

not in favour of the erection of additional special hospitals to deal with these diseases as he was anxious to avoid anything which would tend to have a deterrent effect; he was of opinion that the more the general hospitals could be used the more freely patients would present themselves for treatment.

Dr. Johnstone pleaded for an attitude of greater frankness on the part of the public with regard to these diseases; if the public were properly educated in the matter and the necessary facilities for treatment were provided there was now an opportunity of reducing the diseases to very small dimensions.

On November 17th statistical evidence as to the prevalence of venereal diseases in the Army was given by Lieut.-Colonel Scott, Deputy Assistant Director-General of the Army Medical Department.

The figures furnished by Colonel Scott were for the period from 1888 to 1912, and related to the rejections of recruits on account of venereal disease, the admissions to hospital, the numbers constantly sick and the numbers invalided from the Service from this cause. Under all these heads remarkable reductions were shown. The rejections on recruiting had fallen from .63 per cent. of the candidates in 1890 to .14 per cent. of those presenting themselves in 1912. The admissions to hospital in the United Kingdom which stood at 224.5 per 1,000 of the forces in 1888 had dropped to 56.5 in 1912. There were corresponding falls in the figures of constantly sick and invalids. In the case of India the reductions had been still more marked.

Colonel Scott showed that certain qualifications have to be borne in mind in comparing the earlier with the later years, but he was satisfied that real progress had been made, and that the figures did indicate a large measure of success in dealing with the diseases in the Army. He was not prepared to say whether the figures indicated a corresponding improvement in the civil population.

Colonel Scott attributed the diminutions in the Army figures to the greater abstemiousness and temperance now existing, to the fact that the soldier is nowadays better looked after and under better influence in the regiments; barrack conditions also are now more healthy and comfortable, and the soldiers' institutes provide greater amusements and healthy recreation. In addition there has of course been considerable improvement in the methods of treating the diseases.

Colonel Scott remarked on the excellent work of the Royal Army Medical Corps and on the probable absence of concealment of disease from the medical officers. He laid stress also on the great importance of the personal influence of the regimental officers.

We propose to report the proceedings of the Royal Commission fully, as we know that many of our readers, both at home and abroad, are deeply interested in this vitally important subject.

## HISTORY OF SYPHILIS IN ALSACE.

In an interesting article on the History of Syphilis in Alsace, it is stated by the *British Medical Journal* on information from a foreign contemporary that the first detailed information as to the appearance and rapid spread of syphilis in Alsace is due to Matern Berler, a priest of Rouffach, and to Trithenius, Abbot of Spanheim. Berler's chronicle, written in the sixteenth century, was preserved in the library of the City of Strassburg. The disease was first observed in the French Camp after the Italian campaign of Charles VIII, King of France in 1494-1495, and there were many victims. As there was a certain resemblance between the disease and leprosy, an attempt was made at Rouffach to get the patients admitted into the leper house, but the lepers, although partitions were put up to separate them from the syphilitics, resisted this proposal so strenuously that it had to be abandoned. The epidemic originated in Spain. Matern Berler writes of it: "It is a strange and terrible contagious affection; even the lepers hold it in horror, and will not allow those affected with it to remain among them. They fear to be smitten with a disease worse than leprosy." At Strassburg, where the disease appeared in 1495-1496, the magistrate forbade public house keepers and innkeepers to receive them, and surgeons and bath men to treat them. The hospitals and leper houses were shut against them, and all communication with them was forbidden. They languished in misery in a remote quarter of the town; lying on straw, men and women huddled together. Only one man, Casper Hofmeister, took pity on them, visited them, and urged their pitiful case on the attention of the chief magistrate. He also begged alms for them and by the wise administration of these alms was able between 1503 and 1505 to acquire a house for a hospital.

One of the finest works on the French disease was, we read, by the celebrated Alsatian jurist and poet, Sebastian Brandt. The chief cause of the sudden dissemination of the disease is said to be found in the terrible depravity which prevailed in all classes of society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In Geneva and in Nürnberg and elsewhere, the prostitutes elected from amongst themselves a superior known in the former city as the Brothel Queen. They had a monopoly which enabled them to prosecute all women who infringed their right by practising prostitution without a licence. In Strassburg, special quarters were assigned to them. Some were lodged in the towers of the Cathedral and other churches; hence they were known as the "swallows of the Cathedral." About 1521, however, they were ejected from these sacred precincts.

At the present day it is almost inconceivable that they should have ever been permitted to establish themselves there. Public opinion would be too outraged were such a thing contemplated.

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