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EDITORIAL.

THE MEDICAL DÉBACLE IN MESOPOTAMIA.

The Report of the Commission appointed by Act of Parliament to enquire into the Operations of War in Mesopotamia is an appalling document. The revelations it contains could scarcely be worse, but, if anything can be, it is what the Commissioners term "the Misuse of Reticence" by which the true conditions were kept from the authorities, and from Parliament, in this country, and "the active intolerance of all criticism of defects, or suggestion for reform."

It is a relief to turn to the action of Major Carter and his courage in bringing to the notice of the authorities in Mesopotamia the real condition of the wounded. It is the more commendable because the revelation of unpalatable truths in official circles almost inevitably entails unpleasantness and retribution, and the case of Major Carter was no exception. The Commissioners state, "On this account he was treated with great rudeness. Surgeon-General Hathaway, in writing to the D.M.S. in India on this subject, says:—'The Army Commander, realizing the injustice, ordered the D.A. and Q.M.G. and myself to deal with him (Major Carter) with regard to his objectionable remarks,' and General Cowper, then D.A. and Q.M.G., told us 'I threatened to put him under arrest, and I said that I would get his hospital ship taken away from him for a meddling, interfering faddist.'" Later General Cowper himself came in for censure from the Commander-in-Chief at Simla through Sir Percy Lake in reply to a telegram for adequate shipping transport. "Please warn General Cowper that if anything of this sort again occurs, or I receive

any more querulous or petulant demands for shipping, I shall at once remove him from the force, and will refuse him any further employment of any kind."

Major Carter, I.M.S., who was in medical charge of the hospital ship "Varela" waiting for the wounded from Ctesiphon describes the arrival of one of the river convoys. "The barges were slipped, and the Medjidieh was brought alongside the 'Varela.' When she was about 300 or 400 yards off it looked as if she was festooned with ropes. The stench when she was close was quite definite, and I found that what I mistook for ropes were dried stalactites of human fæces. The patients were so huddled and crowded together on the ship that they could not perform the offices of nature clear of the ship, and the whole of the ship's side was covered with stalactites of human fæces. . . . Then we found a mass of men huddled up anyhow, some with blankets, some without. They were lying in a pool of dysentery about 30 feet square. They were covered with dysentery and dejecta from head to foot. With regard to the first man I examined, I put my hand into his trousers and I thought he had a hæmorrhage. His trousers were full almost to his waist with something warm and slimy. I took my hand out and thought it was blood clot. It was dysentery. The man had a fractured thigh, and his thigh was perforated in five or six places. Many cases were almost as bad. There were a certain number of cases of terribly bad bedsores."

These are the conditions which Major Carter was threatened with arrest for reporting.

Nor were the ambulance arrangements better, the army transport cart, thus described by the A.D.M.S. of the third division, being used. It is "without springs and has no cover to give protection against rain or

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