

**Letter to the Right Hon. Viscount Cross, G.C.B., Secretary of State for India
/ by Surgeon-General Maclean.**

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LETTER

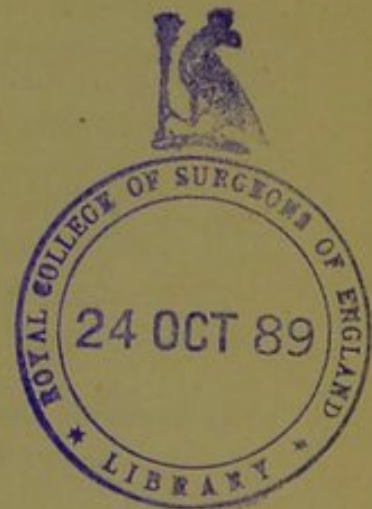
TO THE

RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT CROSS,
G.C.B.,

Secretary of State for India,

BY

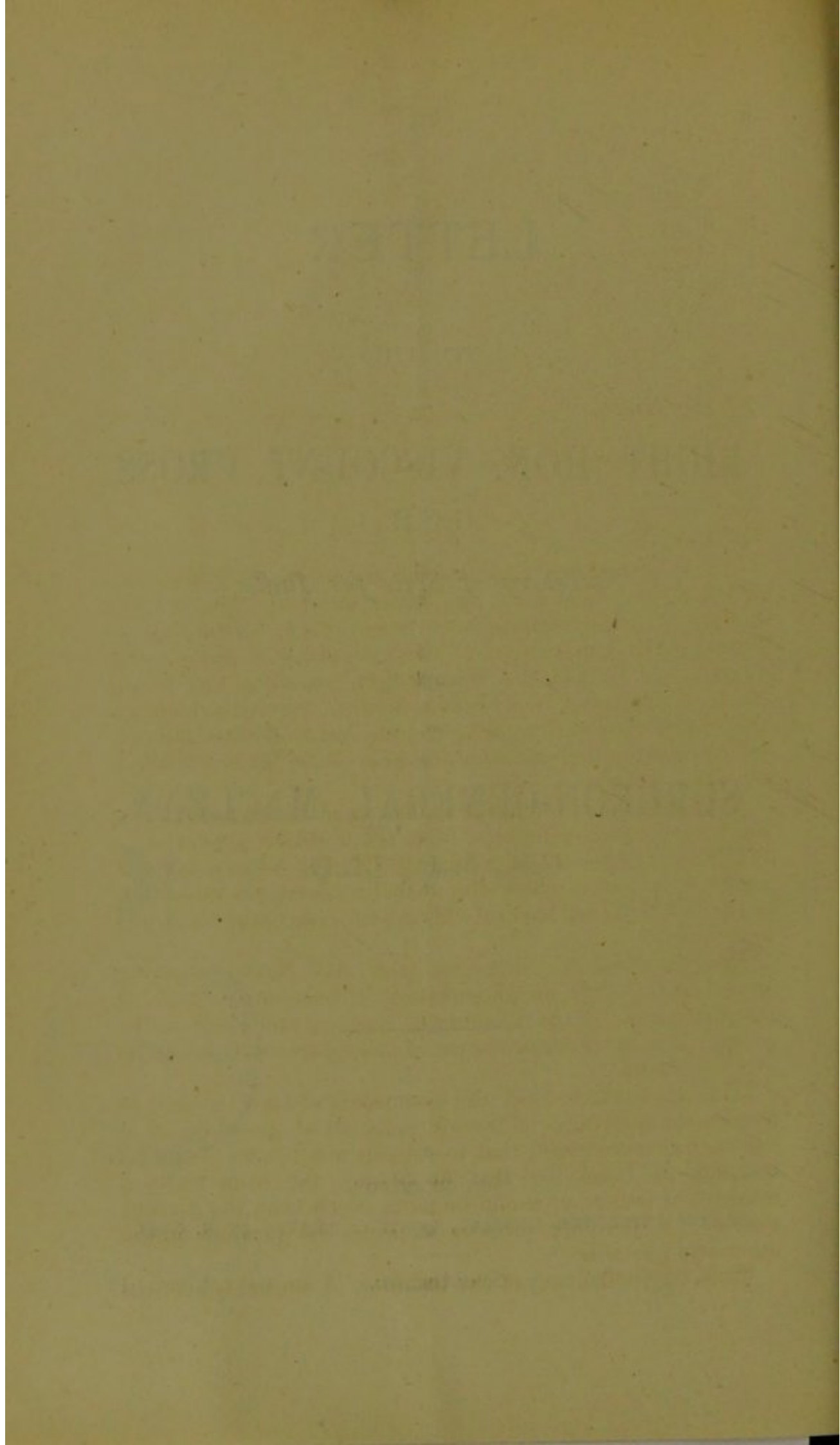
SURGEON-GENERAL MACLEAN,
C.B., M.D., LL.D.



Southampton:

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MDCCCLXXXVIII.





*To the Right Hon. Viscount Cross, G.C.B.,
Secretary of State for India.*

MY LORD,

As I have for a considerable time ceased to have any official connection with the Army Medical School, I feel I may, without impropriety, respectfully address your Lordship on the subject of the proposal, now before your Lordship in Council, for discontinuing sending the young Medical Officers of H.M. Indian Medical Service to undergo the course of special training in the Army Medical School, still deemed indispensable in the case of the Medical Staff of the British Army.

This serious matter has been discussed in the press, more particularly with reference to a letter which appeared in the *Times* under the signature of "Civis" advocating this measure, a letter which has called forth replies in defence of the School from Medical Officers of rank, experience, and long service.

The proposal to dispense with the Netley training is defended—(1st) on the ground of economy; (2nd) on the inefficiency of the training at Netley; and (3rd) on the ground that a superior course of special instruction can be given in India.

It is understood that the authorities are not inclined to discuss the question on merely economical grounds, as it has been demonstrated that to substitute a course of special training in India for that at Netley, far from being a measure of economy, would be more costly than the present system. I therefore propose to argue the question on the other two grounds.

First, the inefficiency of the training. I am not concerned

to take up your Lordship's time by a defence of my own teaching. I have ceased to be a professor, and the subjects I taught are now in other hands. I content myself by appending to this letter a syllabus of the course of lectures I delivered, when I held the Chair of Military Medicine in the Army Medical School. I do not suppose any one, with any pretension to speak with knowledge and authority on such a subject, will venture to assert that the subjects dealt with in this syllabus are other than of vital importance for Medical Officers about to devote their lives to the practice of their profession in India. This being so, I add without fear of successful contradiction, that in the many years of my professorship, I never found one man in fifty of the Surgeons on probation sent to Netley, who had any practical acquaintance with the diseases which formed the subjects of my teaching. I further say that the Surgeons on probation have, nine times out of ten, been ready to make this confession themselves, which they could well do without shame, in as much as Military Medicine has never formed, and never can form, a part of the course of instruction in Civil Schools. It has been my good fortune to keep up friendly intercourse with large numbers of "Netley men," after they have served in tropical climates, and I have had the gratification to receive letters from them gratefully thanking me for the instruction given, with the assurance that in the early and inexperienced days of their service the lessons given at Netley have been of inestimable use to them.

I never supposed it would fall to my lot to have to defend the work of the late Professor Parkes, and his distinguished successor, the *late* Professor De Chaumont. The name of Parkes runs like a golden thread through the warp and woof of modern scientific medicine, it is to this day a household word in every school of medicine in the kingdom, and, I may add, in every Capital of Europe. He may be said to have in this country *created* the science of Military Hygiene. As a teacher he was *facile princeps*, and to his teaching, directly and indirectly, no small share of the enormous diminution of mortality in the Army at home and in India can be distinctly traced. De Chaumont was a worthy successor, and obtained for himself an European reputation as a successful teacher and high authority on Hygiene in all its branches, until his career was closed by a too early death.

The chair is now held by Professor Notter, a pupil of Parkes' and for five years the assistant of De Chaumont. In his hands it is certain that Military Hygiene will be taught on the lines and in the spirit of his distinguished predecessors.

It is said that Hygiene is taught in the Civil Schools. It is in some schools as a post graduate course; but what is taught is not the Hygiene of Armies. In addition to all that is comprised in the term Public Health, the course at Netley embraces the service of the soldier; the conditions in which he is placed in barracks at home and in hot climates, in huts, tents, and camps; hospital encampments; his food, cooking, clothing and equipments; the work he has to do, gymnastics, marches in all climates, and the duties of medical officers during marches; effects of military service; army statistics in all their various branches; service on board ship; transports for healthy troops, the same for sick troops; hospital ships; preparations for war, entry on war, actual war, regulations in war; causes of sickness and mortality; hospitals in war; sieges; climate; meteorology; disinfection and deoderisation; the prevention of specific and non-specific diseases.

The above subjects occupy about 32 lectures. In addition, on every other day, an hour and a half is given to chemical and microscopical examination in the laboratory; the examination of water, air, food, beverages, and condiments. Is knowledge of the above a necessary part of the training of a modern Army Surgeon wherever he serves? There can be but one answer to this question—it is. If so, *can* this knowledge be given in the Civil Schools, in addition to the long course which the young medical student has to go through, to enable him to “qualify” and satisfy the yearly increasing demands of his examiners? The only possible answer is, it cannot. When we are told that all that is required in the way of practical Hygiene for Army Medical Officers is what is embraced in an ordinary course of lectures on Public Health, we are told what is not correct; nothing but sheer ignorance of the subject can justify such an assertion. If this doctrine comes to be received and acted upon, the public must be prepared to see the education of the medical officers of the British and Indian Armies revert to what it was in pre-Crimean days, with the inevitable consequences.

Is Military Surgery taught in Civil Schools? It is not, and it cannot be. When we are told that since the introduction of anti-septic surgery the treatment of gunshot wounds has become the same as of all other wounds, we are only told a small part of the truth. Military Surgery in the present day embraces a great deal more than the treatment of wounds—gunshot or other. The Military Surgeon has to learn all the arrangements of modern war for first and secondary aid to the wounded; the position of dressing stations; the removal of the injured from the field, their transport to the base hospitals along the lines of communication; familiarity with all the means and appliances in use to mitigate the sufferings of the wounded; to say nothing of the effects on the human body of the terrible weapons of modern war; the examination of recruits for service; the duties of medical officers in the important matters of Boards of Invaliding; the granting of certificates to guide the authorities in the important matter of pensions, and a hundred other subjects; among which may be mentioned the exact terms of International Conventions regarding the position of hospitals in war, and the movement of wounded men under those conventions; to say nothing of an intimate knowledge of the literature on the above subjects by the surgical experts of the great military nations on the Continent. Once more, can all this be taught in Civil Schools? And, without this knowledge, what will be the position of our Military Surgeons in a few years, when the present race of Netley trained men have passed away?

Is the pathology of military diseases a subject to be lightly esteemed? What is pathology? It is the science of disease. Where can this important subject be well taught, if not in a great Hospital like Netley, where the invalids from every climate are brought, bearing on their persons the indelible marks of their service and sufferings? The Netley Professors, after twenty-eight years of experience, can testify to this fact, that until taught at Netley not one in ten of the young surgeons on probation knew how to make a *post-mortem* examination of a human body in such a way as to be of the smallest use to themselves or to science. Some gentlemen, who have had exceptional opportunities, and have used them, do come to Netley, able to use the various aids to diagnosis that modern science has

placed at the disposal of physicians. But by far the majority are first taught the use of such instruments in the Army Medical School.

I am aware that since this discussion has arisen certain gentlemen have spoken in disparaging terms of Netley as a school of clinical instruction. I venture, on this subject, to say, that in my service in India and China, extending over twenty-two years, I was not a careless observer of disease, yet I aver that I learned many a precious lesson in the wards at Netley; and I can conceive no better preparation for the study of the acute forms of tropical disease than the impressive lessons to be learned there. Parkes had served in tropical climates, was a high authority on the diseases of such climates, and it is consistent with my knowledge that to the day of his death he never ceased to approve of Netley as the home of the school, mainly on account of its enormous value as a school of clinical observation. This also—I speak with knowledge—is the opinion entertained and expressed, times without number, by the foreign experts who have, year after year, visited Netley. This, I venture to say, is something more than a set-off to the rash judgments of Netley critics, who have never visited the wards of that great Hospital, have no personal knowledge of the nature and kind of teaching given within its walls, and who yet think themselves warranted in offering crude advice to those in authority who have to decide this important question.

And now to the last point can the work done at Netley be done in India? Unhesitatingly I answer no!

I think it has been shown that it cannot be done in the Civil Schools at home—now, the Medical Schools in India are Civil Schools—the Hospitals at the Presidency Towns are Civil, in no way resembling Military Hospitals. The able teachers in the Indian Presidency Medical Schools, most of them distinguished Netley men, have their hands full of their own duties, and have neither the time, the needful museums, the libraries, or the “teaching plant” that has been accumulating for nearly thirty years at Netley. The Surgeons on probation while at Netley are not Commissioned Officers, they are so to speak *in statu pupillari*. In India they are commissioned Officers, and I can conceive nothing more repulsive to them, after all the years of their pupilage, than to have to enter once more as Students, and to go

through all the labour of such a course of study as I have tried to explain, in a climate and under surroundings most unfavourable to real and profitable study. As a teacher of eleven years standing in India, and more than twenty-five in England, I venture to say, if the experiment I have argued against with all the earnestness of which I am capable is attempted to be carried into practice it will end in a disastrous failure.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient servant,

W. CAMPBELL MACLEAN, C.B., M.D., LL.D.,
SURGEON-GENERAL.

