be called upon to perform, even in ordinary circumstances. In civil practice this is not of very great importance, for the beneficial effects of competition correct the mischief.—The public is at liberty to choose, and it is in a great measure its own fault if it suffers from falling into incompetent hands. The soldier however, has no option in the matter, and he must submit to whatever the government may give him. A quantity of gilt-corded attached to their clothes, and the possession of two or three little books protessing to treat of military surgery, though they are so small as to be readily carried in the pocket for easy reference, cannot render all the members of the profession fit for the duties they are to be called upon to perform. Before receiving an appointment in the army, they should be carefully examined by competent men. Moreover, to preserve the health of the troops, it will be absolutely necessary to place everything relating to their hygiene, in the hands of members of the medical profession who have devoted their lives to such studies. Many lives; great interests are now at stake. All important is it, at the beginning of a campaign, that the sanitary condition of an army, should receive careful and intelligent attention.

It is ascertained that Gen. Patterson's campaign in Virginia cost the Government fully $10,000,000; and that the sole result was the capture of some twenty fugitive slaves, and the return of them to their masters. In alluding to this subject, the Cincinnati *Gazette* asks:

"Is not this enough for $10,000,000? What patriot will stop to count the cost of fulfilling our fraternal obligations to our Southern brethren? Who will question our fraternal fidelity to the South, when we can point to $10,000,000 expended to return twenty fugitive colored persons to secession masters?

But this is only a trifle of the cost of our fidelity to the South in this case. It exhausted Gen. Patterson's energies so that he could not attack Johnston, nor prevent his junction with Beauregard; and thereby it cost us the defeat at Manassas. A hundred millions would be a low estimate of the cost of returning these twenty fugitives. And yet, considering the moral effect that the evidence of our fidelity to slavery must have on the South, and especially on the Union men of the border slave States, it must be regarded as cheap.

But this is only the beginning of our patriotic exertion