

CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

The Causes of the Death Rate.

Official Medical Reports on the Habits of the Refugees.

As Given in a Blue Book Issued by the British War Office—Conditions of the Camps.

(London Standard, Nov. 16.)

A blue-book was issued last night containing reports, etc., on the working of the burgher refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal. On March 18 last the war office asked Lord Kitchener to send by next mail a despatch giving a full report on the camps. Lord Kitchener was unable to comply with the request forthwith, and called for a report from the camp commandants, who sent in the present batch of documents, filling nearly four hundred pages, ranging in date from March to September last. A few quotations will illustrate the nature of the contents, so far, at least, as they disclose the causes or contributory causes of the mortality among the refugees. The reports on the camps in the Transvaal are preceded with a long letter (July 16th) from Major General Maxwell, military governor of Pretoria, who says:

"Many more refugees have come in since the compilation of this report, but so far I have been able to cope with all difficulties. It is very difficult to get up tents fast enough for the demand, but everything is done that is possible. Unfortunately, the death rate among the children continues high, owing to the prevalence of measles and the extremely cold nights. The Boer mother is greatly to blame; she insists on tending her children, refuses to obey the orders of the doctor, or the advice of the nurse; the Boer remedy for measles, apparently, is a tea made of goats' dung; this is administered to the child, continues to give poor results. Another favorite remedy appears to be an absolute refusal to wash the children, or any attempt at cleanliness. I have every reason to be satisfied with the administration of these camps; economy and efficiency are studied. The inmates of the camps receive gratis everything that is necessary for their health and comfort, but owing to circumstances over which we have no control, it is sometimes impossible to supply the immediate wants for a few days, as we cannot possibly foreseen what the demand will be or where."

The reports of the medical officers abound with points bearing out the above summary of conditions at the camp. Of the refugee camp for whites at Bloemfontein, medical officer for the Orange River Colony (Dr. F. Pratt Yale), writes a report, in course of which he says:

"The risks of camp life are rendered more serious by many of the habits of the refugees, who seem to have no idea of the duty of cleanliness, either to themselves or neighbors, in the removal of offal, skins, etc., everything can be deposited in the immediate surroundings of tent or hut so disposed of, rendering the soil of the camp site more filthy daily, and the work of scavenging unnecessarily tedious. With regard to the dietary, the allowance is certainly small, but both children and adults are in the same condition. I am particularly sceptic of the sufficiency of the dietary; all were content with the exception of one woman, who complained that her husband did not find the meat sufficient, adding that farmers were accustomed to a large flesh diet. To judge by outward appearances, the refugees all look healthy condition. The death-rate among the natives is undoubtedly very high, due in a great part to an epidemic of measles, which has proved very fatal. Even without the presence of epidemic disease, the death-rate must necessarily run high, as camp life, by the exposure during winter, would in any case induce a severe mortality among children. In this particular, also, the refugees are somewhat to blame by their conduct in concealing cases of disease in their families, thus ensuring the rapid spread of infection."

DR. G. B. WOODROFFE.

writing on August 4 of the camp at Irene, says:

"No one can imagine the difficulty a man has in preventing these people from using their dangerous, needless, and disgusting remedies. Goat dung and wormwood made into a decoction and drunk in quantities is the favorite 'drippe' or 'middle' for bringing the measles out; pieces of raw meat bandaged over each eye in acute conjunctivitis; and most of these cases are treated with ear drops and ear apertures for an endless variety of rubbish, and consequently otitis is very common. Rags wetted with human urine are used for open flesh wounds, and so on. Many of the up-country people are impregnated with malaria, and all acute diseases are consequently of a severe type, in these rotten conditions."

In explanation of this large mortality, I consider the first cause to be carelessness and a most deplorable ignorance and lethargy amongst those who have charge of the sick, rendering them from measles. The more enlightened people, who have been affected, have pinned up blankets inside their tents, and so made them warm at night; they have kept their tents ventilated by day, and so avoided the great contrast which quickly sets in at sunset between the cold of the day and the warmth of the bed." Amongst the majority, however, no instructions upon these important details have had the slightest effect, medicines and nourishments are neglected, and the pernicious use of 'Armpells' containing what they know not and care less, has very largely obtained; children are carried out into the open air during cooking operations in the open with measles on them, and it seems well nigh impossible to persuade the majority of the unusual susceptibility of the lungs for some days after the rash has faded and the patient perhaps feeling well enough to get up."

The medical officer for the camp at Pietersburg, Dr. H. N. Spencer, P. M. O., on the refugee camp at Middlebury, describes the high mortality from measles and influenza in June, and says:

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The medical officer for the camp at Pietersburg, Dr. H. N. Spencer, P. M. O., on the refugee camp at Middlebury, says that half the deaths in June were due to lung disease, caused by the cold weather, and "the disregard of parents for the welfare of their children." The following is from the report of Kendall Franks, hon. consulting surgeon to his Majesty's forces, on the camp at Irene:

"I visited and inspected carefully

great number of tents in various parts of the camp. The condition of the inmates and the interior of the tents in Ward 6, the ward under Miss Van Warmo, where the latest arrivals are accommodated, was much worse than in any other portion of the camp, and I shall refer to it first. In third ward there are 120 tents, the inmates are of the very poorest class. In some of the tents there is a definite overcrowding. In one tent, for instance, there are two women, Mrs. Bushhurst and Mrs. Prinslo, and nine children; some of the children are insufficiently clad, and all poorly. In another tent there are three families (Venter, Prinslo and Dordling), parents and children number fourteen. All had measles. Two children died last week. One is still very ill, and not likely to recover. In all these tents, poverty, dirt and ignorance prevail. In one of the tents there were two children who fell ill with the sequel of measles; one had lung complication, the other peritonitis. I stooped down to examine the latter; the children were in their ordinary clothes lying on mats. In order to see the abdomen, I had to undo some of the clothes; the skin beneath was as black as Kaffir's, covered with accumulations of dirt. To see the skin in a case of vomiting and diarrhoea."

FROM KENDAL FRANKS' REPORT.

"The following is the translation of the following passage upon the neglectful treatment of the sick by their own people:

"Although the death rate from measles is high it does not reach the level observed in some of the camps. Dr. Rabson is of opinion that the high death rate from this disease is due more to the indiscriminate and reckless dosing of the children by their parents at the beginning of the disease, and even before it is manifest in any other camp. This taken in conjunction with the severe type of the malady in South Africa, and to the very improper and neglectful treatment of the sick children in the tents, explains, though it in no wise condemns, the terrible ravages which this epidemic has wrought in the burgher camps. When I speak of neglect I do not altogether refer to wilful negligence, neglect on the part of the parents, but I have seen instances of this in the camps, and several of the medical officers have spoken to me about it. As an instance, one of these gentlemen wrote to me, a gentleman who had for some years been practising in Cape Colony, that: 'A Mrs. Celliers always had a lot of sickness in her tent, to whom I felt called upon to put the fact that she was most negligent in her treatment of the children.'

"A recent remedy among the Boers,

also writes (July 31) respecting the camp at Krugersdorp:

"The doctor informs me that they are just beginning an epidemic of measles, and I myself have several children in camp who looked as if they had been ill before it is manifest in any other camp. This taken in conjunction with the severe type of the malady in South Africa, and to the very improper and neglectful treatment of the sick children in the tents, explains, though it in no wise condemns, the terrible ravages which this epidemic has wrought in the burgher camps. When I speak of neglect I do not altogether refer to wilful negligence, neglect on the part of the parents, but I have seen instances of this in the camps, and several of the medical officers have spoken to me about it. As an instance, one of these gentlemen wrote to me, a gentleman who had for some years been practising in Cape Colony, that: 'A Mrs. Celliers always had a lot of sickness in her tent, to whom I felt called upon to put the fact that she was most negligent in her treatment of the children.'

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