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EDITORIAL.

A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY.

The Report by the Government Committee on the treatment by the enemy of British Prisoners of War contains such an appalling story of the conditions of the camp for British Prisoners at Wittenberg, both before and during the typhus epidemic in 1915, that we should hesitate to believe it, did it not come to us as an official report, issued only after the most careful sifting of evidence, by a committee of which Mr. Justice Younger—one of the Judges of the High Court—was chairman.

The evidence shows that before the outbreak of the typhus epidemic there was most serious overcrowding, though the cold was intense there was often no coal for the stoves, the men were insufficiently clothed as the overcoats of most of the British prisoners were taken from them on the day of their capture and none were given them in exchange, many had neither boots nor socks, others had their feet wrapped in straw.

The medical and surgical arrangements were in the hands of Oberstabsarzt Dr. Aschenbach and his German assistants, and on the outbreak of the epidemic in December, 1914, there were no British medical officers at Wittenberg, though there were some Russian, and possibly some French medical men. The German staff, military and medical, precipitately left the camp.

On February 10th, six English medical officers who had been detained at Halle in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention were sent to Wittenberg, and it was only from the guard on the train that they first heard of the typhus there.

On arrival they visited the different compounds. They were received in apathetic silence. The rooms were unlighted; the men were aimlessly marching up and down; some were lying on the floor probably

sickening for typhus. When they got into the open air again Major Fry broke down. The horror of it all was more than he could for the moment bear. Later in the evening Major Priestley and Captain Vidal were directed to go to two temporary hospitals outside the camp. Of the four officers left behind only Captain Lauder survives.

Major Fry, Captain Sutcliffe and Captain Field were attacked by the disease and died, and there is no doubt in the minds of the Committee that the conditions to which the camp authorities had reduced it, and the prisoners they had abandoned, was directly responsible for the death of these officers. Captain Lauder for three days, with a temperature due to typhus, stuck to his work, there being no one to take his place.

On March 7th Major Priestley and Captain Vidal were ordered to return to the main camp. Major Fry and Captain Sutcliffe were then dying. Major Priestley found delirious men waving arms brown to the elbow with faecal matter. The patients were alive with vermin; in the half light he attempted to brush what he took to be an accumulation of dust from the folds of a patient's clothes, and he discovered it to be a moving mass of lice.

Drugs and dressing were impossible to obtain in adequate quantities. Limbs became gangrenous and had to be amputated for lack of them, and when the dead were carried for burial outside the camp by their comrades the coffins were frequently greeted with jeers by the inhabitants of Wittenberg who stood outside the barbed wire and were permitted to insult them.

When the day of reckoning comes to settle an account with the Commandant, General von Dessel, and Dr. Aschenbach, the medical officer in charge, the British nation will demand that it shall be paid to the uttermost farthing.

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