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TYPHUS IN THE WITTENBERG CAMP.

THE story of the prisoners' camp at Wittenberg will especially appeal to medical officers of health, for the reason that their work lies in the prevention of disease, and that they of all others know what might have been done to limit the spread of typhus in a population circumstanced as that of the prisoners in this camp.

It is not matter for surprise that typhus should have been introduced into the camp. A number of Russian prisoners had to be admitted, and it is quite likely that they brought infection with them. No better opportunity could have been found for the subsequent spread of this disease than that which appears to have been deliberately provided by the German Authorities who had charge of the camp.

The camp was grievously over-crowded. The buildings were inadequately heated during the cold winter of 1914-15. The temperature was so low that windows of the over-crowded barracks were kept closed to husband what little warmth there was. The prisoners were badly clothed, the food was bad and insufficient, the opportunities for personal cleanliness wholly inadequate, and this in a camp crowded with men taken from the fighting lines, where verminous conditions are an inseparable incident. Vermin spread through the camp, and thus were provided all the requisites for the spread of the disease.

What was done by the authorities to mitigate the conditions which thus gave such fertile opportunities for the destruction of the prisoners in the camp? Absolutely nothing. Not only did they do nothing, but they prevented from being done what might have been done to meet the wishes of a British medical officer. Captain Vidal asked a German officer who was "himself standing outside the camp," if the remaining healthy English could be placed together in one compound, and "his

request was insultingly refused." The infected sick were required to be placed with the other sick. One mattress was made to serve for three men of different nationalities. "When a patient was brought from the compound to the hospital, either the mattress on which he had lain was brought with him, or it was left behind in his bungalow. If it was brought with him, his former companions were left without anything to sleep on; if it was left behind his still uninfected companions were left to sleep upon the infected mattress, and it was almost inevitable that they should catch the disease."

So states the report of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War. The report is signed by Mr. Justice Younger, the Chairman of the Committee, and is based upon information collected from prisoners of war, and especially from Major Priestley, Captain Vidal, and Captain Lauder, themselves prisoners, who were among those who survived, Major Fry, Captain Field, and Captain Sutcliffe having died from typhus in the camp. In what we have extracted from this report we have dealt only with the circumstances which relate to the dissemination of typhus, but the report contains other matter which will touch the heart of all humane people, and be a lasting testimony to the degradation to which Germany has fallen.

The terrible story of the cruelty inflicted upon the prisoners includes account of savage dogs being habitually employed to terrorize the prisoners, frequent flogging with a rubber whip, and men tied with their arms above their heads for hours.

Nor must be omitted reference to the conduct of the German Staff, military and medical, who precipitately left the camp when typhus broke out, and maintained relations with the inside by shouting directions outside the wire entanglements, and supplied the hospital in the camp with food "passed in on a trolley over about 20 yards of rail, so

as to avoid all contact between the prisoners and the outside world."

The German medical hero of the outbreak will not be forgotten by the medical profession in this country. His name will always be remembered among us. It is Dr. Aschenbach, and it is said he has been awarded the Iron Cross for his heroic services. "On one occasion only during the whole course of the epidemic did he enter the hospital or even the camp. . . . He came attired in a complete suit of protective clothing, including a mask and rubber gloves. His inspection was brief and rapid."

In contrast with his conduct which has thus merited the approval of his Kaiser, stands the work of the British medical officers and orderlies who, with organising skill and with a devotion which is beyond praise, did all that was possible to alleviate the misery of their fellows, and limit as far as they could the continued extension of the disease. Mr. Justice Younger's Committee bears tribute to their work, and says that everyone of these officers and men as truly offered his life for the sake of others as any soldier on the battlefield.

They too will not be forgotten by us.

Mr. Justice Younger's Committee has endeavoured to distinguish between the hardship which might be experienced by prisoners who are interned and which in a time of war might be unavoidable, and those which might have been the result of set purpose. Thus the Committee recognize that at the beginning of the war, when the Authorities were overwhelmed with the number of Russian prisoners who fell into their hands, the difficulties in the way of making provision for them must have been extreme. The Committee, after full consideration of all the circumstances, "are forced to the conclusion that the terrible sufferings and privations of the afflicted prisoners during the period under review are directly chargeable to the German officials, whose elementary duty it was, in the words of the Geneva Convention, to respect and take care of these men, wounded and sick as they were . . ."

No one in this country will hesitate to accept this verdict, and the story of the Wittenberg Camp will not be without its influence in determining the permanent judgment of civilization upon Germany's conduct.

A DISCUSSION ON MATERNITY AND CHILD WELFARE,*

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IN opening this discussion, perhaps it would be as well to refer to the circular of the Local Government Board, dated 30th July, 1914, which was sent to County Councils and Sanitary Authorities. In that circular the Board stated that an estimate had been laid before Parliament for a grant to be distributed by the Board in aid of the expenditure of local authorities and voluntary agencies in respect of institutions or other provision for maternity and child welfare. This grant, as you know, was passed. It has been made in aid of expenditure in respect of clinics, dispensaries, or other institutions primarily concerned with the provision of medical and surgical advice and treatment, as well as in respect of the salaries of health visitors and other officers engaged in the work. The Board hope that this grant will stimulate local authorities who have not yet taken up the work of maternity and child welfare to do so, and to those already engaged in the work to develop it still further.

The circular points out that it is not only desirable to deal with infants under one year, as heretofore, but that the scheme should include the period from before birth until the time when a child is entered on a school register. Thus the child will have constant supervision until he or she comes under the inspection of the school medical officer. Very great importance is attached to the work of home visitation by an adequate staff of health visitors. The Board say it is desirable to provide consultation centres, which may be called maternity centres, to which expectant mothers and mothers with infants and little children may be referred for advice and treatment; co-operation is advised with the midwives of the district, and with any local hospital having a maternity department. They also say that it will be necessary to have a medical officer in charge of the centre, and for attendance at the centre of members of the staff engaged in home visiting. Careful records are to be kept, and in regard to children, the records should be available for the information of the school medical officer when the child is entered at a school.

* At the February meeting of the Northern Branch of the Society of Medical Officers of Health.