

WAR STORY OF THE C.A.M.C.

and of a pathological laboratory, with the performance of autopsies when needed for neighbouring Casualty Clearing Stations and reports upon surgical material, they were responsible for reports upon the identification and strength of chemicals supplied to the troops in the area, on materials in connection with cases of suspected poisoning, on the efficacy of gas masks and helmets, on poison gases, on the chemical and bacteriological analysis of milk and water. They became, in fact, a general utility laboratory.

We have already, in Chapter IV., referred to the part played by Lieutenant-Colonel Nasmith in the detection of the first poison gas. A more constant study was that of the water-supply of the area. That supply was almost all from wells, and in this low-lying Flanders country almost all the wells are contaminated. Of forty-four sources examined during June, 1915, ninety-three per cent. showed the presence of *B. coli* in one cc. of water. Now *Bacillus coli* inhabits the internal tract of cattle as well as of man, but when in a farmyard the privy is as near to the shallow well as is the dung heap, it is not exactly safe to suppose that these and other contaminating microbes are derived only from harmless cattle. Such water had to be sterilized. There had been an extensive outbreak of typhoid among the civilian population in Flanders in the autumn of 1914. Lieutenant-Colonel Amyot tells me that there were some eight thousand cases, with two thousand deaths. With widespread inoculation the epidemic had come to an end, and in the spring and summer of 1915 the disease had become relatively uncommon. But that the water might be responsible for summer diarrhoea is shown