

THE TYPHUS EPIDEMIC IN SERBIA.

Dr. T. Gwynne Maitland, M.A., B.Sc., D.Phil., Director of the Typhus Colony, Skoplie, Serbia, has contributed to the *British Medical Journal* the first detailed account, from the clinical standpoint, of the epidemic of typhus which, our contemporary points out, "has been raging in Serbia since the beginning of January, but which has now, thanks to the exertions of various British and foreign doctors and the devoted labours of many nurses, been brought to an end." The article is of the highest interest to nurses, and we quote from it in part.

From March 1st to the end of April, 1915, about 1,800 cases of typhus passed through our hands. It is impossible to form anything like a correct estimate of percentages with regard to deaths and sequelæ, for the hospital was seriously handicapped by reason of the dearth both of nurses and medical attendants. So far as hospitals were concerned, the epidemic was almost entirely neglected during the first three weeks. So great was the mortality among the native doctors that the few who could be induced to take charge of the General Fever Hospital had to leave the supervision and treatment of patients almost entirely in the hands of the orderlies.

HOSPITAL ORGANIZATION.

When the Sixth Reserve Hospital was taken over for the purpose of isolation and treatment of these cases it was considered unjustifiable to detach nurses from the existing units, inasmuch as most of these nurses were surgical nurses whose services were required elsewhere. It thus happened that during the earlier days at the Sixth Reserve Hospital the nursing was left in the hands of three volunteers from the surgical unit. Two only of these were fully qualified nurses; the third was a probationer. These three nurses, together with one doctor, were left to cope with the typhus outbreak.

With such a staff it was, of course, impossible to provide adequate treatment, and so it was necessary to enlist in the work some Serbian soldier orderlies and a number of Austrian prisoners, and as a necessary precaution only orderlies and prisoners who had had typhus were selected. The wards one by one were emptied, scrubbed, and washed with disinfectants, and the ceilings, walls, and floors were afterwards brushed with petrol. This cleaning was done twice weekly afterwards throughout the entire hospital buildings. The Austrian and Serbian attendants were, with a few exceptions, thoroughly washed, bathed in

disinfectant, and given clean clothes. They were then isolated and not allowed to come into contact with anybody, save those in authority or patients under supervision. It was hoped in this way to avoid all contamination, and we found that only one case during the first few weeks became reinfected by vermin. A certain number of the orderlies were not disinfected, and these were given the charge of the admission of patients to the wards. To them was left the duty of unclothing the patients, shaving their heads, and passing them through the bath of disinfectant. From the bath of disinfectant the patients passed directly to the clean orderlies, who wiped them down and gave them clean night things. They were then sent to clean beds. We invariably carried out this method of handling new arrivals. As soon as we had a sufficiency of the requisite combination garment (to which reference will be made later) to distribute throughout the hospital staff, all the orderlies were disinfected, as they were enabled to maintain their cleanliness by discarding their clothes after each admission.

In the early days the conditions under which all the foregoing was performed were extremely primitive. The patients were disrobed on the steps of the pavilion in the open air, and passed into the hall—the antechamber to the wards—where they were immersed in a disinfectant bath, after which the "disinfected orderlies" took them at once into the wards. Later on, when the colony included two excellent cadet schools, we were able to take over the outside offices—kitchens, baths, and wash-houses—and here, in these outbuildings, the patients received the same treatment as above, but under much more favourable conditions.

To prevent lice getting into underwear it was necessary to improvise suitable garments—not such an easy matter, since the necessary tailoring was not to be had. At first we tried a jacket fitting high in the neck, long sleeves to button securely over the wrist, trousers fastening round the waist with string, and the legs tucked into high rubber boots. Finally I decided upon a sort of combination suit which answered admirably to all requirements, and was especially welcome in the hot weather. It was made in one piece, fastening at the neck like a bathing suit—that is, by two buttons on the shoulders, the trousers ended in feet which were slipped into sandals. To protect the hands, rubber gloves (previously boiled) came up well over the wrists. We made it a rule that all the staff should wear this outfit. Changing-rooms were provided, the combination suit being put on before going into the wards, and removed when going off duty.

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