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THE MEDICAL ASPECTS OF THE BOER WAR.

BY A SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGNER.

I.

THE MEDICAL WORK OF THE CAMPAIGN.

It is now abundantly clear that during the South African campaign the medical service, both in the army and civil branches, will have important duties to perform. Hospital ships and a hospital train will shortly be despatched in addition to the resources already available; and although we may still hope that the campaign will be a short one, and the deplorable losses of life on both sides be soon brought to an end, it is evident from the very imperfect medical resources at the disposal of the Boers that our medical and ambulance departments will have, while the war lasts, to devote a considerable portion of their attention to Boer wounded in addition to attending to our own soldiers.

THE MAUSER AND LEE METFORD-BULLETS.

Judging from the result of the campaign up to the present, and from the nature of the wounds received by our soldiers, it is probable that the great bulk of surgical cases will consist of bullet wounds, and inasmuch as the Mauser bullet used by the Boers is a small hard conical one, which passes out with as little disturbance to surrounding tissues as is produced at the point of entrance, these cases should in the great majority of instances do well wherever the wound is merely one of a limb or limbs; and although thoracic and abdominal wounds will naturally be more serious, their gravity is certainly less than it would be with a Martini-Henry or old Snider bullet. The large proportion of wounded to killed, and the excellent accounts received of the progress of the wounded are both largely due to this peculiarity in the Mauser bullet.

In the same way we know from past experience, and also from recent Boer testimony, that the Lee-Metford—our own rifle—inflicts a similarly small and clean wound. The Lee-Metford bullet, it is true, is somewhat larger than the Mauser, but the difference is slight, and both bullets, when compared with the Martini-Henry, are diminutive. Of the wounds inflicted by the Martini-Henry I have myself had practical experience; there was with this bullet little difficulty in telling the wound of entrance and the wound of exit, the characteristic features of which are so fully described in the old textbooks. The track of the wound itself also was large and well defined, and the shock, wherever the wound might be, was severe. This was the rifle used by the Boers in the campaign of 1881, and the proportion of killed to wounded then was very much higher than it is to-day.

SHELL WOUNDS: MELINITE AND LYDDITE.

Fortunately for us and for our soldiers the Boer shell, from some peculiarity in its loading or structure, very frequently omits to burst, so that hitherto the losses from artillery fire on our side have not been very numerous, although it is equally clear that our own artillery have inflicted very serious losses upon the Boers. The wounds from bursting shells may be of any degree of severity, but obviously cannot be of so clean a character as those produced by Mauser bullets. In view of the protests recently made by the Boer General against our use of lyddite, I took the opportunity the other day to obtain the opinion of an artillery officer and a naval commander on the subject. I found they had been freely comparing notes and discussing the question. The following is a summary of the information derived from those authorities. Melinite and lyddite, although not absolutely identical, are so for all practical purposes, and the former is largely used in Continental armies. The shells now being used by the Boers in their field guns are, I was assured by the Royal Artillery officer, loaded with melinite. If accurately fired these shells would, if they exploded, inflict very severe losses upon our men, but by a fortunate coincidence these shells, although not infrequently directed with accuracy by the German artillerists now serving with the Boers, do not as a rule burst.

The shells used in our field artillery are loaded with black powder and shrapnel, and never fail to explode. The only lyddite shells used by us were fired from the naval guns for

the first time at Farquhar's Farm on October 30th. They are of somewhat large size, and doubtless did great execution, as they called forth General Joubert's protest. In sending this protest, however, the Boer General did not, we understand, send any guarantee that the Boer melinite was *intentionally* kept damp or otherwise inefficient. The difference between a black-powder and a lyddite shell is that fragments of the former must strike a foe in order to inflict injury, whereas mere vicinity to the explosion of the latter is fatal from the terrific concussion which is produced. In this respect it seems to be similar to dynamite. Men or animals killed by the explosion of lyddite have been found in some cases to show no wound whatever.

THE SUMMER HEATS.

Another factor to be reckoned with by the medical service in the present campaign is that the summer is rapidly coming on in South Africa, and by December the heat on the plains of the Karoo and Orange Free State will be very great. A temperature of 90° or even higher in the shade may have to be encountered, and in the sun the heat at mid-day will produce many cases of solar fever and sunstroke unless provision is made against it. The hospital train should have more than the ordinary protection overhead, and the fittings might well be made to approach more to those in use in India than in South Africa.

The Transvaal and the Free State, at least those portions of them which Sir Redvers Buller's column will enter, are situated on the high veld of South Africa, and one peculiarity of these high inland plateaux is the great changes between the night and day temperatures, which have to be borne in mind by troops bivouacking on the veld. Sharp attacks of diarrhoea and dysentery are very liable to occur at this time of the year.

THE CLIMATE OF THE INLAND PLATEAUX.

Johannesburg is 5,600 feet high, and at this altitude the temperature seldom goes above 85° F. in the shade. Pretoria lies under the Magaliesbergen at an altitude of 4,500 feet, and is considerably hotter than Johannesburg. The great interior plateaux on which both Bloemfontein and Pretoria stand are those plains lying inside the semicircle of mountains which run all round South Africa parallel to the coast, and amongst which in Natal itself our troops are now more or less entangled.

THE THUNDERSTORMS.

The thunderstorms in these plains are sometimes terrific, and, although grateful in their after-effects, are trying at the time, especially to men clad in khaki. Wet khaki is about as unpleasant, and while it remains wet as unhealthy, as anything I know. Chills and occasionally pneumonia will occur among men exposed to wet.

Froude's description of one of these thunderstorms on the high veld of the Transvaal during the summer is so graphic and true that I will quote it, as showing the dangers to health, as well also unfortunately to transport, which a series of these storms may produce. The extract is taken from his *South African Diary*:

"The lightning was rose colour, deepening at times to crimson. Each flash appeared like a cross; a vertical line seemed to strike the earth a second time, crossing it horizontally. The air was a blaze of fire; the rain fell in such a deluge that the plain in a few minutes was like a lake. Of course we could not move; the horses stood shivering up to their fetlocks in water. At one time there was no interval between the flash and the report, so that we were in the very centre of the storm. The sense of utter helplessness prevented me from being nervous; I sat still and looked at it in mere amazement. In two hours it was over, the sky cleared almost suddenly, and with the dripping landscape shining in the light of a summer sunset we trotted on to the river."

In such hours as these on the High Veld the sound of Heaven's artillery will drown even the roar of battle.

The first scientific meeting of the Zoological Society of London for the session 1899-1900 was held at the Society's House, 3, Hanover Square, on Tuesday last, November 14th, when Mr. F. Vaughan Kirby read Field Notes on the Blue-buck of Cape Colony. Papers were also read by Mr. R. I. Pocock and Mr. Stanley S. Flower.