

BMJ

Notes Of The War

Source: *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 504 (Aug. 27, 1870), pp. 225-226

Published by: [BMJ](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25219588>

Accessed: 07/02/2015 12:16

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Digitization of the British Medical Journal and its forerunners (1840-1996) was completed by the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) in partnership with The Wellcome Trust and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the UK. This content is also freely available on PubMed Central.



BMJ is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The British Medical Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

NOTES OF THE WAR.

NO THOROUGHFARE.

THE refusal of the French to allow the wounded in the recent battles to be transmitted to the hospitals of Aix-la-Chapelle involves a difference of three days, against three hours' transit; that is to say, it signs the death-warrant of some thousands of their own countrymen as well as of their wounded enemies. It is true that some problematical advantage may be derived from the terrible aggravation of mortality and suffering involved in the refusal to allow the combatant army to relieve themselves of this load; but it must be remembered that precisely similar advantages are accorded by the conditions of the treaty of Geneva, which allow the combatants on either side to leave their wounded within the enemy's territory, under the protection of the red-cross flag, and which neutralise alike the wounded, the ambulances, and the medical officers, on both sides, and relieve the retreating combatants of their encumbrances. In the rout of MacMahon's army, one hundred and two members of the French medical staff were cut off, comprising seventy-five surgeons and thirty-seven assistants. All have been sent back, *via* Cologne and Belgium, over this neutral territory. No objection has been made, nor is likely to be made, to their travelling by this route. The severely wounded are now expressly neutralised; and we cannot help feeling deep regret that they are not allowed to be sent to hospital by the shortest route, over neutral territory.

ARMY MEDICAL OFFICERS OF NEUTRAL POWERS.

THE refusal of the British Government to allow unemployed army and navy medical officers to give their services in the Franco-Prussian war is not easily to be explained, in the face of the opposite measures agreed to at the International Conference last year at Berlin, of the opposite course now being pursued by other governments (as the Russian and Swiss), and of the interests of English medical science and of English soldiers. One of the measures agreed upon at the International Conference respecting volunteer aid to wounded soldiers in time of war, held last year at Berlin, was the following:—"In case of war, non-belligerent powers are invited to place at the disposal of the belligerents those surgeons of their army whom they are able to lend without disadvantage to their own service; such delegated surgeons to be placed under the orders of the principal medical officer of the belligerent army to which they may be attached." The Governments of France and North Germany, on the opening of the present war, both announced their intention of accepting and acting upon the resolutions agreed upon at the Berlin Congress. Accordingly, the Federal Government of Switzerland, as a neutral non-belligerent power, has offered to the French and German Governments a number of surgeons of their army staff who had volunteered to go. Both of the belligerents have accepted the offer through their respective ministers at Berne, and have expressed themselves thankful for the assistance. The Swiss army surgeons destined for France are ordered to report themselves for further instructions to the Central Committee of Volunteer Aid to the Wounded sitting at Paris; those for Germany to the corresponding Committee at Berlin. We understand that a large number of surgeons of our own army, desirous not only of helping in the hospitals, but also of gaining military surgical experience, have applied to be allowed to give their services in a similar way; but their applications have not been acceded to, notwithstanding that the reason given for no examinations for admission into the army medical department being held at present is that the department is over-numbered. Captain W. Noble, R.A., Deputy Director-General of Ordnance, and Captain Brackenbury, R.A., have left Woolwich for the respective seats of war, the former for Prussia, the latter for France, to watch the military operations and report to the English Government, so that the objection to make the necessary arrangements for sending medical officers appears all the more unaccountable.

THE CONVENTION OF GENEVA.

THE advantages secured to the wounded by the Geneva Convention are manifesting themselves every day during the present war, which is the first which has occurred between two Powers both of whom had signed the treaty. When the war occurred in 1866 between Prussia and Austria, Prussia had signed the treaty, but Austria had not. Before the war, however, had concluded, although not until fighting had ceased, Austria, seeing the advantages offered by the Convention, applied to be admitted as one of the signatories to it, an application which was at once acceded to. One of the principal articles of the

Convention was the neutralisation of the *personnel* and the *matériel* of the hospitals moving with an army in the field—of all, in short, that is absolutely necessary for affording the first means of saving the lives or lessening the sufferings of the wounded who are placed *hors de combat* after each succeeding engagement. One can see the importance of this provision from the information which reached London on the 20th inst. in a telegram from Brussels. A French field hospital complete—comprising fifteen surgeons, ninety *infirmiers*, eight ambulance vehicles and their horses—was captured by the Prussians near Metz and sent on by them to Cologne; but, at the date of the telegram, the whole was passing through Belgium on its way back to France. Before the Geneva Convention, all the persons belonging to this hospital establishment would have been retained and treated as prisoners of war, while the carriages and rest of the hospital equipment would have become prize of war. The military reasons which led the Prussians to send back this French military hospital through Belgium instead of returning it across the ground on which the Prussian army was manœuvring are sufficiently obvious. One or two telegrams have referred to field hospitals being fired upon, contrary to the terms of the Geneva treaty. No doubt explanation will be given of these supposed infractions of the Convention; but it is to be remembered that the Convention particularly provides that the neutrality of the field hospitals is to cease if they are placed in positions of strategic importance. Their neutralisation might be taken advantage of to secure important military ends were this provision not made; indeed, no government could have been expected to sign the treaty without such an exception being attached to it.

THE WOUNDED IN FRANCE.

OUR correspondence from Paris includes the following items. There are indications that the grievous official incompetence and obstructiveness, which have weighed on the efforts of professional and non-professional volunteers and subscribers to the aid of the wounded in the war, is about to come to an end. No words can express the grievous injury which it has done. The *intendance générale*, which has blocked the way, will probably be swept on one side by General Trochu.—The Faculty of Medicine have just formally placed at the service of the Minister of War all their professors, *agrégés*, and pupils, in a body. The provincial Faculties are taking a similar course.—The Medical Dean of the Faculty of Montpellier has abandoned his salary in favour of the wounded whilst the war lasts; he has added a further subscription of 500 francs, his own services, and his Chateau de Grammont. One thousand seven hundred physicians and students have inscribed their names as volunteers at the Val-de-Grâce.—Dr. Cunier, of the First Corps, private physician of Marshal MacMahon, has been made prisoner at Reichshoffen, and, notwithstanding the neutrality convention, has not reappeared. Other surgeons captured have, however, been set free by the Prussians.—The Aid Society has, at short notice, established a permanent hospital at the Gare de Strasbourg, communicating with the station by an inclined plane. The wounded are received there at once, on issuing from the railway-carriages, and either retained there, or forwarded after their wounds are dressed, according to circumstances.

NOTES OF AN AUSTRIAN SURGEON.

A CORRESPONDENT of the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, writing from Heidelberg on the 15th instant, at which place he had arrived on the previous day in charge of 500 wounded, says that Billroth was fully employed as principal surgeon at Weissenburg, where he had charge of a hospital of 500 wounded. His assistant, Dr. Czerny, had the care of 100. The correspondent says that the difficulties of the medical staff are great and manifold. The number of wounded scattered in all directions in Germany must exceed 15,000. The French ignore the regulations of the Geneva convention; their army surgeons do not wear the white band with the red cross, and the transport service labours clumsily, but earnestly and fearlessly, to remove the wounded from the battle-field, even in the midst of showers of bullets. After the battle of Wörth, he saw an ambulance waggon overturned on the declivity of a mountain, and lying under it three wounded men—one *in articulo mortis*—who had evidently been left on the spot in consequence of the overturn and of the flight of the drivers. The French, he says, have made no improvement in their ambulances, notwithstanding their experience in Italy and Mexico; they still use for the conveyance of the wounded carriages which are dark and unventilated. The question of providing bedsteads is still unsettled. Billroth, though a man of great energy, could not provide beds for his patients in less than eight days. The Prussian members of the order of St. John, and their conduct, are beyond all praise; they supplied the writer's transport-waggon with all possible necessities and comforts. There is a want of means for the

transport of the wounded from the field of battle, and of operators in the ambulances after the fight. The neutral powers, as a rule, do not appear to trouble themselves about carrying out the resolutions arrived at in Berlin last year, by sending out army surgeons to the seat of war.

AID TO THE SICK AND WOUNDED.

COLONEL LOYD LINDSAY states that there are now twenty English surgeons serving under the Society for giving aid to the sick and wounded, in equal proportions on the French and German sides. The Society continues to receive applications for surgeons. Eight thousand French wounded are in the German Hospitals. Dr. Mayo, who is the chief representative of the Society in Germany, has gone forward to the frontier, after having had interviews with the Crown Princess of Prussia and Princess Alice of Hesse. Chloroform, surgical instruments, disinfectants, waterproof goods, tourniquets, are the leading necessities asked for. We suppose that Liebig's extract, hydrate of chloral, and opium may be counted, also, in the front rank. Great supplies of charpie and rags have been forwarded. The Committee give to each surgeon an allowance of £1 a day, partly to pay their expenses, and partly to enable them to procure for their patients such comforts as are not to be found in a military hospital. Dr. Frank is the chief representative of the Society in Paris; three of the surgeons are near Chalons, two at Metz, and two in Paris.

AID TO THE SICK AND WOUNDED.

THE *Pharmaceutical Journal* has appealed to the numerous members of the influential Society of which it is the organ to afford assistance in kind to the societies for aid of the sick and wounded in the war. The appeal is timely and well-placed, and we do not doubt that they will respond as liberally on this occasion to the appeal from their own journal as they did on a former occasion—the heroic war of liberation by Garibaldi—to a private appeal to relieve the necessities of the wounded volunteers who fought in the cause of Italian freedom. Among the drugs most needed will, of course, be carbolic acid, hydrate of chloral, opium, and chloroform; but all hospital necessities will be needed in bulk to relieve the dreadful sufferings of the mass of men now suffering from wounds or sickness. Lieut.-Colonel Loyd Lindsay has addressed this week a letter to the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, thanking it for its appeal, and giving a list of articles required, as agreed on by Dr. Sieveking and Mr. Pollock.

DRESS OF SURGEONS AND DRESSERS.

SEVERAL instances on both sides are reported in which surgeons and dressers have been fired upon and killed. It is suggested, perhaps with reason, that this is due to the difficulty of distinguishing them from many combatants, from whom they differ but little in uniform. It is recommended that "surgeons, hospital attendants, and ambulance men should be dressed in some unimilitary uniform of a conspicuous colour, say, for instance, the bright yellow formerly worn in the Spanish army—a colour no longer worn in any army in Europe." The idea seems good, although the colour will probably not be approved. Modest men, however steeled by scientific carelessness of costume, would feel uncomfortable nowadays in a canary-coloured dress, and a more sober means of distinguishing them might easily be selected. In time of war, indeed, extraordinary expedients are suggested; but regimental surgeons walking about the streets in yellow coats would probably know no peace. This Spanish uniform is at present worn, we believe, by one division of the rag-brigade, who would possibly join the gutter-boys generally in resenting the arbitrary adoption of this colour by the Army Medical Department.

MATERIAL RATHER THAN MONEY.

It seems incredible, says the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, but from all quarters, especially the German hospitals and ambulances, the complaint reaches us of want of material for dressing the wounded and for treating and supporting the sick. It would almost seem as if governments and war ministers took care for the provision of the means of destroying, wounding, and maiming, and treated charpie, compresses, and surgical aid as quite of secondary value. And if this want is apparent at the commencement of a war, what must it become after weeks or months? It is almost the exception for the aid-societies to send to the belligerent powers material, and not money. Money has been liberally supplied for the wounded; but of what use is it, if it is impossible to buy medicines, charpie, bandages, wine, and other necessities on the spot where they are wanted? The Austrian patriotic help-union has turned its attention, in the first place and chiefly, to the sending of material both to the French and to the German armies; from both sides it has received the warmest expressions of gratitude,

and requests for further aid of the same kind. It would only be a matter of simple humanity if other societies would apply themselves more to the sending of material than of money.

ACTION OF THE ITALIAN AID-COMMITTEES.

THE Italian Committees for aiding the sick and wounded in war have placed themselves in communication with the central office at Basle. Those of Padua and Milan have forwarded to that place supplies of every kind. Arrangements for doing the same thing at Florence are being made; and the Turin Committee has provided ambulances and placed them at the disposal of the central committee, whose instructions as to their destination are expected.

DR. MOSETIG, formerly assistant of Baron von Dumreicher, will probably go to the seat of war in France, as a delegate from the Austrian Society for mutual help.

THE *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* learns with deep regret that the Austrian foreign ministry has declared it inopportune to comply with the proposal of the ministry of war, to allow military surgeons to be sent to Prussia and France, and placed at the disposal of each power for service in the military hospitals.

DR. MAYO, one of the medical men whom we last week mentioned as having been sent by the National Aid Society to Germany, has telegraphed from Darmstadt:—"Have seen Princess Alice. Am going forthwith with party towards Metz. Instruments much needed, probably surgeons. Send cases of instruments, tourniquets, and 20lb. of chloroform to me here. Mark 'Immediate,' with large red cross. Pray continue to give us your aid."

MR. SIMON'S NEW REPORT.

THE Twelfth Annual Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council will be shortly in the hands of the profession. It is one of considerable interest and importance. It deals with the recent epidemics of relapsing fever and scarlatina, the dry-earth system of treating night-soil, and the midden and its allied systems used in some northern towns, the water-supply, the use of milk of diseased cows, the transmission of disease by vaccination, animal vaccination as practised on the continent, the Pharmacy Act, and other subjects.

In respect to relapsing fever, though there have been cases in other parts of the country, the reporter confines himself to giving an account of the metropolitan epidemic. He observes that it is a disease almost unknown in England, but as far back as the middle of 1868 there were precursory symptoms of such an epidemic. It was not till the autumn of 1869 that it became an accomplished fact. Mr. Simon calls attention to the memorandum, to which we referred at the time, for the guidance of local authorities, and gives the following short account of the epidemic.

"The admissions of relapsing fever in the London Fever Hospital in October had numbered 130; in November they were 259; in December 315. Here, perhaps, strictly speaking, my statements on the subject ought to cease, as my report formally relates only to the business of 1869; but probably I shall be excused for adding the more satisfactory experience of the first three months of 1870. After Christmas the disease increased in the district of Holborn with Clerkenwell, and in the parish of St. Saviour's, Southwark, and appears to have attained at the beginning of the year its chief extension over the poorer parts of London. In January the cases of relapsing fever admitted into the London Fever Hospital were 258; in February the London Fever Hospital, together with the newly opened Hampstead Hospital, received 153 cases only; in March they received 140. At the present date (March 31st, 1870) the two hospitals contain 103 cases of relapsing fever; the disease is on the wane; and the months of winter, during which such infections are particularly apt to spread among the poor, have happily now passed with comparatively a trifling epidemic."

The mortality was very low: out of 769 cases treated in 1869 in the London Fever Hospital only 17 were fatal.

Reference is then made to the Diseases Prevention Act of 1865, and to the working of the Metropolitan Asylums Act of 1867; and Mr. Simon says of the former that, though it has only been passed fifteen years, it had, even in a crisis such as that of 1869, to be treated as