SOME UNCLASSED PARASITES WHICH AFFECT THE SOLDIER IN INDIA.

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This short sketch will hold no news for those who know India, but may interest those who have yet to go there.

Ships that voyage in the Tropics soon collect weeds and barnacles on their hulls; the soldier is not long in India until he finds he, also, has gathered on him a number of parasites which make a lodgment on him, or rather, a living off him. All parasites may not be hurtful; unfortunately, the soldier thinks his are all good fairies, and wonders how he ever got on without them before. One soothingly shaves him daily, and gives him cycosis occasionally. Another will bring him his ginger beer, and even opens it for him with a dirty finger, or a piece of stick picked out of the nearest gutter; and so on, with many others to be mentioned below.

Suppose we take a unit that has been a fair time in India, and see what accretions can grow round it, and what usages may come to be established in it. Say a soldier has to turn out early, and the coffee shop or other arranged place for "gun-fire tea" is at some distance, he has an obliging native at hand with hot cocoa on sale for a trifle. Where or how prepared may take some finding. The soldier comes back to breakfast, and is inclined for something more than bread and tea. The coffee shop is still a way off, but he rubs his ring, and at his elbow is a native retailing hot porridge, again for a trifle. The dinner hour comes round and the meat has proved uneatable (as it often does, unfortunately); with what shall he fill up the vacant place? Once more the obliging native is at hand, this time with hot rice pudding, as mysterious in its origin as its predecessors. The afternoon wears on, and supper is still far off. Rice pudding fills for a time, but does not last. The good fairy comes again to the rescue with boiled peas, or that still more succulent and tempting snack, the "Bombay oyster." For the benefit of the unlearned I may say that the "Bombay oyster" is a raw egg, vinegar and pepper. The latter is not always necessary; Keating's insect powder may be used at a pinch. This mixture is served out in the solitary glass the hawker carries, and it must not be imagined that this glass is cleaned each time—it is not. No doubt many other petty caterers are known to those with more
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Indian experience, or, perhaps, some are lucky enough to have never met any of these.

In these days, when we have to seek for other sources of sporadic enteric than the controlled water and milk supplies, this question has a very serious side. The soldier is over-supplied with natives, particularly in stations where he has extreme heat to bear. Generally low-caste, unclean beings, they are always at his hand, attending to his wants and, as has been seen, furnishing him with "dainties." As well as shutting the big gates against enteric, these small postern doors have also to be looked to. It is not so easy as it seems to stamp out these trades. The soldier likes these people about him. The old soldier often finds that his snacks come cheaper than if he used his institutes; the young soldier has the feeling of his importance fed, by having retainers at call. Of course this must be qualified. Probably the majority of men get all their extra food in their institutes, but there is a large minority who patronise these folk. In the next place the spending power of a unit is sometimes not realised. A penny per day per man, in a fairly strong battalion, may amount to £120 a month, or more. So it can be seen how large a sum may be circulated among these hangers-on. The small sums these latter pick up, and which we see may become a large amount in the aggregate, have to yield their toll to whoever is strong enough to exact it, and so vested interests grow up which offer passive resistance to remedial measures.

Another qualification is now necessary. I am far from implying that the above would fairly represent an average unit in India. Whether these customs prevail in many or few I do not know. I do know, however, that I have not drawn a fancy picture.

In passing, though it has only a distant connection with the above, I may note the liking I find among soldiers to make themselves independent of their institutes in the matter of food. They say that they economise by it. Many of them club together in small groups for the purpose of providing and cooking their suppers. I am told that the practice has considerably grown since the South African War. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether it should be frowned upon or let alone. The skill to cook for himself is a valuable asset to the soldier in the field. On the other hand, as the cooking is generally done in the open, it is, so far, exposed to contamination by dust and flies; the men may not be careful where they procure their materials from, and these materials may be overmuch handled by natives. It needs careful watching and regulating at all times.