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(Dr. George H. Simmons)

The Athenaeum.

Pall Mall. S.W., July 5, 1917.

Dear Simmons:

Here is a brief note of warning for the Journal.  
It may be a word in season.

Congratulations on the Journal which keeps up  
splendidly, and is more and more read over here. We have  
been thrilled by the arrival of the American Hospital units,  
and still more by the safe arrival of the troops. I wish  
you could realize how much it is felt by all classes here.  
There is extraordinary enthusiasm, and it was a great sight  
yesterday to see the stars and stripes floating over the  
Houses of Parliament. The American orthopedic draft of 20  
brought over by Goldthwaite has been distributed in various  
Hospitals and is doing splendid work.

Greetings to all old friends.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Wm. Osler.

War Wastage.

A Note of Warning to Examiners of Recruits\*

by

William Osler

In the grim game of war, bullets and bacilli put men out of action, and the best general is the one who has the lowest percentage of wastage by the former with as little as possible from the latter. An outstanding feature of the present war has been a reversal of the usual proportion of killed and wounded to those who have died from disease. But there is another group - the unfit, who should be checked at the recruiting office, as they furnish a large contingent in our Hospitals and add a needless burden of transport, care and pension. What I desire to urge in a few words is the necessity of stopping, at its source, this group. It is impossible to deal with all types of unfit men, but let me briefly indicate three who should be kept at home.

First, the Mouth breather. "Shut your mouth and save your life" is the title of Kit Catlin's famous pamphlet, which should be reprinted every few years for distribution. The original title of pamphlet just referred to was "The Breath of Life", and nature meant this to pass through the nose, an organ which medically speaking, reaches to the diaphragm. Blocked nostrils mean:- (1) Weakened tonsils - pharyngeal resistance. (2) Enormously increased liability to bronchitis, and catarrhal troubles of all sorts; and, (3) lowered defence against the pneumococcus group. The hospitals have had to bear the strain of caring for hundreds of these men who should never have passed the examining Board. No matter how good his chest, or how keen he

is to go, or how good his muscles, be merciful to the army and keep the mouth breather at home. Campaigning is not for him.

Secondly. The Neurastheic, who is not so easy to catch as the signs are deceptive, and he may come up in good form. Moreover he is keen and alert and usually anxious to go. The history is all important. Has he had a breakdown? There are many groups, the worst coming from men of sedentary occupations. A great many get into the army - a few pull through all right - but what I would urge is try out the doubtful cases in the home camps. The trench is no place for a man with unstable vasomotors. In the strain of war they break like dry twigs, and become a heavy burden in the hospitals, and convalescent homes. In any case when in doubt give the country the benefit.

Thirdly. The Hippocratic chest, as it may be called, long, narrow, thin and with, as so often happens, the vertically placed low heart. Cut out unsparingly the owners of these. If lungs and heart are not in a good case, the head is of no use in war.

It may seem very saucy for a man who has never been trained to examine recruits to venture to give advice to his superiors; but this brief note of warning is sent to my colleagues in the hope that they may profit by the experience of one whose work has been largely with the wastage of the recruiting office.