
A manual of military surgery, by S.D. Gross, MD,
1861

Rare Medical Books

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A manual of military surgery - Chapter II: Importance of military surgery

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CHAPTER II.

IMPORTANCE OF MILITARY SURGERY.

It is impossible for any civilized nation to place too high an estimate upon this branch of the public service. Without the aid of a properly organized medical staff, no army, however well disciplined, could successfully carry on any war, even when it is one, as that which is now impending over us, of a civil character. No men of any sober reflection would enlist in the service of their country, if they were not positively certain that competent physicians and surgeons would accompany them in their marches and on the field of battle, ready to attend to their diseases and accidents. Hence military surgery, or, more correctly speaking, military medicine and surgery, has always occupied a deservedly high rank in public estimation.

Dionis, a surgeon far in advance of his age, in referring to the value of medical services to soldiers, exclaims, with a burst of eloquence: "We must then allow the neces-

sity of chirurgery, which daily raises many persons from the brink of the grave. How many men has it cured in the army! How many great commanders would have died of their ghastly wounds without its assistance! Chirurgery triumphs in armies and in sieges. 'Tis true that its empire is owned: 'tis there that its effects, and not words, express its eulogium."

The confidence reposed by soldiers in the skill and humanity of their surgeon has often been of signal service in supporting them, when exhausted by hunger and fatigue, in their struggles to repel the advancing foe, or in successfully maintaining a siege when the prospect of speedy surrender was at hand. Who that is versed in the history of our art does not remember with what enthusiasm and resolve Ambrose Paré, the father of French surgery, inspired the souls of the half-starved and desponding garrison at Metz, in 1552, when besieged by 100,000 men under the personal command of Charles V.? Sent thither by his sovereign, he was introduced into the city during the night by an Italian captain; and the next morning, when he

showed himself upon the breach, he was received with shouts of welcome. "We shall not die," the soldiers exclaimed, "even though wounded; Paré is among us." The defense from this time was conducted with renewed vigor, and the French army ultimately completely triumphed, through the sole influence of this illustrious surgeon.

No man in the French army under Napoleon rendered so many and such important services to the French nation as Larrey, the illustrious surgeon who accompanied that mighty warrior in his various campaigns, everywhere animating the troops and doing all in his power to save them from the destructive effects of disease and injury. His humanity and tenderness were sublime; and so highly was his conduct, as an honest, brave, and skillful surgeon, appreciated by Napoleon, that he bequeathed him a large sum, with the remark that "Larrey was the most virtuous man he had ever known."