

Notes on the new medical warrant.

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NOTES ON THE
NEW MEDICAL WARRANT.

Recognising the impossibility of carrying on the Army Medical Department in its present stagnant condition, the Secretary of State for War, advised by the Director General of the Army Medical Department, has promulgated a warrant which completely changes the principle upon which that Department has hitherto been based.

Of the sincerity of the efforts of these high officials for the advancement of the Medical Service, there can of course be no question, it is, therefore, all the more allowable to enquire into the results which will probably attend their labours.

The abolition of the title "Assistant Surgeon" is a graceful concession to sensitive members, who, as they advanced into middle life, still occupying the most junior grade of the Department, were unwilling that their misfortune should be proclaimed to the outside world by a distinctive appellation, but the substitution of the word "Surgeon" for "Assistant Surgeon" leaves, in all other respects, its possessor in exactly the same state as regards rank, pay, and position in which he had grown old before the new scheme.

With reference to the promotion of Medical Officers, the Secretary of State admits that the limit of service which ought legitimately to be exacted in the junior grade is *fifteen years*, while he, at the same time, objects "to make an absolute condition" of promotion on the completion of that time—thus the prospects of the juniors are as indefinite as ever. Demi-official rumour announces the coming promotion of eighty Surgeons, and upon this is grounded a belief that the stagnation will be relieved; however, as the issues of much greater projects have been of late years worked out on paper long before the incidents came to pass, it is not difficult, by the application of the Rule of Three, to demonstrate the precise results of this move. Under the old regime the total number of Surgeons and Surgeons-Major amounted to 336, and the average rate of vacancies occurring amongst them for the last five years has been less than twenty annually. When the augmentation

by eighty has been made, there will be 416 still placed under exactly similar circumstances as before, without any additional inducement or compulsion to retire, and, therefore, the increase of vacancies must be in direct proportion as $336 : 416 :: 20$, obviously 24 ; but during the present year, the remaining thirty-three of those who joined in 1858 will have completed fifteen years service, and, since even at the quickened rate, only eighteen vacancies can occur in the ensuing nine months, it is evident that fifteen must remain unpromoted.

At the conclusion of 1874, the fifty-one Surgeons whose commissions date from 1859, will have fulfilled their fifteen years, which will give a surplus over the annual twenty-four vacancies of twenty-seven unpromoted, making by that time a total of forty-two, and in the same manner must each succeeding year overlap—swelling the number of those, who, under the new warrant, are to be deprived of the increase of £45 7s. 6d. a year previously allowed after fifteen years service.

It cannot, therefore, be claimed for this warrant that it deals with the block in promotion, but merely that it postpones the question for a year.

Of the actual curtailments of previously enjoyed rights, the enactment that “forage shall be granted to officers of the A. M. D. for such number of horses as are necessarily kept by them for duty,” is the most serious.

It would be ridiculous to assume that now, for the first time, has it been discovered that a horse is not required for the practice of Medicine and Surgery in a Military Hospital, and not to admit that its possession has always been conceded as an allowed appendage of the Surgeon's rank ; the future regulation, however, under which the claim of a Medical Officer to a horse is to rest on its being indispensable for his duty, renders Forage Allowance an intermittent income, during the intervals of which a Medical Officer must either continue to maintain the horse at his own expense, or be prepared to buy and sell in accordance with the fluctuations of duty.

Of scarcely less importance is the repeal of the rule of choosing quarters according to date of commission, a privilege which, in the case of Surgeons-Major over twenty years service, has been directly revoked by regulation, and, in those under twenty years, has been annulled by compelling them to take rank in regimental seniority, when they are only allowed a five years' tenure of such appointments.

It appears but a trifling matter that a Medical Officer should be allotted one room instead of another in a building where all were constructed on the same plan, but it is a subject of no slight moment whether he, when married and supporting a family on his pay, should have the first claim to draw lodging allowance, or should continue to pay for his lodging without receiving the benefit of that priority to which he is justly entitled.

In conclusion, the sudden and arbitrary removal of Medical Officers from their regiments without any regard to the established rights of tenure conferred by the gift of Her Majesty's commission, and heretofore enjoyed in common with all other officers, is an act which can only awaken the most bitter feelings of dissatisfaction in the minds of the sufferers, who will go forth to work under the new system with a depressing sense of the hardship inflicted on them.

If the medical duties of a regiment, together with the attendance on women and children in detached localities, the visiting of cells and inspection of prisoners, the book-keeping and correspondence be not sufficient occupation for two Medical Officers, then the overlooking of this by a succession of Director Generals during their terms of office has already permitted considerable pecuniary loss to the state, but if the proposal to attach one Medical Officer for five years to a regiment be merely an experiment, it seems a pity to throw the majority of the working class of the department into a ferment of discontent by the abrupt execution of a tentative measure.

As to the effect of this scheme on the Surgeons who as juniors, must be the victims, it will entail on them not only the grievous wrong of separation from their adopted regiments, with forfeiture of all previously paid subscriptions and expenses, but a further pecuniary loss, which may give rise to material privations,

Placed upon a General Staff, and liable, up to promotion, which is equivalent to a period gradually lengthening from fifteen to twenty years, to transfer at a moments notice from any part of Great Britain to another, a married Surgeon may be compelled, on an income which can never exceed £273 15s. od. a year, to defray the travelling expenses of his family, and bear the incidental losses of moving so often, as to leave him with a balance for subsistence which he could more easily have earned as a second-class mechanic.

As to the influence of the new order of things on the younger members of the department, they will be debarred from the civilising education of a regimental mess, excluded from the opportunities of mixing in good society which participation in regimental invitations heretofore gave them, and located in General Hospitals, where, their senior colleagues being for the most part married, they will thus be left to their own devices, and will carry into the practice of maturer years, the habits and manners of Medical Students.

Of the questions which must arise out of the operation of this warrant, the first will of course be that of compensation for the fifty days' pay which each Medical Officer was *compelled* by regulation to contribute to the Mess and Band of the Regiment to which he was Gazetted, also for the twenty days' pay a year which was for the same purpose deducted from him during his service

in that regiment, and again for the expense of change of uniform; and since the sums interchanged between combatant Officers as Over Regulation Money, although voluntary, have been very justly made an admitted charge against the Public Revenue, Parliament cannot consistently refuse the claims of men who have nothing to live by but their professions, to be repaid on the cancelling of their commissions, those sums which they were compelled to disburse, that they might, in the first instance obtain, and subsequently continue to hold, those commissions.

April 7th, 1873.

