

(Letter to London Times, Aug. 29, 1914, p. 6,d)

COMPULSORY ANTITYPHOID VACCINATION

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A Necessary Measure.

Oxford, Aug. 27.

To the Editor of the Times.

Sir: - In war the microbe kills more than the bullet. Malaria, cholera, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery have been the scourges of armies. From the first three our soldiers are not likely to suffer; but it will be very difficult to prevent outbreaks of dysentery and of typhoid fever, of which in the South African war more men died than were killed in action. Against this we now possess an affective vaccine, and I write to urge that antityphoid vaccination should be made compulsory in the army. The very simple procedure is followed by a slight and not often incapacitating indisposition and there are no harmful effects.

The work of the French Army doctors and of British Army surgeons, particularly in India, has shown conclusively the remarkable reduction in the incidence of typhoid when vaccination is thoroughly carried out. The experience of the American Army is of special value, as the disease is so much more prevalent in the United States. The number of cases in the home Army has fallen from 3.53 per thousand men to 0.03 in six years, and the death-rate from 0.28 in 1909 to zero in 1913. In the Army at home and abroad - a strength of 90,646 - there were in 1913 only three cases of typhoid fever, and no deaths. The greatest improvement has been during the three years in which the vaccination has been compulsory. What this signifies in the United States is best appreciated by the fact that the civilian death-rate for the year 1912 from typhoid fever was 16.5 per hundred thousand of the population; and in many instances the garrisons are in regions in which the disease is very prevalent. Fortunately, in this country typhoid fever is not common, but in camps it is difficult to avoid contamination from "carriers" - men who harbour the germ while well in themselves. Abroad, the men are sure to be exposed, and I would urge most earnestly that vaccination be made compulsory. Sir William Leishman in the Lancet last week has pleaded for the adoption of the practice. The Vaccine Department of the army medical college, Lister Institute, and many of the pathological laboratories throughout the country have a plentiful supply. Pending the issue of a compulsory order, it is the duty of the medical officers of the Territorial Force to urge as many men as possible to be vaccinated.

Yours, &c.,

William Osler.