

THE MEDICAL SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES.

With the report of General Miles, Commander-in-Chief, on the condition of the United States forces during the late war, also appears a report by the Surgeon-General of the Army on the same subject. In these reports there is no attempt to gloss over or conceal the deplorably inefficient condition of the suddenly assembled forces; but a frank avowal is made of the shortcomings, which might have been disastrous had the enemy to be met been more formidable. The Surgeon-General states that the number of medical officers allowed in the army, namely 102, is "inadequate even in times of peace;" and it was consequently necessary to employ a staff of 650 "contract surgeons" by forced selection in a hurried call for their services. Medical men inexperienced in military matters were assigned responsible positions and afterwards unfairly charged with incapacity. The demand for trained nurses likewise far exceeded the very limited supply from the trained hospital corps, nor was it possible to get suitable hands from regiments or from outside sources.

There were abundant medical supplies, but it was out of the question to obtain adequate or timely transports for them. The prevalence of so much sickness is frankly ascribed to imperfect sanitation, together with want of experience in the medical officers in charge, rather than to badly chosen sites for camps.

Among the troops themselves it is stated a leading factor in the development of disease was the reduction of the age limit in recruits from 21 to 18 years; pronounced to have been "a fatal misjudgment." This is not by any means the first time that placing boys directly on active war service has been found a fatal mistake. During the Napoleonic campaigns of 1813-14, Napoleon in his despatches said: 'I must have grown men; boys only serve to encumber the hospitals and road sides.' In his earlier campaign the youngest soldier was 22, and the sick were few. Another mistake was the formation of camps near large cities, which led to drunkenness and dissipation.

There is here an object lesson, not alone to the Ameri-