Amongst the many discomforts which the soldier has to contend with whilst on the march, and the temporary relief of which is fraught with so much danger, is thirst. The craving for water and other liquids on the line of march varies in its intensity in different individuals. Many men are able to complete a long and fatiguing march without once indulging in a drink of any kind whatever, whilst others can scarcely march a few miles before their water bottle is emptied; after which at each halt they besiege the regimental water barrel, or patronize the "fizzer wallahs," or vendors of cheap mineral waters, &c., who invariably accompany a regiment on the march at home.

Having been able to make a particular study of the type and habits of different men in relation to their ability to restrain themselves from drinking on the march, I have come to certain conclusions which I will endeavour to describe for the benefit of all young soldiers who value their health, and who wish to maintain their military efficiency—from a physical point of view—under the hazardous conditions imposed on them, either on manoeuvres or on active service.

It is a well-known fact that impure water is one of the chief causes of enteric fever; in fact so much attention has been bestowed on the importance of pure water by the medical authorities, in their endeavours to combat this great scourge of modern armies in the field, that it would appear that impure water is the greatest, if not the sole cause of enteric. I feel fully justified, therefore, in urging on my readers the importance of accustoming themselves to the habit of going for long periods on the march without liquids, with a view to minimizing the danger of contracting this disease.

Not only for hygienic reasons is it desirable to be able to control the desire for drink on the march: but it is also of benefit in other ways. On some of the long marches in South Africa, the officers had the greatest difficulty to restrain men from leaving the ranks to drink filthy and polluted water, sometimes from stagnant...
pools or dams on the veldt. The orders were very stringent on this subject, yet some men unable to restrain themselves at the sight of water in any form would run out of the ranks, a proceeding which invariably brought them heavy punishment.

The most frequent indulgers in drinks whilst on the line of march, strange to relate, are total abstainers from alcohol. I do not state this fact with any desire to discourage total abstinence, but I do think that temperance societies, especially the Army Temperance Society, should endeavour to point out to its members that temperance, or total abstinence from alcohol, should not mean an immoderate use of all other liquids or beverages, and that there is sometimes a greater danger to their health lurking in the innocent-looking glass of clear water, or the bottle of cheap mineral water, than may be contained in the beverage from the use of which they have promised to abstain.

Heavy drinkers, or those addicted to over indulgence in alcohol, come next, though many of these, through a rooted contempt for water or minerals, overcome their thirst, or preserve it, with a view to better enjoying their favourite beverage when the camping ground is reached, and the canteen opened. I have known many a hard drinker who, when in camp or barracks, was seldom without being more or less under the influence of drink, still retain his aversion to water whilst on active service and unable to indulge in alcohol, was more moderate in the use of water than the avowed abstainer.

The moderate drinker, accustomed as he is to moderation in the use of alcohol, is usually moderate also in the drinking of water, and does not suffer so much from the desire to drink frequently and copiously, as either of the two former.

Non-smokers, however, come easily first in the ability to resist the craving for drinks, or rather should I say the desire to drink on the march is not so intense in them as it is in their comrades who smoke. Many virtues have been claimed for the fragrant weed. It is attributed with the power to soothe the tired and troubled mind, soften the temper, allay the pangs of hunger, and many other beneficial powers, none of which I am going to question; but that it lessens the desire for drinking, or that smoking strong tobacco either before or on a march under a tropical sun is anything but harmful to the smoker, I have never been able to justify from my experience of the habits of the men I have marched with.

No one, except he be a bigoted non-smoker, who has had experience of active service, can deny that tobacco, when used at
the proper time, is beneficial. It is the soldier's greatest solace and comfort in camp, bivouac and, when permitted, in the hospital.

When the relieving force marched into Ladysmith through the lines of gaunt and half starved men of the garrison, the first thing they asked us for was not food, but tobacco. Unfortunately we were not able to help them, as we were as badly off for the precious weed as themselves, having been unable to procure any during the ten days' continuous operations we had been engaged in since leaving the last camp at Chieveley.

So it was even with the wounded. When help came, their first cry was for water, and the next was for a cigarette or a smoke of any kind. Yes! there is no doubt about the influence of tobacco on the spirits of the soldier on service. You may curtail his bread, biscuit or meat ration, take away his allowance of rum, or deprive him of his tent and blankets, and you do not affect his spirits, but if you fail to keep him supplied with tobacco you go a good way towards making him a depressed and unsatisfied individual.

Smoking, however, has its demerits as well as its advantages. It is usual amongst most hard smokers to light their pipes immediately on rising—that is if they have not been indulging in it whilst lying awake before reveillé. Then they have another smoke after breakfast; and for the first mile or two the pipe is kept going. These are the men, I invariably noticed, who always had their water bottles emptied the first, and were asking for drinks from the bottles of their more careful comrades.

By drying up the salivary glands, smoking creates an intensified desire for water, when acting in conjunction with a hot sun, a dusty road, and the fatigue of marching with a service load; so that the craving for water in these men was but the sequence of the early morning smoke.

You will see very few men smoking after the first eight or nine miles have been accomplished, and the sun pouring down its fierce rays on the dusty column. It is in the early cool of the morning that the harm has been done, when the pipe or cigarette has been too freely indulged in.

During our long marches in South Africa, I have often been asked how it was that I was always able to reach the end of the longest march with my water bottle still three parts full. I had gained a certain reputation for this, so that at the end of each march, when the water carriers were detailed from each section to fill the bottles—a proceeding which usually entailed another walk of a mile or two—there would be a rush for my bottle, not so much for the honour of filling it, as for the water they knew it contained.
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to quench their thirst before setting out on their tramp to the watering place.

I have always attributed my immunity from thirst to the fact of my not smoking, and those who have taken my advice, and curtailed or discontinued their morning smoke, have invariably informed me that it lessened their desire for water.

It is remarkable how easy it is, with a little persistency and exercise of will power, to overcome the desire for water in the early stages of the day’s march. If a man will make up his mind not to give in to the first symptoms of thirst by slaking it from his water bottle, he will find that the desire will gradually wear off, so that whilst he may have felt thirsty after the first mile or two, the thirst, instead of increasing, has diminished.

Constant tippling at the water-bottle, especially at the beginning of a march, only aggravates the thirst, and leaves the drinker still unsatisfied. A few minutes after each drink if the sun is hot, and the roads dusty, the thirst is as insatiable as before, whereas had he left his water-bottle alone, he would have found that the first thirst had worn off, and left him with little desire, if any, for water.

That it is possible, by the exercise of the will to overcome the initial cravings for drink on the march, I am quite confident, both from my own experience and from that of other men I have marched with and advised on that point.

It would be useless, however, to ask any man past a certain age, who had been used all his life to immoderation and the slaking of his thirst at its first and every call, to attempt this control. It is the young soldier, for whom these pages are written, that I would ask, in his early soldiering career, to practise the exercise of control over drinking on the march.

He will have many opportunities; on field days, route marching, and manoeuvres. Let him endeavour to accustom himself to the habit of overcoming the first false thirst, that ensues when only a short while on the road, and of marching as far as possible without drinks of any sort.

Resist the blandishments of the “fizzer wallahs” and vendors of cheap drinks, when they appear on the line of march. These drinks only create a stronger thirst, and are not always obtained, or manufactured from a desirable source. When you are really thirsty, drink sparingly of the water provided in the regimental water barrel, or of what you may be carrying in your bottle. When the mouth is parched and dry, if you take a mouthful of water and roll it about in your mouth a while, then throw it out again, you will find that it sometimes relieves the thirst as well as if a deep
draught had been taken. It was my habit, when I found I could
do no longer without a drink, to keep each drop of water in my
mouth for a while before swallowing it. That was when water
was scarce, and I found that it satisfied me as well, and made my
allowance of water last longer.

If you continue to practise the habit of controlling the desire for
drinking liquids on the march, the habit will grow on you, till you
can accomplish the longest day's march, without a drink of any
kind or without any intense desire for the same.

When you have reached this stage, it will go a long way to
insuring you good health and ability to resist the ravages of
disease in any country you may find yourself quartered in, or on
any campaign it may be your luck to take part in.

There is more disease caused, especially in tropical countries, by
the immoderate use of water and other liquids than by any other
means.

Wine, beer, spirits, water, minerals, tea, coffee and all other
beverages, when used to excess, are one and all as bad as each other,
whilst each when drunk in moderation may be beneficial. Let
moderation in all things be your motto and apply it specially to the
indulging in liquids if you wish to retain your health in tropical
countries.

PART V.

MUSIC AS AN AID TO MARCHING.

Singing has often been recommended as a means of keeping up
the spirits of the men, enlivening the weariness, and soothing the
bodily fatigue, consequent on the performance of prolonged marches,
thereby adding to the marching efficiency of a regiment. Marching
songs, psalms, and even the latest Music Hall ditties, have all had
their advocates. Only recently a suggestion has been made that
choral classes be formed amongst the various regiments quartered
at Aldershot, with the object of encouraging the singing of songs
and choruses on the march.

As a means of developing the lung-power on short practice
marches, in cool weather, singing together and in rhythm with the
step would certainly be of advantage. Vocal efforts on the march
may be all very well in this way, or on occasions, such as going or
returning from a bathing parade, on a short winter route march, or
when marching through the cool glades or shady lanes of England,
during the autumn manoeuvres.

I doubt, however, if the singing of marching songs or choruses,
under a tropical sun, across stretches of sandy plains, would be of
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any benefit. I have always found that the man who kept his mouth closed, breathing steadily through his nostrils, was the man that marched well. Singing interferes with the natural steady breathing, allows dust to enter the lungs through the throat, dries the salivary glands, causing a desire for more water, and altogether adds to the general fatigue of the body. Even conversation, when carried on to excess in the ranks is, in a way, detrimental.

Whilst marching with my company on an unusually hot and sultry day in South Africa, enveloped in clouds of fine dust, and hearing no sound for miles but the deep breathing of the men as they plodded silently on, I have always known they were marching well—you cannot march for any length of time and talk, not to mention sing—not under an African sun, anyway—amidst clouds of dust thrown up by transport animals and the feet of the marchers.

Regimental bands, I need hardly say, are of the utmost value on the march, and the music is highly appreciated by the men. All old soldiers, whether regulars or volunteers, will remember the thrill they have experienced, when towards the close of a long day's march, the band has struck up a lively and familiar air. How they have pulled their tired bodies together, straightened out their shoulders, and stepped smartly out to the music.

All regiments have some favourite march—not necessarily the regimental one, the playing of which by the band never fails to enliven, or to use a familiar expression, to “buck up” the men, no matter how tired or wearied with hard marching they may be. In my regiment, the favourite was “Brian Boru’s March,” and whenever the men were beginning to show signs of weariness on a long march, the striking up of the first few bars of this inspiriting march was always responded to by a squaring of shoulders, a straightening of tired bodies, and a series of ear-splitting Irish yells, culminating in one long and loud “Hurrish” as the band sustained a pause note in the middle of the march.

A good deal of music, however, is wasted on the march by playing over rough and uneven ground, up hills, and through narrow lanes where the column has to stretch out considerably.

Playing under these conditions, besides being very distressing to the bandsmen, is the cause of much “grousing” amongst the men, as they try to keep step to the jerky music, while dodging stones, ruts, and mounds of earth in their path.

The band should never be ordered to play unless there is a fairly clear road to march over, when its music can be appreciated.
and the keeping of the step to the same is a relief, instead of adding to the distress of the column.

Regimental band music was seldom heard on the march during the South African campaign, for the reason that the band instruments were collected at the base of operations, and with the exception of a few regiments, they were not issued again till the end of the war; the bandsmen either being employed as regimental stretcher-bearers, or taking their place in the ranks.

Some regiments, however, retained their drum and fife bands and used them whenever it was considered that the dispositions of the enemy's forces would permit of music being played on the march. That this music was highly appreciated by the men, and also a great aid to their marching, there is not the slightest doubt, though personally I cannot vouch for its good effects, as I was never fortunate enough to march behind a band of music during the campaign.

Highland regiments, in common with all Scottish regiments, are the most fortunately situated in respect of music on the march, for they are never without their pipers in war or in peace. The Highland pipe has the advantage over other wind instruments that it can be played singly and for a long period without undue distress to the player. One piper can play for his company should they be detached from their regiment, for long periods throughout the day's march, and it is very unusual to see a company on service without its piper. This fact has a lot to do with the good marching powers of our Highland regiments, and I am of opinion that if Highland pipes were more extensively used in the service they would be of assistance in maintaining a high standard in marching.

The pipes are already in use in the Indian native army, notably in the Ghoorka regiments, and in the Egyptian army. The Soudanese regiments also possess their corps of pipers, so that the instrument is not altogether the monopoly of Scottish corps.

Irish regiments in particular should possess a corps of pipers, as they have a national claim to the instrument as well as the Scotch, the Irish war pipe having claims to antiquity as great as the Highland pipes. I look forward to the day when all Irish infantry regiments will possess a band of their old Irish war pipes in lieu of the drums and fifes, so convinced am I of the great service and utility of the pipes as a means of supplying music on the march, especially on active service.

Whilst writing these lines I have been interested in an announcement that the Royal Navy have sanctioned pipe music at the Royal Naval Barracks in Portsmouth.