

occlusion. For the present one has to adopt the most rapid palliative measures, but the question will have to be taken up very seriously.

"The official recognition of the value of dental treatment and the appointment of a number of dental officers is urgently needed at the present moment. For the future the foundation should be laid by enforced school dentistry, followed by constant and efficient care of the teeth by dental officers, whilst the men are in the Navy or Army."

SOLDIERS' TEETH: NEED FOR DENTAL SURGEONS.

UNDER the above heading, the *Liverpool Daily Post* of October 23 published the following article:—

A Rodney Street professional man, who had just returned from a visit to France, expressed the opinion in these columns a few days ago that it was shameful there were no dentists within the vicinity of the firing line. This opinion is endorsed by other professional men—both medical and dental. For the maintenance of sound general health in the soldier unrelaxed attention to his teeth is a necessity. Nothing is more essential in a soldier than good digestion, and among the things which assist to ensure that are sound teeth. It is not a question of number, but of condition. A Tommy with only two teeth can masticate and obtain more nutrition from his food than the man with a complete set if that set is not healthy. The present Army stipulations regarding teeth make it possible for a man to be passed as fit for service provided he has only two sound molars. But the difficulty is in keeping those teeth good when he gets to the front. Should he be put on short rations he would find the biscuits rather hard, and a tooth might break. Cold in the teeth is another common ailment, and "there is nothing," says one soldier who is now in hospital, "which takes it out of a man in the trenches more than toothache." Many of the minor jaw wounds inflicted by bullet or shrapnel could be treated by dentists on the spot, and so relieve the already overworked doctors. There is plenty of work, in fact, at the front for dentists.

Such a case as the following is just one where much pain could have been alleviated had a dental surgeon been present on the battlefield. A man was shot in the upper lip and several of his teeth shattered. The teeth themselves, however, deflected the course of the bullet, with the result that it passed through into the throat. In spite of the pain which the presence of the bullet itself must have occasioned, the man complained chiefly of pain from the jaws. His teeth had been knocked down his throat was how Tommy described the trouble. This was not literally correct, but broken stumps of teeth were found embedded into the gums at the back of the mouth. Without doubt, says the dental surgeon, much of that man's pain could have been alleviated on the battlefield had only a dentist been present. Another case cited is that of a man who was invalided home through digestive trouble. He complained of pain from the teeth. Examination of these by the dentist showed tartar a quarter of an inch in thickness. On scaling they were found, with the exception of one small root, to be quite sound. That one stump had caused all the trouble, and was responsible for all the tartar and all the pain. Yet a cursory examination of the mouth by a doctor would not have led to the discovery of that one stump; it needed the trained eye of the dentist. It could have been found and extracted at the front. Quite a number of such instances might be quoted.

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DENTAL SURGEONS.

Liverpool Daily Post of October 23

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There have, indeed, been cases where men have been returned from the front owing to the state of their teeth not enabling them to eat the food when on short rations. Invariably skilled dentistry could have done much to put the men right on the spot.

Limitations to the scope of the dental work possible there would necessarily be. Dentures or artificial teeth could not be made or fitted while on a battlefield, but extractions could be made, teeth scaled, and mouth dressings and treatment given to the men suffering the distracting or merely the annoying pains of toothache.

The R.A.M.C. surgeons are able on occasions to attend to the men's teeth, but the medical practitioner is not always able to locate the seat of annoyance with the same quickness and certainty as a qualified and experienced dentist.

Among the Territorials and recruits dental work has been going on to a considerable extent, but all of it gratuitously. Liverpool has played a large part in this dental work. The Dental Hospital authorities have attended to nearly fifteen hundred men. But this is a big strain upon their funds, and the question is prompted—why, when the military authorities recognize, as they do, the value of dental treatment for the men, some provision is not made or financial assistance forthcoming from the Government for this work which is being carried on throughout the country by the various dental institutions? Representation has, in fact, been made to the War Office regarding the appointment of dental surgeons for the various base hospitals, but so far nothing has been done. Whatever work is done by dental surgeons must be done free.

With the recruits and Territorials the work done has not been so much that of cure as prevention. The large majority were not actually suffering pain with their teeth, but they would when they came face to face with new conditions that involved the eating of harder and coarser food. Over two hundred of the Liverpool cases were, however, of men who had actually been rejected on account of defective teeth, and these have now been made efficient and accepted. But dental caries are the chief trouble—teeth that are in a state of decay. These should be attended to, or in all probability they will give Tommy trouble before very long.

On the other hand, so many of the men have what are professionally known as arrested caries. Here the trouble has been done in their school days. Proper attention was not then paid to the teeth, with the result they began to decay, but later on this decay was arrested by a change in their mode of life. When the lads began to work, in many cases they partook of different kinds of food; pride in their appearance caused them to pay some little attention to their teeth, and they probably lived a more open-air life. At any rate, some such change of life arrested the decay, but the damage had been done in their school days, and so now they required attention. The only remedy whereby such cases as these could be avoided lies in the adoption of school dentistry, and the present wholesale examination of teeth which is taking place testifies to the absolute necessity of this. In the majority of these cases the teeth required filling, and 1,093 fillings have been inserted for Territorials and recruits by the Liverpool Dental Hospital at a cost to that institution of over 13 guineas.

Teeth in a more advanced state have had to be extracted. This extraction of teeth from which Tommy was suffering no pain has rather puzzled him,

complaints have been heard from the soldiers that they were having all their teeth drawn. One Tommy, in fact, loudly complained that he had had sixteen drawn. Perhaps a little explanation regarding these extractions is required. To Tommy anything which is drawn out of his mouth is a tooth, and literally he is right. But there are certain qualifications. Quite a number of them may be only stumps—for mastication purposes quite useless. Others are teeth while at present giving him no trouble are highly decayed, quite beyond repair, and only endangering the healthy condition of the other teeth. The slightest cold in the mouth and these decayed teeth would begin to ache, and so for something which is quite useless the soldier suffers intense pain. Such teeth are better out, and scores of these cases have come forward. If the soldier has only half a dozen sound teeth in his mouth, his digestion will be better than if those teeth were alongside some that are decayed. In all 419 extractions with gas have been made at the Dental Hospital at a cost of sixteen guineas. Fifty-nine men have also been supplied with dentures or artificial teeth at a cost to the hospital of over £85.

THE following letter appeared in the same paper on October 26 :—

Sir,—Your article of recent date on "Soldiers' Teeth" is most opportune, and shows the disgraceful and inexcusable apathy of the military authorities in the vital matters of general health and comfort of our brave soldiers. The Government's negligence of regular and periodical attention by qualified dental surgeons to the teeth of our soldiers is not only an amazing fact, deplored by those in the best position to judge, but can be proved beyond doubt to be uneconomical and to affect the efficiency of our troops at the front, as the men well know from experience.

A certain minimum of dental efficiency—a relic of ancient regulations—has been required of recruits, who, after joining the Army were totally neglected in the matter of preserving that dental efficiency; and to-day there are otherwise first-class reservists being rejected right and left solely on account of the bad state of their teeth, which could easily have been saved had officials who ought to and do know better taken more care of the men whilst they were serving their country.

Any panel doctor will prove to those interested the advantage to the general welfare of an individual whose teeth have been skilfully and properly attended to by a qualified man. They are seeing cases every day, and find it to their own and also their patients' interest to insist on dental efficiency.

Tommy is waking up. He can appreciate proper dental attention and would gladly avail himself of it; he doesn't want and very much resents, his teeth being extracted wholesale and in a hurry to qualify for any particular occasion. He wants regular dental treatment and his teeth preserved the same as the better-off officer obtains on his own account, and he most assuredly is entitled to dental service from any Government who expects him to be fit on "the day."

If an army "marches on its stomach" it won't march far if the dental armament is defective; and if the "Little Corporal" of Europe were alive to-day I fancy he would sagaciously substitute "teeth" for "stomach."

Yours, &c., J. P. R.
