

RECOLLECTIONS.

BY

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IN the near future an old gentleman, now approaching the allotted span of three score years and ten, will cease to be a Colonel-Commandant of the R.A.M.C., thus ending an official connexion which began forty-seven years ago.

Those years have witnessed some of the most stirring events in the world's history. They have also witnessed striking changes in the Army Medical Services—changes which, in spite of occasional set-backs, have resulted in remarkable progress being achieved. Perhaps a few stray comments on some of these changes may be of interest. They are written from memory, as there has been no opportunity of checking their accuracy with official records.

On joining the Army in 1899 we went to Netley as Surgeons on Probation (S.s.O.P.). Our period there was cut short by the outbreak of the South African War, but it was sufficiently long to acquire a lasting *esprit de corps* and to form lifelong friendships with other members of the "batch."

It was usual for S.s.O.P. on completion of their course at Netley to proceed to the Depot at McGrigor Barracks, Aldershot, but, because of the war, this was delayed in our case, and I personally did not do the Depot course until after my return from foreign service six years later.

On the medical teaching at Netley, bacteriology was the most notable, as might be expected with Almroth Wright as Professor and Leishman (then a junior Major) as his principal assistant.

In addition to our work at the Army Medical School we each had charge of one or two wards and I well remember my first inspection by the divisional officer who showed grave displeasure at finding a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches under a patient's pillow! It surprised me to learn that he seemed more interested in such details than in the condition and treatment of the patients. Daily completion of the diet sheets was another task to which much time had to be given. An operation under a general anæsthetic was somewhat of an event, which required the authority and often the presence of the P.M.O. (a Surgeon-General). It was at that time the general custom throughout the Army that, except for the orderly officer, work ceased at 1 p.m. It was a custom which brought a good deal of criticism on our Service and I am glad that in later years it ceased to be followed by our best officers. In my opinion it was justifiable only in the tropics.

The Mess was excellent and, including I.M.S., we sat down sixty to seventy to dinner. Although our pay was only eight shillings a day we managed to get along all right. As the R.A.M.C. had only recently been formed and the new uniform not yet determined, we had no mess-kit, but wore blue jumpers and overalls with a broad red stripe both at work and in Mess.

(Incidentally when the uniform was ultimately decided on, it was by no means universally popular. Many had hoped for royal blue or red facings, but many Armies have adopted cherry as the colour for their medical services.)

After a "passing-out" examination we were posted to various units then being mobilized. I joined a Bearer Company which, with an entirely separate Field Hospital, comprised the medical units of an Infantry Brigade. Before leaving the port of embarkation, the unit was inspected by a General Officer of our own Service who in his address surprised us by stressing the importance of not robbing the dead!

We sailed from Southampton for the Cape on January 4, 1900.

During the voyage lectures were given to the troops on anti-typhoid inoculation, then in its infancy, and all volunteers were given one dose.

After disembarking at Capetown we entrained for Orange River where the brigade assembled and remained some weeks. Of that period I only remember two incidents—a huge swarm of locusts which destroyed all vegetation in its path, and a visit from Lord Kitchener who had recently come from the Sudan to become Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts.

The transport of our unit included seven ambulance wagons, each drawn by eight mules, and we were very disappointed when told by Lord Kitchener that owing to inability to provide sufficient forage for the mules, five of the ambulances would have to be left behind. My Commanding Officer pointed out that two ambulance wagons would be insufficient to transport the sick, but was told there wouldn't be many sick—a forecast which unfortunately did not prove accurate.

The function of a Bearer Company on the march was to transport the sick and wounded and hand them over to the field hospital on arrival at the next camp—a most unsatisfactory system which ended after the war with the adoption of the field ambulance.

We ultimately marched across the frontier of what was then the Orange Free State to a place called Ramdam where, within a few hours, an enormous mass of troops, including French's Cavalry Division, assembled from all directions, and in the evening Lords Roberts and Kitchener rode into camp. That was a thrill and we realized for the first time that we were taking part in a highly important operation.

No General Officer of my time won the esteem and affection of his troops to the same extent as Lord Roberts and they loved seeing him riding among them sitting his horse like a man of 30.

At that time he was approaching 70, had recently lost his only son (also a V.C.) killed in Natal, and had been called to direct a campaign which till then had mainly consisted of a series of reverses. In a few weeks the whole situation was changed—Kimberley was relieved, Cronje and his force surrendered at Paardeburg and Blomfontein was occupied. After the Paardeburg surrender a number of us were sent into the Boer Camp to dress the wounded. It was the first time I saw deep dug-outs and difficulty was experienced in getting out some of the more serious cases.

Cronje had put up a stubborn defence and it was during this period that the

enteric outbreak first made its appearance, to become much more extensive at Blomfontein a few weeks later.

Shortly after the fall of Paardeburg I was transferred to a Mounted Infantry Battalion with which I remained till the capture of Pretoria where, as a cheery but much-reduced band of bearded warriors, we rode past Lords Roberts and Kitchener in the main square of the capital.

Up to the time of the typhoid epidemic the medical arrangements had worked well, and the failure to deal adequately with the outbreak was a grievous disappointment to all R.A.M.C. officers serving in South Africa. This feeling was not appeased when, after the "scandal" became known at home, medical equipment of all kinds arrived from England. It was felt that with more foresight on the part of the military and medical authorities, such equipment should have been made available in the country in the earlier stages of the war.

Memories of that outbreak and the suffering and losses resulting therefrom make one wonder whether the Army realizes the debt it owes to Wright, Leishman and their successors at Millbank for protecting it from one of the greatest scourges that could inflict an army in the field.

One of my liveliest recollections of the South African War is that of the great fighting qualities of the Boer Commandos. As Mounted Infantry they were, I should think, unsurpassed, and, for example, the way in which they harassed our columns on the march was as efficient as it was unpleasant.

The period after the Boer War was to my mind the most important in the development of the Corps. For the striking improvements then brought about we are mainly indebted to two men: Mr. R. B. Haldane (afterwards Lord Haldane), Secretary of State for War, and Sir Alfred Keogh, Director-General. To their administrative genius and close co-operation the Corps owes much. Among the changes introduced during their period of office were: Establishment of the R.A.M. College, Millbank, and the Army School of Hygiene, Aldershot; senior officers' courses and appointments of consultants and specialists; formation of the Territorial Medical Service; establishment of departments of Hygiene and Pathology at the War Office with specialists in these subjects on the Staffs of the various Commands; extension and re-organization of the Nursing Service, and alterations in the Field Medical Organization.

It would be difficult for anyone who did not serve before that period to realize what a notable effect these changes had on the Corps and on the individual officer. The standard of professional work as well as the organization and equipment of our hospitals were markedly raised; our association with the civil profession (among whom Sir Alfred Keogh was held in high esteem) became closer, our position vis-a-vis the other branches of the Army was strengthened, and the Nursing Service which had been small and, to some extent, administrative in character, was re-organized into that great service which has since won such distinction in two world wars.

For Captains, the principal change was, of course, the introduction of the Senior Officers' Course and specialization, and it is a curious fact that a number

of them were against the latter when first proposed. There was also much criticism of the schemes of accelerated promotion based on the result of the examination, as it was felt that officers holding certain appointments before the course held an undue advantage. This part of the scheme was discontinued some years later.

I suppose most people will now agree that specialization has more than justified itself, indeed it would be difficult to visualize the Service without it, and it is probably true to say that the reputation of the Corps in any Station depends more on the medical, surgical and gynæcological specialists than on any of their brother officers of whatever rank. I well remember the satisfaction I felt when, on at least two occasions, Commanders-in-Chief came to my room at the War Office to express appreciation of the splendid "medical teams" in their Commands.

It is curious that so far as I remember the Haldane-Keogh developments did not include the provision of a dental service, more especially as the lack of dental surgeons was seriously felt in South Africa. I regret to think of the number of unnecessary extractions one was forced to carry out (and had carried out on oneself) during that campaign. The formation of The Army Dental Corps many years later was one of the most important developments in the Army Medical Services in recent times, though I regret it was not organized as a special branch of the R.A.M.C. Its success is a tribute to the zeal and efficiency of those dental officers who supervised its growth in the early days of its existence.

The developments to which I have been referring proved their worth in the first world war when, especially on the western front, the medical services reached a high state of efficiency. It may be claimed that no troops of any nation had ever before been so well looked after in the field, and the knowledge that, if wounded, they would be well cared for played an important part in maintaining their morale in spite of grievous casualties and extreme discomfort.

Although its success in the war was generally acknowledged, it was disappointing to find on the conclusion of hostilities that the Corps was unpopular in many of the medical schools, with the result that recruiting of young officers fell to a very low level. One of the principal causes for this was, I think, the fact that during the war almost all regular officers including specialists were allotted administrative tasks, the professional work being done almost entirely by T.C. officers. This left the impression that the R.A.M.C. was primarily a Corps of Administrators and for a young man who had just spent five years of hard work in qualifying as a doctor, a career which had been pictured to him as mainly administrative held no attractions.

The relative proportion of officers employed in administrative, as distinct from professional, work is one of the main criticisms of the Corps made by our civilian brethren. Our work in peace differs from that in war more than in any other branch of the Service. In peace we are primarily a corps of doctors; in war, with the civil profession to draw upon, a large proportion of our regular officers have of necessity to become administrative though I have always felt that this should not apply to the majority of our specialists.

Twice in my lifetime the Corps has been suddenly called on to expand to more than twenty times its normal strength, and the successful manner in which it has organized and administered that huge force is one of its greatest achievements. Unfortunately it is not an achievement which is fully appreciated either by the profession or the public, though the late Lord Moynihan, when Chairman of the Army Medical Advisory Board, used to say that as a preparation for war the training of administrators was more important than the training of surgeons because a sufficient number of the latter would always be available.

But the two functions are not incompatible. A keen doctor can, in time of peace, prepare himself for war without losing interest in his professional work and at the termination of hostilities can and should return to that work on the first opportunity.

Another subject of criticism is the admittedly large number of Forms and Returns required in the Army. I am sure no one dislikes them more than the R.A.M.C. officer who has to furnish them. Many of our best officers have tried to reduce them but without much success mainly because so many of them are required to furnish information demanded by others, e.g. the Annual Report on the Health of the Army for submission to Parliament. Anyone who can bring about a diminution in these encumbrances would be a real Corps benefactor.

I'm afraid it must be admitted that about the time I joined, many of our senior officers were not efficient, nor is this to be wondered at when one remembers that they were brought up in the old regimental system. Though usually men of great personal charm, they showed little initiative or self-reliance and were slaves to regulations. The junior officers on the other hand were a grand lot who, under the new system to be introduced later, became our first specialists and helped to raise the Corps to a high standard of efficiency. It was in the years preceding the first world war that the Corps in my opinion reached its highest peace-time level of competency and well-being.

Social life in the Corps, like everywhere else, has much changed since my early days due in the main to the increased prevalence of matrimony and the advent of the motor car. It used to be thought that marriage before reaching the rank of Major was a thing to be deprecated and the delinquent was regarded by his brother officers with ill-disguised pity. This somewhat harsh view was later modified to the wise precept that no officer should marry till he had completed his first foreign tour.

Sport, especially hunting and shooting, was indulged in much more frequently than is now the case, and polo had not yet become a game confined to men of wealth. Many of our officers played it though I never attained an ambition to play in a wholly R.A.M.C. team.

The internal combustion engine has, I fear, replaced the horse and the pony for the majority of Army officers, and tall stories in the Mess are now more likely to be concerned with shooting eagles on the golf course than shooting snipe or duck on the marshes.

The training of "other ranks" has improved out of all recognition, though I used to think it regrettable that much of that training had to be wasted

owing to "establishment" considerations. As a result of the latter, highly skilled technicians on reaching certain ranks had to be taken from their special work and allotted duties of a more or less routine character.

The bearing, demeanour, loyalty and reliability of our Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers have long been a source of justifiable pride and we all welcome the increased opportunities for promotion to commissioned rank which recent administrative changes have afforded them.

In time of war our N.C.O.s and men do not get the credit they deserve, and in the 1914-18 campaign were always referred to in the Press as "Red Cross Men," which they are not. This point was referred to by the then Adjutant-General (the late Sir Nevil Macready) in his work "Annals of an Active Life." He presumed that "our special correspondent" would ensure that such "pin-pricks" would be avoided in future wars, but such does not seem to have been the case.

Like every retired member of the R.A.M.C. I have followed its activities in recent years with the greatest interest. We shared with our comrades on the active list immense pleasure at the signal honour paid to our Corps by Her Majesty The Queen in becoming its Colonel-in-Chief.

Of its achievements in the recent war one can only express profound admiration, believing that never in its history has it served the nation and the Army so faithfully and so well.

Through the courtesy of the Director-General I paid a short visit to the B.L.A. last year. The visit was for me a memorable one, and I am very grateful to the D.M.S. and his Staff for the plans made for me to see as much as possible in the time available. One inevitably compared what one saw with the well remembered medical picture of the first world war, but the differences were so profound that there was really no comparison. Fewer casualties, earlier surgical interference, blood transfusion (the organization of this service was truly remarkable), penicillin and air transport, had altered the whole problem. The surgical technique appeared to have changed little, but thanks to the developments mentioned there seemed to be a complete absence of those shocked and toxic cases which were such a sad feature of the previous conflict.

It was a very real pleasure to be back in the field again with one's old Service, a little strange perhaps for the first hour or two, but after that I felt perfectly at home.

More, I believe, than any other medical service or society, the R.A.M.C. has always been a home to all who had the good fortune to serve it.

Whatever the future may hold, I hope that spirit will ever prevail.

[The Departments of Hygiene and Pathology at the War Office with specialists in these subjects on the Staffs of the various Commands came into effect in 1919.—ED.]