

### Army Nursing Notes.

DURING the past week the evidence of Lord Roberts has been taken at Pretoria by the Hospitals Commission. Lord Roberts detailed the difficulties of transport, and said that the whole question turned upon these. Every care was taken of the sick and wounded, and there were no complaints from the men, who said they were more comfortable in waggons than in ambulances. [It would appear that some description of the regulation ambulance might account for this preference. The account given by those on the spot of our Army ambulances is anything but an attractive one.—Ed.]

In Bloemfontein, said Lord Roberts, (we quote from the *Times* report) everything that was possible was done for the care of the sick, and an unlimited order was given to commandeer everything obtainable. To show the enormous difficulties which had to be overcome Lord Roberts mentioned that from March 13th, when Bloemfontein was reached, to March 28th not a single truck was able to cross the Orange River, and no food was obtainable from the base except a little which was commandeered at Norvalspont and was brought up by road. The first truck arrived in Bloemfontein from Cape Colony on March 29th.

At Kroonstad everything obtainable was commandeered, and ladies came crying that mattresses and beds were taken from under them. At Johannesburg requirements were obtained much more easily.

Lord Roberts thought that no blame attached to the home authorities in reference to the supply of military stores and equipment. He had considered it inadvisable to have special sanitary officers in the camps, and had only appointed one in Bloemfontein and one in Pretoria. To add to the present allowance of bearer companies and field hospitals would be to create difficulties in regard to transport. It would be advisable when the war was over that there should be a departmental inquiry into the questions which had been raised in connection with the Royal Army Medical Corps in time of war.

With regard to Mrs. Richard Chamberlain, he had given orders forbidding her to enter the Wynberg hospital, as she had not obeyed the regulations.

At the conclusion of his evidence Lord Roberts stated that the campaign had been an

extraordinarily difficult one from the hospital point of view, and gave it as his opinion that the Royal Army Medical Corps, assisted by the civilian surgeons, had met the difficulties magnificently.

We are glad that Lord Roberts favours a departmental enquiry with regard to the Royal Army Medical Corps at the close of the war. No one doubts that individual doctors and nurses have worked well, and, in many cases, heroically; but if we are to attain the efficiency which should be attained, the present *system* must be abolished. The opinion that it is the system which is at fault is constantly brought before us.

Sir William Thomson, who has been in civil charge of the Irish Hospital since its commencement, complained that the authorities of the hospital were unaware of sick being detained at the railway station on May 23rd, as mentioned by Mr. Burdett-Coutts. He had left Bloemfontein then. He remembered similar incidents in April, in which notification had been given of the arrival of a train, but the train was several hours late owing to a breakdown, and the men were left without food. The arrangements for feeding patients at railway stations were not efficient until latterly. When Lord Roberts advanced the sick had, unfortunately, to be taken on with the army from Roodeval, as it was considered unsafe to send them back. He confirmed Mr. Murray Guthrie's statement that he had said that the men could not be properly treated in bell tents, and that there were insufficient stores in Pretoria. He formed a committee in Pretoria which supplied all the hospitals with necessaries purchased in Pretoria and Johannesburg. He recommended the reorganization of the medical department with a view to greater relief being given to the sick and wounded in war time, establishing the definite principle of a civil nursing system. This civil nursing system should be a distinct department, associated with the Army under special officers. Consulting physicians were more necessary than surgeons in a campaign, where only one-sixteenth of the men in hospital were wounded and the remainder were sick.

From Pretoria the Commission went on to Johannesburg, where it began its sittings on September 12th. On that day the only noteworthy new facts which were brought out were that the Naauwpoort Hospital was pitched on an insanitary spot, and that no notice was given of the arrival of hospital trains at Bloemfontein, so that the wounded were exposed for several hours in open trucks as the authorities did not know the trains had arrived.

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