

Royal Army Medical Corps.

MR. JOHN STEWART, the special war correspondent of the *Morning Post*, has contributed to it, from Pretoria, some excellent articles on the Royal Army Medical Corps, from which pressure on our space does not permit us to quote at greater length. He writes:—

"I know that there were grave failures in the hospital economy at Ladysmith, into which the recently-appointed commission will have to inquire. But I also know that the Royal Army Medical Corps officers and their civilian coadjutors in Ladysmith gave shining instances of devotion to duty.

RED TAPE.

"They were hampered—I do not speak of the civilian surgeons—by the fact that they are not the ablest surgeons in the world and by the machinery.

"I have seen the Royal Army Medical Corps at its work in other places, and where it has failed the failure, I think, must be put down, in some degree at least, to incomplete medical education or to incomplete medical instinct, to a system that encourages, nay, imposes, a mechanical pursuit of the profession of surgery, to habits concerning hours, methods, and so forth, habits which are the direct results of a long course of red tape and to an absence of initiative that bespeaks a lack of professional enthusiasm, though be it understood that lack of professional enthusiasm co-exists, in war, certainly, and, I presume, in peace, with quite a sincere desire to alleviate suffering and help the patient in his struggle against death.

LACK OF AMBITION.

"That any medical man should have enlisted himself in the Royal Army Medical Corps is a fact which hints, if it does not declare, that man to be limited in his private, and almost devoid of professional, ambition. He is a poor sportsman. He is like the man who always plays for safety at billiards, though by facing a risk he might pile up a decent break.

"What he asks, and what he gets, is a very modest income followed by an equally modest pension. He ensures himself the company of men who are not 'outsiders'; of men, indeed, who may hold views about his own centrality—while he is young; and when he is old, after a career compared to which the 'potecary' of our forefathers had a career of wide and various experience, he knows that he will not lack a roof to cover his grey locks.

"It may be sound commerce, but on my soul I cannot away with the man of moderate desires.

The man who has the pluck 'to put it to the touch to win or lose it all' carries my money, if I happen to have any.

LACK OF PROFESSIONAL ENTHUSIASM.

"It is the absence of any impulse towards professional enthusiasm that has prevented the corps from insisting on instruments that would not be the derision of the attached civil surgeons. You know, a thorough-going medical man is just like a smart practitioner of the art of being a woman. He is ready to hang himself if his instruments are an hour behind the fashion of the day, just as a smart woman is enraged if she finds that her frock bears one pleat too many or too few.

"And as far as concerns the medical practitioner, the lust of novelty is entirely praiseworthy, since each new fashion in instruments registers a step of improvement, a stride nearer perfection. I have inquired of civil surgeons (who all use their own instruments) about the weapons provided for Army surgeons: the subject raises loud-tongued derision.

LACK OF INITIATIVE.

"When the British troops occupied Pretoria the Palace of Justice was offered to the principal medical officer as an hospital. It was refused, on the ground that the general hospitals had no beds. Consequently, our sick and wounded were lying on bare ground at the racecourse. The matter came to the notice of Mr. Leigh Wood, who did so much for our prisoners, and especially for our sick prisoners, before we occupied the place.

"Mr. Leigh Woods consulted with Sir William Thomson and the Hon. Rupert Guinness, of the Irish Hospital, and Mr. Murray Guthrie, for, to his mind, the condition of our own sick and wounded was little better than that of our sick and wounded prisoners under the Boers.

THE PRETORIA MEDICAL COMMISSION.

"At their instance the Pretoria Medical Commission was founded, beds were bought in the town, likewise blankets, sheets, and mattresses. The stores and equipment of the Irish Hospital were used as a nucleus, and now in the Palace of Justice there is an hospital of which we all may be proud. Four hundred and eighty out of five hundred beds are occupied, and Sir William Thomson, with nine medical men, is doing the work that usually requires twenty Royal Army Medical Corps officers. In fact, in the whole of this business the Royal Army Medical Corps has been put to shame. There was no sudden pressure here as there was at Bloemfontein.

"I should like to know, by the way, how it is that the Army hospitals are so inferior in equipment to the hospitals which the nation owes to private benevolence?

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