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A manual of military surgery - Chapter I: Historical sketch of military surgery

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A MANUAL

OF

MILITARY SURGERY.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF MILITARY SURGERY.

THE duties and requirements of military are essentially similar to those of civil surgery. It is founded upon the same knowledge of anatomy, medicine, and the associate sciences; it demands the same qualifications, physical, moral, and intellectual. The difference consists in the application of our knowledge rather than in its range or depth. The civil surgeon remains at home; the military follows the army, examines recruits for the public service, and superintends the health of the troops. If the former is well educated, he will be quite as competent, at any time, as the latter to perform these duties; for the emergencies of civil are often not less trying than those of military practice, although they may not be on so large a scale.

The best civil have often also been the best military surgeons. In proof of this assertion it is necessary only to refer to the names of Paré, Wiseman, Schmucker, Kern, Larrey, Guthrie, Charles Bell, Alcock, Thomson, Ballingall, and Macleod, of Europe; or to those of Rush, Jones, Thacher, Mann, and Horner of our own country.

Military surgery occupies, at the present day, a deservedly high rank in the estimation both of the profession and of the public. The war in the Crimea, the mutiny in India, and the recent convulsions in Italy, all attended with so much waste of blood and life, have attracted to it the universal attention of the profession; and the revolutionary movements now in progress in our own country invest it with a new and a fearful interest to every American physician. Its praises have been sung by Homer, and, in all ages of the world, governments have extended to it a fostering hand. As a distinct branch, however, of the healing art, it dates back no further than the early part of the sixteenth century, when it was inaugurated by Ambrose Paré, by the publication of his treatise on

"Gunshot Wounds," the fruits of his observations in the French army in Italy. This man, who was surgeon to four successive kings, was an eye-witness of the numerous French campaigns, from 1536 down to the battle of Moncontour, in 1569, a period of thirty-three years. His popularity, both as a civil and military surgeon, was, up to that time, without a parallel. The soldiers worshiped him; and the success of more than one siege, as well of one battle, was due almost exclusively to the wonderful influence of his presence. His treatise on "Gunshot Wounds" appeared toward the middle of the sixteenth century, and, after having passed through various editions, was ultimately incorporated in his surgical writings, published nearly a quarter of a century later.

In England, the earliest work on military surgery was that of Thomas Gale, entitled a "Treatise on Gunshot Wounds," designed chiefly to confute the errors of some of his contemporaries, respecting the supposed poisonous nature of these lesions. Gale was born in 1507, and after having served in the army of King Henry VIII., at Montrieul, and also

in that of King Philip, at St. Quintin, finally settled at London, where he acquired great distinction in his profession. In 1639 appeared the work of J. Woodall, "The Surgeon's Mate; or, Military and Domestic Surgery." He was surgeon under Queen Elizabeth, by whom he was sent to France, along with the troops that were dispatched to the assistance of Henry IV. and Lord Willoughby. In 1676, Richard Wiseman, sergeant-surgeon to King Charles II., published his famous "Chirurgical Treatises," one of which was expressly devoted to the consideration of gunshot wounds. Two years after this a treatise on gunshot wounds was published at London, by John Brown, also surgeon to Charles. He was a man of eminence, and served with much credit in the Dutch war of 1665. The next English work on military surgery appeared in 1744, from the pen of John Ranby, sergeant-surgeon to George II., under the title of "The Method of Treating Gunshot Wounds." After Ranby came the imperishable work of John Hunter, familiar to every reader of English surgical literature. The part relating to gunshot wounds was founded upon his observations made while serving as staff-surgeon at

Belleisle and in Portugal, and is one of the most precious legacies of the last century, near the close of which it appeared.

The present century has supplied quite a number of works on military surgery, as is shown by the valuable publications of Larrey, Hennen, Hecker, Augustin, Guthrie, Thomson, Hutchinson, Ballingall, Baudens, and others, which have contributed so much to the elevation of this department of the healing art. Some of these works have been reissued in this country, and have acquired a wide celebrity.

We must not forget, in this rapid enumeration of works on military surgery, the "Manuel de Chirurgien d'Armée" of Baron Percy, published at the commencement of the revolutionary war in France. It is a model of what such a treatise ought to be.

The only work on this department of science yet furnished in this country, is that of the late Dr. James Mann, published at Dedham, Massachusetts, in 1816. It is entitled "Medical Sketches of the Campaigns of 1812, '13, and '14," and forms a closely-printed volume of upwards of three hundred octavo pages.

The latest treatise on this subject in the English language is that of Dr. George H. B. Macleod, now Professor of Surgery at Glasgow, entitled "Notes on the Surgery of the War in the Crimea; with Remarks on the Treatment of Gunshot Wounds." It is a work of intense interest, written with great ability by an accurate and diligent observer, and is worthy of a place in every medical library. To this work frequent reference will be made in the following pages.

To Dr. Lewis Stromeyer, Physician of the Royal Hanoverian Army, we are indebted for the most recent German work on military surgery. It was issued in 1858, under the title of "Maximen der Kriegsheilkunst," in two duodecimo volumes, to which a Supplement was added in the early part of the present year. A more valuable contribution to this department of surgery could hardly be imagined.

Besides the above more recent works, the reader should carefully study the "Principles of Military Surgery," by the late Dr. John Hennen, one of the most zealous and distinguished military surgeons that Great Britain

has yet produced; a man of vast experience and of the most enlightened views upon everything which he has touched with his pen.

Perhaps the most systematic work on the subject in the English language is that of Sir George Ballingall, entitled "Outlines of Military Surgery," the last edition of which, the fourth, appeared only recently at Edinburgh, where the author held for many years the chair of military surgery, for a long time, we believe, the only one in Great Britain. It is a production of much merit, and is destined to maintain a very high rank in this species of literature.

The works of the late Mr. George Guthrie also deserve attentive study; they are written with great clearness and ability, and embody the results of an immense experience, acquired during many years of arduous and faithful labor and observation in the British army. I have always regarded the works of this great man as among the most valuable contributions, not only to military surgery, but to surgery in general, in the English language.

With these works before him, the student of military surgery cannot fail to make him-

self in a short time perfectly familiar with everything pertaining to the subjects of which they treat. He should also provide himself with a copy of the excellent little volume entitled "Hints on the Medical Examination of Recruits for the Army," by the late Dr. Thomas Henderson, formerly Professor of Medicine in Columbia College, Washington City. A new edition of it was published a few years ago by Dr. Richard H. Coolidge, of the United States army.

Although we have long had one of the most respectable and thoroughly organized army and naval medical staffs in the world, our country has, nevertheless, not produced one great military surgeon; simply, it may be presumed, because no opportunity has occurred since the establishment of our government, in which the men in the public service could distinguish themselves. Their aid has been required in the duello and in skirmishes rather than in great battles, such as have so often characterized the movements of the armies of the Old World. We make no exception in this remark in favor even of the battles that were fought during the Revolution, and during our Late War, as it has usually been designated,

with Great Britain. Those engagements were, for the most part, comparatively bloodless. Happily living under a flag which, until recently, commanded alike the respect and the admiration of all nations, belonging to a government which was at peace with all foreign powers, the medical and surgical staffs of the public service had little else to do than to prescribe for such diseases as are incident to civil practice. America has never witnessed, and we trust in God she never may witness, such carnage as that which attended the footsteps of Napoleon at the Bridge of Lodi, at Leipzig, at Dresden, and at Waterloo; or which, more recently, characterized the exploits of the English, French, and Russian forces in the Crimea; or of the French, Italian, and Austrian armies in Italy; or of the English soldiers during the late rebellion in India. Nor has she ever been engaged in one great naval battle similar to that of La Hogue, Toulon, Trafalgar, or Aboukir. A number of highly respectable physicians accompanied our army to Mexico, but they returned without any special laurels, and without any substantial contributions to military medicine and surgery.