

Extempore hospitals / [William Augustus Guy].

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EXTEMPORE HOSPITALS.

*(Extracted from "War in its Sanitary Aspects,"
being Part II of Dr. Guy's "Public Health.")*

IN the year 1758, we made an unprosperous attack on the coast of France, and brought home a great many sick soldiers, who were lodged in old houses, barns, &c., round Newport, in the Isle of Wight. In one of these close hovels, a poor soldier of the 63rd Regiment, just landed from a transport, was placed. He was soon seized with malignant sore-throat, which carried him off on the third day. Another soldier, who was placed in the same bed (the sheets only being changed) was speedily attacked in the same way, and soon died. A third man was put into the same bed and shared the same fate. "Fresh bedding of every sort" was now ordered, and "the boards all around" were scraped and thoroughly washed with vinegar, and then a fourth soldier was lodged in this hovel and died. A second time this "ill-fated spot underwent a most rational purification"

with abundance of vinegar fumes, burnt gunpowder, and burnt resins, and all the contiguous parts were scraped, washed, and fumigated. But, in spite of all this precaution, a fifth man was attacked and had a narrow escape of his life. Having thus lost four brave men, and "with difficulty saved the fifth," Dr. Brocklesby would not suffer another soldier to be lodged in this place till after seven or eight days; but a sixth soldier, having then been placed there, he too caught the disease, and had a narrow escape. Taught by this sad experience, and finding that the soldiers landed from the transports were more numerous than could be accommodated in all the spare out-houses, barns, and empty cottages which money could procure, or humanity supply, it was resolved to erect a temporary shed with deal boards, upon the open forest, to thatch it with a coat of new straw, thick enough to keep out wind and rain, and to make it large enough for 120 patients. A country workman did the work (charging for the use of the boards) for 40*l*. Here I quote Dr. Brocklesby's words:—"Although the hovel was finished in a fashion the most slovenly, and apparently inadequate to the end proposed, upon trial it was found, that notwithstanding much extraordinary cold as well as moisture which the sick there lodged had suffered, remarkably fewer died of the same diseases, though treated with the same medicines and the same general regimen, than died anywhere else; and all the convalescents recovered much sooner than they did in

any of the warmer and closer huts and barns hired round Newport, where fires and apparently better accommodation of every sort could be provided for them."

Now this striking fact happened to come to the knowledge of Mr. Adair, Inspector of Regimental Infirmaries, who was in the neighbourhood, and he, " remarking that this currency of fresh air had such amazing salutary effects upon the men hutted in the forest, procured an order to convert Carisbrooke Castle itself, situated upon the extremity of a very high ridge of land, into one large general hospital, where near 400 sick might, on occasion, be lodged together."

" At first," says Dr. Brocklesby, " it was expected that the sick brought to that place would do better than their comrades who were lodged up and down in the miserable huts of the town, or than those upon the wild bare forest near Newport, under that occasional hovel" (meaning the 40^l. extempore hospital). " Yet the event verified our conjectures only in part : for though the castle was more prosperous to their recovery than the small rooms in low-roofed houses, yet more, proportionally, of the foresters were recovered, and that much sooner than any of the rest ; and it evidently appeared that all the damage and inconvenience the men suffered from cold or redundant moisture in that place, was much fitter to be tolerated on the whole than the mischiefs complicated on the sick by huddling together 300 or 400

men and upwards, under one roof, and in the out-houses adjoining to the castle."

But Dr. Brocklesby has still something to tell us about cheap extemporized hospitals and their good effects; for two years later (1760) a dangerous putrid fever made its appearance amongst the sick of the 30th Regiment, at Guildford, in Surrey, which led him to erect other hospitals, with like good results, and at the reduced cost of something above 10*l.* a-piece.

The sick soldiers were at first taken to their infirmary about five miles from the camp. As this place was crowded with more than four times the number it ought to have contained, Dr. Brocklesby remonstrated, and obtained from General Cornwallis plenary powers to act. It was "in the beginning of September, 1760, when very unusual numbers from the 30th Regiment," and a few from other regiments, "were daily falling sick of putrid petechial fevers," and when proper accommodations for the sick could by no means be procured in the town of Guildford, that the doctor made his second experiment.

He "pitched upon the driest and most airy spot," on a rising ground in a field behind the camp; hollowed out as much of the dry sandy soil as he required, and near the edge of the hollowed ground drove in upright stakes, about six feet high from the surface, and placed wattles between them, coated on the side next the weather with fresh straw. Rafters were laid over in a workman-like manner, and coated thick

like the sides. This made the hollow "spacious and airy over head, and yet abundantly warm and dry."

This structure cost the public ten guineas, added to 5*l.* for straw, and gratuities to the bricklayers, who built a large chimney and set a kitchen-grate. So that probably this hospital, for forty patients, did not cost more, from first to last, than 20*l.* Now Dr. Brocklesby tells us "that though several soldiers were admitted into this 'repository,' ill of a true petechial jail-fever, only one or two, at most, died in it;" and he adds, "I candidly ascribe their fortunate escape more to the benefit of a pure, keen air they breathed therein every moment than to all the medicines they took every six hours or oftener. For, on account of the nature of this sandy soil, there was an opportunity to remove, as oft as necessary, the whole inner surface of the floors and walls, which might be suspected to imbibe and retain any infectious matter proceeding from the patients; and the sand so scraped off was, every three or four days, ordered to be thrown out of doors."

Dr. Brocklesby had still another and another opportunity of trying this happy expedient of cheap extemporized hospitals, in 1761 and 1762. In the first of these years there was a militia camp at Winchester, and much sickness there. The soil was chalk; and he proceeded to dig three pits, thirty-one feet long, nineteen wide, and five deep; at a foot from the edge of these pits he drove stakes, six feet

apart, formed his walls with wattles and thatch, and his roof of the same materials. A brick chimney, and boards fastened along the line of the men's heads, completed these "mansions for the sick." Air-holes in the thatch, to be occasionally opened, served as windows and ventilating apertures; and steps, cut in the chalk, gave access to the interior. To these three mansions the fever cases from the "close infirmary at Winchester, as well as from the camp," were admitted; and, in less than a fortnight, the numbers were reduced in the proportion of four to one, the number of sick to the end of the campaign was much fewer than ever before, and all the men admitted, "except three at most," were cured. The following year, 1762, the same plan was adopted on the chalky soil of a different encampment, a large, airy porch being added before each door. A regiment encamped there lost not a man during the whole encampment; while "Some other regiments of the brigade, who had invincible prejudices against the above practice, lost several of their sick in that and the previous year. And all that time," says the worthy doctor, "the militia themselves were known to give ten guineas, or more, for a good recruit to supply the place of the deceased."

This abstract of Dr. Brocklesby's experiences with cheap extemporized hospitals I have laid before you, as both instructive and suggestive—as equally applicable to war and peace, and as bearing directly on one of the most important hygienic questions of

the day. His facts are in perfect harmony with Sir George Baker's interesting narrative of the outbreak of small-pox at Blandford, when patients in natural small-pox fared better under hedges and dry arches than those who had been inoculated did in their own dwellings.*

* See "Public Health," Part I., Lecture I., p. 16.

I issue the above reprint because it contains facts especially applicable in the conduct of the war now raging. Dr. Brocklesby's experiences may be taken to prove to demonstration that cheap extempore hospitals of the rudest kind, and even the roughest shelter from the weather that can be found or created, are infinitely preferable to the best existing structures adapted, at whatever cost, to the reception of the sick and wounded.

