THE R.A.M.C. IN THAILAND.

BY
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In arduis fidelis.
"Hot but not bothered."

[Written at Sea on Board H.M.T. "Orbita," October 18, 1945.]

If Bernard Shaw were requested to state what he thought of the way the Japanese treated their Prisoners of War, it is possible he would reply: "What did you expect, when for years the white race has been heaping indignities on the yellow men?" There can be no doubt that the Japanese had a long series of indignities to avenge. What the following strictly medical publications reveal is that they avenged them as much as they dared—on helpless prisoners. Others before in our history have been captured and reduced to servitude, or compelled to pull an oar in a galley (John Knox, for example). What is unique in our experience is not that, in the year 1942, we became slaves, but that we became the slaves of slaves. The wretched Koreans who lorded it over us were themselves confined and beaten by their masters, and whatever of venom and exasperation surged in their hearts they vented on us. It takes a slave to display arrogance, and to portray it in its quintessentialized form we suggest a statue of a Korean sentry, musket in hand, lording it over a squad of P.o.W.

Suffering, as Oscar Wilde, himself a captive, wrote, is one long moment. It has a nightmarish quality, and like a nightmare one forgets it, and finally all that one remembers is that it was a nightmare. Six months after the fall of Singapore each P.o.W. had lost an average of 2 stone in weight. Scrotal dermatitis (a riboflavine deficiency) was almost constant. Beri-beri and encephalopathy were prevalent, and xerophthalmia was beginning to be recognized because of an epidemic of peculiar conjunctivitis and corneal ulceration. Many of the dogs that the camp attracted developed paralysis of their posterior extremities and had to be destroyed, a biological confirmation of the defective state of our diet. It should be emphasized that this grave dietetic inadequacy occurred at a place where the Japanese had captured huge stores of tinned foodstuffs—enough to keep the Army for six months or more. The author remembers eating ground-up peanut meal which was decomposed and gritty from admixture with earth. It was procurable in Singapore as fertilizer and we were grateful for the windfall. After all, we thought, what is good for a plant ought to be good enough for a starving doctor, providing he is not called upon to synthesize his own chlorophyll. A number of officers displayed a sudden liking for bilanchan, a stercoraceous paste made of prawns and native spices, a little of which savoury invigorated a mound of rice. Most of us
preferred to eat on the windward side of it. A wag sent a specimen of *bilanchan* in a stool container to the pathologist of the dysentery block for examination; he reported: "Fæcal, undigested food particles..." Years later we ate such muck gratefully and wondered at our former fastidiousness.

Every farmer knows that it takes about 4 lb. of pig feed to make one pound of pig, and every pediatrician knows that it takes about 6 lb. or more of pork to make a pound of boy. It is obviously extravagant to make human tissue in this circuitous manner, so the Japanese short-circuited the waste by feeding us the pig-feed. However, when in Siam, a primary food producing country, we tried to raise pigs, they often failed to subsist on our swill, and *their* diet had to be supplemented. It is because of starvation chiefly that to have been a P.O.W. of the Japanese in 1942-3 involved, actuarially speaking, a greater risk than that faced by a fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain, or by an army of Canadians bravely fighting their way through Holland. We lack exact figures, but over one-quarter of the European P.O.W. died in the first eighteen months of their captivity, and an equal number had to be admitted to "hospital" for sickness. One may be confident that if the war had continued to go against us, the remainder would also have died. As it was, alarmed by the possibility of retribution, our captors in the last eighteen months relaxed their policy of extermination and began everywhere to destroy written evidence that it had ever existed. Their secret police, the "Kempeis," frequently searched our quarters for diaries. However, the graveyards contain thousands of British and Australian dead and it will be interesting to see by what ingenious ratiocination the Japanese mind will explain this away.

Our captors, for nearly a century have tried to impress the world with the high quality of their civilization. When they took 60,000 prisoners in Malaya, they had an opportunity of showing the world not only that they were excellent soldiers, but that they were decent. Instead, they have turned the word *bushido* into ridicule. Every Japanese, when he could mumble a few words of English, bragged of this code of the Samurai warrior, the Japanese equivalent of the European term, chivalry. What, however, did we prisoners of war understand by it? In the first place, an overwhelming braggadocio and swagger, uncontaminated by such sophisticated notions as modesty, or the decent restraint of good sportsmanship: By *bushido*, we daily understood that a man must not be reprimanded, but smacked in the face, must not be tried in a military fashion in the guard-room, but beaten like a dog—no, not like a dog: we have never seen a dog, or for that matter any animal, beaten the way the Japanese malfhandled their prisoners. By *bushido* we understood that a man must not merely be disciplined, but outraged as well; must never by any accident be kicked in the rump, but in the testicles. When a P.O.W. was recaptured after attempting to escape, he was charged with *desertion* and shot. Thus, for every infringement, fancied or real, a victim was found and the ends of justice satisfied; failing that, the whole group was punished and woe betide that group when the situation lacked a face-saving expedient, for the record of the Kempeis in extracting information from prisoners was an impressive one. By *bushido*, therefore, we understood the normal behaviour...
of our captors: remorseless, lecherous, treacherous, kindless villainy, villainy that having been done was impertinently presented to the world as chivalry. Once we saw a Japanese patting a pony: it was remarked upon as a thing worthy of comment.

There were several journalists among the Ps.o.W. who doubtless have recorded incidents in support of the above indictment. The following vignettes are evidential:

This is the story of an elephant with trade union propensities. Ever since the days of James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, it has been considered that an average horse could do about 550 foot pounds of work per second, a value known in English-speaking countries as the Horse Power. The power of an average healthy man is considered to be about one-seventh of this value. Now the power of an elephant is about six times that of a horse, but the Japanese, by an arithmetic peculiar to their mentality, calculated that 11 Ps.o.W. could do the work of one elephant in hauling railway sleepers, and actually exacted this standard of performance. One elephant, working alongside a gang of prisoners, took offence at the unfair competition; he picked one of them up with his trunk, impaled him on his tusk so that the point entered his buttock and emerged from the groin, then flung him away. He finally arrived in Chungkai, when we saw him. The tusk miraculously had missed the rectum and femoral vessels. The patient recovered and was thereafter known as Sabu.

While we were in Kanchanburi "aerdrome" camp, the following story went the rounds: A Japanese warrant officer, strutting about with his ridiculous air at his side, approached a British captain, whose salute he did not think enough. The following performance was witnessed:

"You English officer-ka?"
"Yes," was the answer. (smack)
"You proud-ka?" (no answer)
"Answer, you proud-ka?"
"Not proud." (smack)
"You proud-ka?"
"Yes, I proud."
"Oh, you proud!" (smack, smack)

Then he walked away in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Later in the week the egregious spirit of an Englishman had metamorphosed this humiliating episode: A pig lay a-dying in the piggery. It was therefore sold by the Japanese to us. Its head was disarticulated and placed on the counter of the troops' canteen to advertise for several hours that pork would shortly be on sale. A British officer approached it:

"You English officer, eh?" (smack)
"You proud, eh?" (smack)
"Oh, you not proud, eh?" (smack)
"English shoko [officer] no goodena." (smack)

During this performance a Korean sentry had stalked up behind the officer's back, witnessed this scene and, to the surprise of all, had slunk off.

Then there is the story of the bedpans in the Chungkai dysentery wards. There were two bedpans for a ward of two hundred and we were not permitted to borrow tools to make others until several months had elapsed. The dysentery latrines were 200 feet away. A light was not allowed to be shown in the open at night, and in any case consisted of one feeble lamp at the end of the ward. The mud, the rain and the darkness made it impossible for the very ill to get to the defecation point and perforce they moved their bowels outside the hut by the ditch. When dawn broke our sanitary squads rushed there to cover up the delinquency, making a race of it with the Korean guards who knew what must be going on and rushed to find a justification for sham rage and an all round face slapping. "English soldier no good" they would sneer, pointing to the dung and smacking whomever happened to be about.
We must include the story of the Korean guard O—, for it is not a tale that a journalist can tell. He sent for the surgical specialist at Chungkai and ordered him to perform several circumcisions for his inspection. "But why?" said the officer. "We haven't any local anaesthetic to spare, and besides, it happens that no one needs to have it done."

"I want to see how you do it and if it is dangerous. If I think you are number one, I will order you to do it on me."

The surgeon left with the promise that he would inform him if and when he was doing a circumcision. Next day, O—, despairing of witnessing a circumcision, Screwed his courage to the cutting point and ordered the surgeon to circumcise him. "Let me see a circumcision. Next day, a set of strictly scientific papers; but it is the imposthume of three and a half years of starvation, of abuse, of neglect, of indignity and of lack of news.
Psychologists no doubt will attempt to explain why a reputedly kindly person like the average little Japanese behaved in this monstrous manner, and they will no doubt tell us that it was mob psychology, and that a large group of people behaves quite unlike the individuals comprising it, just as the mathematical properties of numbers that are infinitely great show some surprising contradictions to our common notions of arithmetic. There is more in it than that, unfortunately: it is a deducible proposition that when two individuals mutually despise each other’s ideology, they hate each other (Spinoza) and the greater the love for one’s ideals, the more the hate towards those who contemn them. This is, in fact, the usual basis of hatred, when one separates it from fear, an entirely different emotion. Now there can be no doubt that the Japanese religion of Emperor-worship is abhorrent to the white man. Obviously, when the United States Congress initiated a Japanese exclusion bill with the preamble that they were an inferior people, they settled our fate as P.O.W., for the Japanese regard themselves as an Asiatic Herrenvolk of divine origin.... There is one more feature that may be urged to explain our cruel treatment. Human beings, physiologically speaking, are animals who have come up in the world, and not fallen angels. Cruelty is inherent in the human personality, being part of the hunting instinct. It is normally submerged by social pressure. Let a man have enough power, however, and it will promptly appear. Lord Acton who was a historian, not a psychologist, spoke truly when he said: “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” At a certain stage of the Asiatic war the Japanese appeared to have everything their own way. The omnipotence of a cat playing with a mouse appeared to us to be the same as that of a puffed-up Korean guard swaggering through the huts looking for trouble, exacting compliments from officers, and convincing himself that we were dirt beneath his little feet. For, was he not the representative of Teno Heika, the holy, the high-born, the just one, the rider of the spotless horse, the redressor of wrong, the shadow of God on earth etc.?

However, enough of this sound and fury: more than enough: let us get on with our papers. They were written in captivity at the time the observations were made, and what they lack by inevitable errors of composition and scientific allusion, they gain by vividness. We have not corrected them in any way. They are of historical importance as indicating how medical science functions when freed of paraphernalia in a community which by an evil chance encountered famine and was thrown back into an environment resembling the days of Moses. The first papers were written during the worst period of our captivity, when thousands of sick lay in stinking wretched huts, euphemistically called hospital wards, in Chungkai (see accompanying drawings by Chalker). Because the Japanese continued to search for diaries, these documents were preserved by sealing them in a bottle which was then slipped under a corpse on its way to be buried. They were dug up after the enemy surrendered. Even so, we did not dare at the time to tell the story in all its brutality, lest the papers be discovered. Four papers are herein presented:

1. *Experiences with Cholera in a Jungle Camp in Thailand*, by Capt. J. Markowitz, R.A.M.C. This paper is chiefly of epidemiological value. It demonstrates the value
of preventative inoculation, and the feasibility of making and giving hypertonic saline in the field. The point might be of use in the mass treatment of cholera in India. Incidentally it illustrates that we do not know the cause of epidemics.

II. A Series of over 100 Amputations of the Thigh for Tropical Ulcer, by Capt. J. Markowitz, R.A.M.C. Actually 115 patients had one or both thighs amputated by the author; of these, at the time of the Japanese surrender, at least 58 were alive and well. Two patients with bilateral amputation survived. The paper gives a clinical account of aggravated tropical ulcer, with a description of an improvised jungle operating theatre. No case of ring sequestrum followed operation, which we attribute to the fact that periosteum was not stripped at the point where the bone was transected.

III. Resuscitation under Spinal Anaesthesia without Drugs, by Capt. J. Markowitz, R.A.M.C. The cause of death under spinal anaesthesia is not circulatory collapse so much as respiratory failure. The former is not urgent and is treated by raising the limbs to an inverted quadrupedal posture; the latter must receive immediate treatment by direct insufflation of air by putting a bit of stethoscope tubing in the patient's mouth and blowing into it. This was surprisingly effective in a number of cases. It is easier and better than other methods since the insufflated air has the advantage of containing CO₂. This rather obvious method was not described by Schäfer because in those days it was thought that CO₂ was harmful.

IV. The Nature of Starvation Amblyopia, by Major A. R. Hazelton, A.A.M.C. Various defects of vision were common in the Ps.o.W., ranging from easy fatiguability of the eyes to complete blindness. Major Hazelton with commendable zeal, in spite of a lack of optical equipment, made a valuable study. One type of visual complaint was due to B₁ deficiency, showing itself by easy fatiguability of the eye. In these patients the ciliary muscle was easily exhausted by ciliary ergography, and B₁ relieved their symptoms. Another group showed amblyopia, of which colour blindness was an unexpected symptom. It was not benefited by nicotinic acid, but vision often improved markedly when the diet was supplemented by eggs. It is almost certainly a conal defect. The observations suggest that there is an unknown vitamin controlling retinal function.

These papers record observations made on starved, brutally used Europeans. We owe it to the 20,000 who died that they may be put on record.

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