VARICOCELE AS A CAUSE OF REJECTION OF RECRUITS FOR THE ARMY.

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A FORMER number of the Journal contained an article by Colonel F. Howard, A.M.S., dealing with certain points in the Medical Regulations for Recruiting. With most of the author's observations and suggestions medical officers who have had to perform recruiting duty will, I think, be disposed to agree.

It is obviously true that a country whose military system is founded upon the principle of voluntary service cannot afford to reject recruits on account of certain commonly met with physical defects, which experience has proved to be not inconsistent with perfect military efficiency.

The existing regulations recognise this fact to a certain extent, but it is no doubt desirable, as Colonel Howard argues, that an even greater latitude should be granted the examining medical officer in certain cases than exists at present, and (I venture to add) that errors of judgment, which may occasionally arise owing to such a relaxation of the regulations, should not be too severely regarded, except, of course, such as could only be due to carelessness or ignorance. So far, then, we are probably all at one with Colonel Howard.

In dealing, however, with varicocele as a cause of rejection for military service, he makes so remarkable a statement regarding his own experience of this complaint, in its effect on the physical efficiency of the soldier, and draws from this statement a conclusion so at variance with my own experience, and, I believe, with that of most military medical officers, that I hope no apology will be considered necessary for attempting to call further attention to the subject in this Journal. The statement I refer to appears on p. 182, vol. ii., and runs as follows:—

"In an experience of thirty years I never treated an officer or soldier for varicocele."

He also asks: "Have any medical officers ever had officers or soldiers under treatment for varicocele, or been obliged to excuse them from any duty on that account?"

My length of service falls a good deal short of thirty years, but during the time I have been in the army I have certainly had a good
Varicocele as a Cause of Rejection of Recruits

many soldiers under treatment, and have often had to excuse men from duty and send them to hospital on this account. Further, I shall be much surprised if this is not the general experience of my brother officers.

It struck me, however, that perhaps the best answer to Colonel Howard's question would be obtained by looking up the number of admissions for varicocele during 1903 at the hospital where I was doing duty (the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich).

I find there were 35 admissions on this account last year (one being an officer), of whom no less than 26 suffered so much pain and inconvenience as to make them willing to undergo the operation for radical cure. In fact, I find that next to the operation for radical cure of hernia, the most frequent operation (of one kind) performed here in 1903 was that for the radical cure of this complaint. The following are the figures:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Operations</th>
<th>34</th>
<th>27</th>
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<tr>
<td>Radical cure of hernia</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radical cure of varicocele</td>
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It must also be remembered that the admissions to hospital only represent those in whom the symptoms were so severe as to unfit them for the performance of military duty at all. How many more had to be excused some portion of their duty (such as gymnasium classes) I have no means of judging. My own experience would make me expect to find there had been a good many.

However this may be, from the above figures two conclusions can, I submit, be safely drawn; and the recruiting medical officer will do well to bear them in mind when deciding whether a recruit affected with varicocele shall or shall not be accepted for military service.

(1) That varicocele may, and not infrequently does, injuriously affect the physical efficiency of the soldier, and necessitate his admission to hospital.

(2) That as soldiers are certainly no fonder of being operated on than other people, the fact that men so frequently undergo the operation for radical cure is proof positive that this complaint is one that causes very real suffering, and that it is not merely the shirker and malingerer who goes to hospital on account of it. (For which reason also, a medical officer may sometimes hesitate to certify a

\[1\] In one of these cases, under each head, the operation was performed on both sides.
prisoner with a well-marked varicocele as fit for punishment, without deserving to be straightway classed among the "Invertebrata."

Consequently I cannot (with all due deference) agree with Colonel Howard that varicocele is, from a recruiting point of view, one of those minor defects concerning which the existing regulations might safely and advantageously be further released. They already sanction the acceptance, at the discretion of the examining officer, of recruits in whom the condition exists to a limited extent, and this, I believe, is as far as it is safe or prudent to go, with due regard for the Service.

As Colonel Howard in all his long service never had to treat a man for this complaint, it is no matter for surprise that he should consider a rejection rate of nearly 14 per 1,000 too high, and unfair both to the army (always in need of recruits) and to the individual desiring to serve.

To those officers, however, whose service experience has taught them to regard this condition (except when "existing to a limited extent," as the regulations say) as a not infrequent cause of military inefficiency, the numbers rejected on account of it appear by no means too numerous. If 10 per cent. of young male adults really are affected in this way, the fact that 86 out of every 100 men so affected are accepted for the army shows clearly that, so far at least as varicocele is concerned, no unreasonably high physical standard is demanded.

As I do not wish to further extend the length of this article, I will not go into the question of the effect of tropical service on soldiers enlisted with varicocele, but in an army such as ours it is a point which should not be lost sight of by officers entrusted with the responsibility of passing recruits.