

Memoir of the late Dr Robert Jackson, inspector of army hospitals / read by Dr Borland at the Anniversary Meeting of the Officers of the Medical Department, 12th May 1827.

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MEMOIR of the late Dr ROBERT JACKSON, Inspector of Army Hospitals. Read by Dr BORLAND at the Anniversary Meeting of the Officers of the Medical Department, 12th May 1827.

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GENTLEMEN,

IN this appropriate place of our annual meeting, surrounded by several senior officers of the department, to whom the inestimable qualities of a distinguished member, now no more, the venerable Dr Robert Jackson, were well known, I proceed, at the request of the Director-General, to perform the duty assigned to me, of offering the tribute, justly due from us all, to the memory of a man whose useful labours must always be highly appreciated, not only by this department of which he was an ornament, but by the members of the medical profession in every quarter of the globe. *

The Island of Jamaica was the field in which Dr Jackson commenced his professional career. The medical charge of a detachment of the 1st battalion of the 60th regiment, quartered at Savanna-la-mar, in the year 1774, was the first duty on which he was employed with the army; and his records of the cases of disease which occurred during his medical superintendence of this detachment, which comprised a period of several years, have been preserved, and exhibit specimens of accuracy in clinical description never surpassed. They are the first fruits of a rule (carefully to register every occurring symptom,) which he then laid down for his guidance; to the undeviating observance of which afterwards, in every condition of service,—in camp or in quarters,—ashore or afloat—may be ascribed the high reputation he attained. As this rule offers an instructive lesson and example, the junior officers of the department who are now present, will, I am sure, readily permit me to draw their attention to the circumstances which led him to adopt it. When Dr Jackson entered upon his duties with the 60th regiment at Savanna-la-mar he tells us he had already seen something of common practice, under common practitioners; but the results did not correspond with his expectations. Desirous to know what is truth, and disposed not to be satisfied with less than truth, he proceeded to seek for it in his own experience. He had studied anatomy, and considered the laws of the animal economy with care and attention. With this preliminary information he believed that the knowledge of the correct history of disease, and of the most effectual manner of removing it, would be best attained by writing down at the bedside of the sick, military or others, a summary

* Dr Borland was requested by the Director-General to prepare the above sketch, in consequence of having passed many years of service with Dr Jackson, and enjoying more intimate friendship with him than any other officer of the department. The hasty manner, however, in which it was drawn up, only a day or two before the annual meeting, renders it unavoidably more meagre than Dr Borland would have wished, and the merits of Dr Jackson may seem in the eyes of his friends to demand.

He was then in the 60th year of his age and had been in the army 40 years.

of the rise, progress, and issue of the maladies which came under his notice, by marking with care the changes which took place,—the medical means prescribed,—the effect produced by the prescription, so far as it was discernible, and by adding, as often as leave was obtained to open the dead body, remarks on the traces left in organic structure by the form of action which the disease constitutionally or casually assumed.

The scene of his observations in Jamaica was comparatively narrow. The war in North America opened to him a field more extensive; and impelled by that zeal to enlarge the sphere of his knowledge, which glowed with unabated fervour to the last day of his existence, he volunteered service in America in the year 1778; and soon after his arrival was attached to the late 71st regiment; in the various services of which corps he had the opportunity of observing very extensively the different forms and degrees of fever in the southern states of the North American continent. The result of his experience in Jamaica and America was submitted to the public in 1791, entitled "*A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica, with Observations on the Intermitting Fever of America; and an Appendix, containing some hints on the means of preserving the health of soldiers in hot climates.*" The materials of this admirable clinical treatise were collected between the years 1774 and 1782. The interval between his return from America in 1782, and its publication in 1791, a period of nine years, was devoted by Dr Jackson to supply valuable additions to an originally scanty stock of academical knowledge; for he candidly confesses in his writings, that, from want of financial means, his early professional education had been very imperfect. As there are few obstacles, however, which an ardent mind will not surmount, he diligently entered upon, and successfully completed a most laborious course of mental discipline during this period, which was passed partly in study at Paris, —partly at the University of Leyden, where he took his doctor's degree, # partly in travelling over a great portion of Europe, surveying minutely the medical, military, and literary institutions of foreign states; and, finally, at Stockton-upon-Tees, in the county of Durham, where he succeeded to extensive practice, and was held in high estimation.

At the beginning of the French revolutionary war in 1793, desirous of investigating still farther the subject of tropical fever, Dr Jackson offered service with an expedition about to proceed to the West Indies, under the command of General Sir Charles Grey; but not possessing the qualifications required by the regulations of that day, for the commission of physician to the forces, he accepted the surgency of the 3d regiment of foot or the Buffs, then embarked for the West Indies. The destination of the corps, however, being changed on the eve of sailing, he accompanied the regiment to Flanders, where he was soon after appointed acting physician to the forces by his Royal Highness the Duke of York, who commanded the army serving there. The appointment was not confirmed by the ruling authorities at home; but the doctor's talents and exertions, under trying circumstances, during a very harassing re-

treat, became so conspicuous, that, on the demise of Dr Kennedy, he was at once raised to the rank of chief inspector, and continued to superintend the military hospitals until the British troops were withdrawn from the continent. The change of his destination from the West Indies to Flanders was considered by Dr Jackson a great disappointment at the time, since it interrupted the researches he then had in view, upon an extensive scale, into the origin, progress, and issue of the diseases of the tropical regions. But the event ultimately turned out to be fortunate, both for his own satisfaction and for the advancement of science, as it afforded him the opportunity of investigating, in a wide and varied field, the not less important subject of contagious fever, which prevailed to great extent during the retreat of the British troops through Holland into Germany; of the medical history of which campaign, memorable for its sickness and mortality, his pen has presented us with a melancholy but accurate and instructive picture.

In the year 1795, immediately upon his return from the continent, and before he had time to publish his observations on contagious fever, Dr Jackson was ordered to the Island of St Domingo, where the duty assigned to him afforded the means of examining the features and causes of endemic disease, at different posts, and in different climates, more fully than happened to any other person on the medical staff of that island. The accustomed rule he had pursued in Holland of writing histories of diseases at the bedside of patients, and minuting every point connected with the influence of local agencies in the production of sickness, was again assiduously observed in St Domingo, although many other laborious duties, as inspector and head of the department, had devolved upon him.

He returned home in 1798, and in the same year published the results of his previous experience on the continent of Europe, and of his more recent and fatiguing researches in St Domingo. This work bears the title of "*An Outline of the History und Cure of Fever, Contagious and Endemic; more expressly the contagious fever of ships, jails, and hospitals; and the concentrated endemic, vulgarly called the yellow fever of the West Indies; to which is added an explanation of the principles of military discipline and economy; with a scheme of medical arrangement for Armies.*"

The superintendence of the medical concerns of a body of Russian troops, consisting of 17,000 men, which acted with the British army in the expedition to the Helder in the year 1799, was next committed to Dr Jackson by the desire of the Russian ambassador, Count Worronzow.

These troops, after the termination of their disastrous service in North Holland, were stationed in the islands of Jersey and Guernsey, where they arrived in a most disorganized and sickly condition; and the management of their numerous hospitals was conducted upon a principle of efficiency, economy, and judicious adaptation of means to purposes, that had not hitherto been witnessed in the British army.

The success that attended his management on this special ser-

vice was so manifest, that his Royal Highness, the late lamented Commander-in-Chief, was induced the following year, 1800, to appoint Dr Jackson to the situation of physician and head of the Army Depot Hospital at Chatham, afterwards moved to the Isle of Wight, where he had many difficulties to overcome in introducing an improved system of hospital improvement. Circumstances, however, having unfortunately caused a want of confidence and cordiality between him and the physician-general and the surgeon-general, especially the latter officer, who was the organ of official correspondence, Dr Jackson felt he could not continue to serve satisfactorily to himself, nor, as he conceived, usefully to the public. He therefore applied for leave to relinquish the situation which he held; and the official letter from the military secretary to his late Royal Highness proves that he retired without a stain upon his honour or integrity.

Thus divested of official employment, Dr Jackson ~~retired~~ ^{returned} to his former residence at Stockton, resuming the exercise of his profession in civil life to the great satisfaction of the inhabitants. He found leisure, however, in 1803 to publish "*Remarks on the Constitution of the Medical Department of the British Army, with a Detail of Hospital Management; and an Appendix attempting to explain the Action of Causes in producing Fever, and the operation of Remedies in effecting Cure.*" And this work was followed in the year 1805 by "*A System of Arrangement and Discipline for the Medical Department of Armies,*" dedicated to the medical officers of the British army. In both of these interesting publications much useful instruction was conveyed, especially to the junior class of medical officers.

In the year 1810 Government instituted an important change in the constitution of the army medical department. The board, hitherto consisting of a physician-general, surgeon-general, and inspector-general, was dissolved; and the ~~arrangement~~ was vested in a director-general, assisted by two principal inspectors, upon a plan analogous to that adopted in other ~~extensive~~ military departments. This change opened the door to Dr Jackson's return to active service without any sacrifice of his feelings; for it was founded on the very principles he had strenuously advocated. Accordingly, in the year 1811 a vacancy having occurred in the direction of the medical concerns of the Windward and Leeward Island station, this enterprising servant of the public, notwithstanding his previous toils in the torrid zone, again came forward, with unimpaired talents and undiminished zeal, to offer service, which was accepted by the late director-general. He immediately proceeded to Barbadoes, the head quarters, pursuing a most active superintending duty for several years, ~~assisting~~ at intervals all the islands and colonies within that military command, and finally contributing to the records deposited in the director-general's office, a most valuable series of health inspection reports, comprising the medical topography of every island and station occupied by British troops in the West Indies, including Jamaica, to which island his inspection was also extended under a special commission. In 1815 he returned to England, and

in 1817 presented to the public the sum of his observations during this recent service, in "A Sketch of the History and Cure of Febrile Diseases; more particularly as they appear in the West Indies among the Soldiers of the British Army." Of this work a second edition, in two volumes, was published in 1820, containing, besides other additions, a most valuable summary of his official reports on military positions, barracks, and hospitals in the West Indies, which had been submitted officially to the commander of the forces on that station between the years 1812 and 1815, with the view of directing the attention of government to the best means of preserving the health and lives of the military in that climate, and at the same time of husbanding the pecuniary resources of the nation. Of this edition the following notice was taken in the bibliographical record of the quarterly *Journal of Medical Science*.—"The matter indeed of these two volumes offers a most astonishing fund of information on the subject of fever, and no tropical visitor in particular should proceed to his destination without possessing the work. The European physician, too, will find that the veteran Jackson has anticipated almost every modern writer on fever in all those points of pathology and practice in which we excel our forefathers."

Although Dr Jackson had become perfectly familiar with the disease, vulgarly named yellow fever, in the West Indies, having, at three distinct periods of his life, possessed extraordinary official opportunities of observing it in all its forms and gradations, in every variety of position, with a keenness of research peculiar to himself, as yet no opportunity had been afforded him of seeing the epidemic malady, known by the same name, which has ravaged the sea-coasts of the south of Spain at intervals since the beginning of the present century. But in the autumn of 1819, this epidemic having been reported to have made its appearance at Cadiz, Dr Jackson, anxious to know its nature, and conceiving that it might be an object of some importance to the nation to ascertain whether or not it was contagious, made an offer to the government, through the present director-general, to undertake the investigation of the subject, and to proceed to Cadiz without loss of time. This zealous act of devotion to the interests of humanity having been submitted to the secretary of state, the offer was accepted; and such forms of introduction having been obtained, after some delay, from the Spanish Ambassador as would secure protection from the Spanish government, and attention from the local authorities of the districts where the disease prevailed, Dr Jackson repaired to Gibraltar. But when in the act of setting out from that garrison for Cadiz to commence his researches, information was received by the governor of the breaking out of the Spanish military insurrection, and the consequent interruption of the route from Gibraltar to Cadiz. Thus defeated in his immediate purpose, detained inactive at Gibraltar, and seeing no prospect that the route to Cadiz would be again open before the fever ceased to rage, he undertook a journey to the Levant, on his own motives and at his own expence, partly with the desire of seeing Greece,—a country hallowed by classical recollections, and partly in the hope of obtaining information respecting the

plague—a disease he had never seen, and concerning the nature and history of which he could form no correct idea from what he had read.

In prosecution of this plan he went from Gibraltar to Malta, to Constantinople, to Smyrna,—and from Smyrna passed among the islands of the Archipelago to Athens and the Morea, finally embarking at Patras for Zante, where he arrived in June 1820. The plague did not prevail in the Levant during the time of the doctor's excursion; but, as investigation into the nature of the yellow fever was his motive for leaving England, he determined to be at Cadiz in August; and therefore embarked at Zante for Gibraltar, which fortress he again reached the latter end of July. His health had suffered seriously during this excursion; but, nevertheless, he set out from Gibraltar to Cadiz on the 23d August, and, arriving on the 25th, it so happened that the appearance of the disease was announced the very day he entered the city. The fever was epidemic for two months at Cadiz, where he remained until he satisfied himself of its character; but, hearing that the malady which raged at Xeres was more severe, and of greater proportionate mortality, he went thither to ascertain its real condition. A statement of his opinions, with a detail of his investigations at both places, in which he was assisted by an intelligent medical officer, whom General Sir George Don kindly permitted to accompany him from Gibraltar, was published the following year, 1821, under the title of "*Remarks on the Epidemic Yellow Fever which has appeared at intervals on the south coasts of Spain since the year 1800.*" This the last, though not the most toilsome of our lamented friend's benevolent career, is here more enlarged upon; because it is impossible not to admire the sacrifice of all personal convenience and domestic comfort, and the grappling with danger in the cause of science, in a pursuit prompted by the most generous motive that can influence the heart of man, voluntarily undertaken, and perseveringly prosecuted, at the age of three score and ten, with an ardour seldom surpassed in the vigour of youth. But your admiration at his zeal will be augmented when you are informed, that, only a few weeks before his death, in his 77th year, he conveyed to the director-general an offer to waive his rank, and to proceed to Portugal, to do duty as physician in the military hospitals under the control of a junior.

Dr Jackson died on the 6th of last month at Thursby, near Carlisle, while occupied in revising and condensing into systematic form the whole of his manuscripts on the subject of fever; and if the work be sufficiently advanced to show to others the plan and intention of the author, a hope may be entertained of its publication by competent authority.

It was not intended, nor would it be possible, in this place, to present to you even a faint outline of the various events of Dr Jackson's long and active life; but it is presumed, that, from materials believed to be in the possession of his widow, should they be entrusted to some friend qualified for the task, a biographical sketch might be prepared that would attract notice from the public, as well as from the medical reader. To the military reader Dr Jack-

son has bequeathed a most interesting quarto volume, namely, "*A View of the Formation, Discipline, and Economy of Armies*,"—the first edition of which was published in 1804, and the last edition, containing the result of twenty years' additional observation, gathered in a most ample field, was presented to the public in 1824. This able work, philosophical in its design, containing sketches of the military character of different nations, drawn with great spirit, fidelity, and discrimination, would elevate the author high in the ranks of literature, even if it had been his only contribution to the republic of letters; and it is no trivial commendation of it to state, that, after the late gallant General Sir John Moore had read the first edition of this work, he wrote to the author in the following terms:—"My dear Jackson,—I have perused your military book, with which I am much delighted. There are none of us, even the most experienced, who may not derive instruction from it; and I only regret that you who possess a soldier's mind had not been a soldier by profession."

Dr Jackson's indefatigable perseverance to obtain a contemplated result from every pursuit in which he engaged may be illustrated by his having commenced the study of the Arabic language after his return from America, with a view to the fullest investigation from original sources of his favourite subject, fever; and, notwithstanding various interruptions, he very soon attained such perfect knowledge of it as to be able to read with facility, and understand thoroughly the writings of all the old eastern physicians.

His curiosity at one time was much excited by the controversy respecting the authenticity of the poems ascribed to Ossian. Although not a Highlander, (for he was a native of Lanarkshire, a lowland district of Scotland,) Dr Jackson had long served in a Highland regiment, was much attached to Highlanders, and felt interested in the question at issue, which peculiarly belonged to the history of that mountain race; but, being ignorant of their language, he could not venture to settle the disputed point in his own mind. He, however, eagerly entered upon the study of the Celtic tongue to qualify him to do so; and having mastered the Gaelic language, and having listened attentively to traditional informations drawn from conversations with the old Highland people, he came to the conclusion, that the poems, though but imperfectly translated, were genuine, and not impostures fabricated by Mr M'Pherson, as had been asserted by Dr Samuel Johnson and others. His opinion will be found by those who are curious on this subject at page 263 of his military work.

When the evacuation of Port au Prince in St Domingo by the British troops caused a reduction in the staff, and Dr Jackson and several other medical officers were preparing to return to England, one* of them suggested to him a joint excursion of amusement through the United States of America, a plan to which he readily, indeed eagerly, assented. They accordingly embarked at Mole St Nicholas; and General Maitland having had the goodness to furnish

them with letters of introduction, and dispatches to Mr (now Sir Robert) Liston, then British minister to the United States, they arrived at Philadelphia, where they met with marked attentions and much hospitality from the celebrated Dr Rush and other American physicians. And to Dr Jackson it must have been gratifying to find that his professional fame had preceded him in that country, his first book on fever being found in the hands of every respectable practitioner.

This tour furnished instruction, as well as recreation, affording an opportunity, which he did not fail to seize, of investigating the nature of the yellow fever which then prevailed at Philadelphia and at New York. He had also the satisfaction, in the former city, of renewing his acquaintance with the American General Morgan, whose prisoner he had formerly been during the revolutionary war, under circumstances so highly honourable, both to the conqueror and the captive, that I shall here relate the particulars. — During the heat of an action fought at Cowpens by a division of the British army, under disadvantages of unfavourable position and numerical inferiority, at a moment when the unfortunate issue of the battle was no longer doubtful, Dr Jackson, who happened to be well mounted, perceiving that the horse of the officer commanding the British troops had been shot under him, immediately rode up to the dismounted commander, and tendered to him the horse he was riding, observing, that he (the doctor) was but an obscure individual, whose escape could have but little beneficial influence, but that his (the officer's) safety was of the highest importance to the army. The commander accepted the generous offer and escaped. Dr Jackson, with some other officers and men, and all the wounded fell into the hands of the enemy. When a prisoner, he continued not only to give the benefit of his kind aid to the British soldiers, but extended his professional assistance to the wounded Americans; a conduct that particularly attracted the notice of the American general, who handsomely marked his sense of it by restoring the doctor to liberty, without even exacting his parole." This anecdote, so truly characteristic of the man, and evincing traits of heroism and generosity deserving of record, was not communicated by Dr Jackson, but by a military officer who was in the action; and when the doctor was afterwards referred to, in terms of surprise, that he had never mentioned it to his intimate friends, and was pointedly questioned as to its authenticity, his short reply was, "It is true."

Those who best knew Dr Jackson loved him most. Simple and unpretending in his habits and manners; independent in mind; bold in the pursuit of truth, but modest in the expression of it, he went about continually doing good in his sphere. He was a liberal contributor to the improvement of this department; a warm friend to the soldier; a benefactor to the human race; and had he been born to hereditary fortune, or been blessed with wealth, he would have moved in the same path with the disinterested and philanthropic Howard. His body has returned to dust. His spirit has departed hence. But the name of Jackson will live so long as medical science shall endure.

J. B.