TRAINING SOLDIERS IN PERSONAL HYGIENE.

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This is almost a new idea, but more probably an old one revived or intensified. Formerly it was not possible, now we live in more sanitary times; and the only barrier to the attainment of the idea is the ignorance of the soldier.

The "esprit de corps" story is not yet old, and is still applicable to men in the ranks at the present time. The soldier has never been taught the practical art of healthy living; indeed I do not know of any class to whom it is systematically taught; it is an art neglected in civil life as well as in the army. But the young soldier, of all men, requires such instruction; he has been placed without preparation in new surroundings, the purpose of his life has been changed, he is expected to become a healthy animal, fit in every way for the strain of war or foreign service. He may, and indeed must, learn something of personal hygiene, but there is no system, no teaching, and there is nobody responsible. He is encouraged to learn everything else needful for his profession, but in this matter the recruit is supposed to be inspired. Now my experience shows me that he does not know the simplest things, such as how to wash, how to care for his teeth, or his feet; how to look after his underclothing, how to eat or drink, how to avoid cold or heat, how to preserve his health and fitness under varying and unusual conditions. The young soldier is in these matters a grown up baby whose education stopped at the age of three, when he was left to look after himself.

If the soldier can be successfully trained in these matters the result will be of immense value to the State, as well as to the man himself. The writer is impressed with the necessity of training the recruit in this art, and making it a part of the routine through which he must pass. It is futile to condemn the men for their apathy and their ignorance of simple sanitary laws—they know nothing about it.

An officer of a distinguished regiment once said to me, "'tis no use, you can't clean them, 'tis their nature to be dirty, they like it. This would be a nice regiment without the men, just the band and the Mess." Well, I admit they were difficult, but that was in the old days. Still, however, it is hard to influence the men in a regiment; they are set; whatever may be the habits and traditions
of the men, they are almost unchangeable. To be quite successful this training should be commenced in the depot and carried on in the regiment.

Who will carry out this work, what branch of the army will undertake it? There are no arrangements at present in force. I think there can be only one answer. The Officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps have the necessary training; it is their interest; it will further their work; they ought to undertake it.

The sympathy of the regimental officers should be aroused, and the co-operation of the non-commissioned officers is essential, as they are in constant touch with the men, and can get them to do things that no amount of talking will accomplish.

May I sketch very briefly my own experience among the recruits of the Royal West Kent Regiment at Maidstone. Here I found the plastic material I desired. Colonel Brock commanding the troops entered fully into the plan. The men were assembled in the gymnasium once or twice a week, and I talked to them. Practical illustrations were given when possible, and a black board was useful. They formed a very interested and attentive audience, and I learn that my lectures form texts for barrack-room conversations. The subjects and the language were simple; just their daily life and habits, about fresh air, sunlight, food and drink, their clothes, their rooms, the care of their teeth, cleanliness. Many converts were made, and a new feeling is growing. The work is also carried on at weekly inspections; this is very important, and a most practical way of impressing and teaching the men. The idea is kept before their minds on every suitable occasion, in the gymnasium, at vaccination, at hospital.

The regimental officers give their support, and the non-commissioned officers assist, they come into direct touch with the men in their rooms, and daily life. The gymnasium instructors especially, have a very powerful influence, which I am happy to say they employ for good.

For the short time that this work has been carried on the results appear most favourable, and encourage a feeling of great hopefulness. The recruits begin to understand and take a pride in following rules intelligently. I am gratified by the ready, "Yes Sir, I do so since you told us about it." Even men in the Militia get their friends in the Regulars to "put down for a tooth brush," so that they too may clean their teeth. Men buy a fourth pair of socks so that two pairs may go to the weekly wash, and two are kept in wear. Excessive cigarette smoking has diminished, spitting
(of all habits the most disgusting in soldiers and sailors), is dis-
countenanced, and has almost ceased. Altogether, there is the
commencement of a higher standard of cleanliness and comfort.

It is gratifying to know that even incomplete results can be
attained; but the work must be continued in the regiment, or these
men will get under the influence of traditions that may not be
favourable to the new idea.

Training the soldier in this practical art of healthy living
should be commenced in the depot but still carried on in the
regiment. If we (the officers of the R.A.M.C.), undertake it, it
will give us a wider interest in the soldier, a deeper interest
in our work. It will do more, it will encourage and cement a
comradeship and sympathy with the other branches of the service;
it will get rid of that feeling that we are always fault finding; we
will have the soldier interested in his own welfare, and the sympathy
and co-operation of the regimental officers.

It is gratifying to know that this educational effort is not an
isolated one: others have been working in the same direction, and
I feel encouraged to hope that the movement may spread widely.