

The Report on the Concentration Camps.

The official report of the Ladies' Committee, appointed by the Secretary of State for War, to inspect the South African Concentration Camps, has been issued. It is dated Durban, December 12th, 1901, and, as was to be expected with so competent a President as Mrs. Garrett Fawcett, is an admirably clear and concise document. The work of this Committee proves conclusively what valuable services can be rendered to the State by women, and how much it has lost by neglecting to utilize these services in the past.

As the Report has been widely and fully dealt with in the daily press, and it is impossible in the space at our disposal to comment on all the twenty-two points to which the Committee directed their inquiry, we will deal mainly with those of special interest to nurses.

CAMP HOSPITALS.

The Committee speak in cordial praise of this section of the work, and say that the organization of the hospitals and the provision of medical comforts are the features which reflect the greatest credit on the administrations which are responsible, and on the medical and nursing staffs as a whole. Doctors and nurses are reported as skilful, gentle, firm and untiring in their devotion to their work. Some of them have died at their posts. But in the few instances where the personal equation was on the wrong side everything went wrong, and the results were disastrous, scarlet fever cases were left in a hospital marquee with other patients; diphtheria "contacts" were kept in close contiguity with diphtheria patients; children with measles actually on them were moved from unhealthy to healthy camps. All these things have been done, and the disasters which followed, have swelled the death rate and brought discredit on camp administration. But the Committee, while not shrinking from pressing the responsibility for these things where it was due, feels that it is only justice to say, that these were entirely exceptional, that, as a rule, and with immense difficulties to overcome, the medical staff and the trained nurses, deserve the highest credit for the efficiency of their hospitals.

SOME CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE.

The schools are a piece of good work well started but an additional supply of English trained teachers would be invaluable. The Colonial Office has been asked to arrange for this.

The hospitals, with exceptions, are well organized and efficient, but in many instances more hospital accommodation, improved equipment, and increased staff are needed.

As the Camps are not likely to be of so temporary a character as was at first supposed a revision of the ration scale has been recommended to the High Commissioner.

Camp Superintendents, with two or three exceptions, are reported to be hard-working, capable, and conscientious. Those reported by the Committee as inefficient were removed.

THE DEATH RATE.

In the view of the Committee the high death rate may be attributed to three groups of causes:—

1. The insanitary condition of the country caused by the war.

2. Causes within the control of the inmates of the camps.

3. Causes within the control of the administration.

The Committee point out that it is a truism to say that pestilence follows in the track of war, and that the whole country is poisoned by the putrefying carcasses of horses, mules, and oxen, defiling earth, air, and water. Further, that in some districts no fresh meat or milk, fruit, or vegetables are obtainable for love or money, and where a community of little children is found who have to be fed without these commodities "a high death rate will follow as certainly as night follows day."

As to the second cause mentioned, the Committee, while speaking appreciatively of the attitude to themselves of the Boer women, who have answered their questions with patience, and thanked them repeatedly and with apparent cordiality for their visits, yet consider it necessary to put on record that every Superintendent has to wage war against the insanitary habits of the people. However numerous, suitable, and well kept may be the latrines provided, the fouling of the ground, including river banks, slopes, and trenches leading to the water supply goes on to such an extent which would probably not be credited except by those who have seen it.

BOER REMEDIES.

The Committee further describe the horror of ventilation rife among the Boer women, and say that the Saxon word "stinking" is the only one appropriate to describe the pestilential condition of their tents from which all air is carefully excluded.

Amongst the remedies used by Boer women for the supposed benefit of their sick children, are pernicious "droppels," the painting of their bodies with common green oil paint, and in one case the application of a plaster of American leather thickly coated with the same paint, painting the face and lips of a child with herpes with vermilion oil paint, varnishing the whole of the chest and stomach of a child with double pneumonia, the administration of cow dung mixed with sulphur, also a drink of the dung of cows, goats and pigs is used extensively medicinally. Dog's blood also is in great request, while the comparatively harmless "Reckitt's blue" is used as a cooling drink.

DEFINITE RESULTS.

The committee believes that its appointment has already been attended by the following definite results:

The appointment of travelling inspectors of camps in the Orange River Colony and Transvaal.

The revision of the ration scale, including fuel.

The provision of boilers for drinking water, and other sanitary precautions against the spread of enteric.

An increase in the supply of qualified doctors and nurses.

The more general appointment of suitable women as camp matrons.

The appointment of water engineers to visit camps and advise about water supply.

The larger provision of kartels, or bedsteads, so as to reduce to a minimum the number of people sleeping on the ground.

The more general provision of soup kitchens.

The reorganisation of four camps and the dismissal of incompetent officials.

The increase of hospital accommodation and staff in a large number of camps.

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