

**A letter to the Commissioners of Military Enquiry, in reply to some animadversions of Dr. E. Nathaniel Bancroft on their fifth report / [Sir James McGrigor].**

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Mc G-RIGOR, Sir J.

~~GREAT BRITAIN, Army Medical Ser~~



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A  
LETTER  
TO THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF MILITARY ENQUIRY,  
IN REPLY TO SOME ANIMADVERSIONS  
OF *Do. Jacobi M. G.*  
DR. E. NATHANIEL BANCROFT  
ON THEIR FIFTH REPORT.

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BY  
JAMES M'GRIGOR, M.D. F.R.S. E.

Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh,  
Deputy Inspector of Army Hospitals,  
&c. &c. &c.

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1808.



LETTER

TO THE

COMMISSIONERS OF MILITARY ENQUIRY

IN REFERENCE TO THE AMMUNITION

DR. F. NATHANIEL BANCROFT

ON THEIR REPORT

315400



E. Squire, Printer,  
Furnival's-Inn-Court.

## LETTER,

&c.

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GENTLEMEN,

IT was naturally to be expected, that, in the prosecution of your highly important labours, in the course of which you would be called upon to detect abuses long connived at, to attack prejudices inveterate by indulgence, and to expose to public reprobation frauds and peculations long practised on the public; it was naturally, I say, to be expected, that you would encounter much opposition, and that a host of foes from different quarters would be in arms against you. Innocence may escape the shaft of calumny; active virtue never fails to be the object of attack.

Had you commenced your labours in the military department at an earlier period, your task in regard to the medical branch, arduous as it is, would



have been incalculably more difficult ; and your report would have excited no common sensation in the public mind. But your investigation began at a time, when, by the indefatigable industry, and incorruptible integrity of one individual, an effectual remedy had been applied to most of the abuses which had previously existed. For, however public opinion may be divided on some points, it is well known, and indeed universally acknowledged by the great body of medical officers, as well as the army at large, that these reforms originated in the judicious and unwearied exertions of the present Inspector General of Hospitals, and the well-digested system which, with the approbation of his Royal Highness the Commander in Chief, he has arranged and introduced.

By these improvements the service, as well as the public at large, have been greatly benefited, immense retrenchments have been made, the effective strength of the army has been increased, and by a more liberal remuneration being of-



ferred, men of superior talent and education have been induced to enter the medical department. Many such will, at present, be found among the regimental medical officers, that class, on whom the care of the army, in respect to health, must at all times chiefly devolve.

That these arrangements, however subservient to the general good, would produce feelings of hostility and resentment in certain individuals, who either felt themselves disappointed, or fancied themselves aggrieved, it is natural to imagine. But private interest coming in competition with public benefit, it will not be questioned, though the decision may be the ground of complaint, which should be preferred.

After my examination before your Board, I had little expectation of being again brought forward: I certainly did not feel any ambition to obtrude myself on public notice; but when character is attacked, silence becomes suspicious---it is even criminal.



In a pamphlet which has lately been published by Dr. Edward Nat. Bancroft, half-pay Physician to the Army, while he animadverts on your report, and arraigns your competency to judge of the subject, he labours industriously to impress you with the conviction, that the evidence given by me is not only inconsistent with fact, but at variance with the opinions, which I had formerly given to the public. Whether this gentleman stands single when he advances these charges, or whether he be linked with a party, of whom he steps forward as the champion, it is not for me to say, nor is it important for me to know. That his mis-statements are gross and numerous, I think I shall most clearly be able to prove.

Before, however, I proceed to the examination of his charges, I deem it a duty which I owe to myself solemnly to declare, that his insinuations respecting my alleged identity of opinions on this or any other subject with those of any other men or set of men, merely



because he is pleased to fancy an identity of interests, are illiberal and unfounded, ---more disgraceful to him than they can be injurious to me. In independence of spirit, if not of fortune, I will not yield to him, or to any man. The evidence, which I delivered at your Board, Gentlemen, was the unbiassed testimony of an humble individual, who, with some portion of medical science, had seen a considerable variety of service.---So far in answer to his very illiberal insinuations respecting the purity of those motives, by which my evidence was dictated. I proceed to examine his charges severally, as they are advanced in the letter.

The first charge insinuated against me, in common with Drs. Jackson and Borland, is that of partiality. He tells you, that our evidence, *prima facie*, ought to have been received with great caution, because “we owe our promotions  
“and present employments to the late  
“arrangements in the medical department, and to the present system,  
“which (he says) has effected the de-



“pression of army physicians, and the  
 “discontinuance of general hospitals.”  
 Hence he logically and very liberally infers, that it was to be apprehended, that  
 “our testimonies might be partial.” Now  
 Gentlemen, a question naturally occurs, who is this Dr. Bancroft, who so readily impeaches the impartiality of all, who do not think with him? Had he no interest in the old system, or connection with its supporters? Had he no promotion to expect had this system been suffered to continue? Did he feel no disappointment on its subversion? Or were his solicitations under the present system, like Dr. Jackson’s letter to Mr. Pitt, as he tells us, neglected and forgotten? Far be it from me, Gentlemen, to impeach the great purity of his motives, when he sat down to address you; but I apprehend, that there are not a few, who will suspect, that they are not quite so disinterested, as he would have you believe.

I informed you, that the mortality in the army on the continent, in 1794 and



1795, was certainly much greater in the general, than in the regimental hospitals. When I delivered this opinion, founded on my own observation, an opinion, which the writer of the letter to you himself does not venture to contradict, it was not my intention to impeach either the talents or the attention of the medical officers in the general hospitals. On this ground, therefore, he might have spared his vindication. It was the system itself of these hospitals, which I blamed, and which I have never ceased to think faulty in all its parts. The theory of Dr. Bancroft will by no means either invalidate my testimony, or explain the facts, which I adduced in evidence. I admit with him, that in general, the majority of the more dangerous cases being taken to the general hospitals, a greater mortality was naturally to be expected in them, than in regimental hospitals. But I assert it as a fact, and I call on him to disprove it, that out of any given number sent to the general hospital, and an equal number in the



same disease, and the same stages of it, retained in the regimental hospitals, a much larger proportion of the former, than of the latter, fell victims to disease. In the years alluded to, some regiments treated their own sick, sending few or none to the general hospitals. Among these, I believe, were the Blues, Buffs, and Greys; and it is a notorious fact, that these regiments lost proportionally fewer men, than any other corps in that army.

But independently of all fact, is it not known that many diseases acquire a malignant form, and that some even are generated by crowding a number of sick into one apartment, or under one roof? Is there a medical man, of any experience in the profession, who will not acknowledge, that this is actually the fact? It is too well established to admit of contradiction; and on this very principle, if I am not misinformed, hospital ships have for some time been discontinued in his Majesty's navy.

To the rash assertion, "that the regi-



“ mental surgeons, not rarely send their  
 “ patients into general hospitals, some-  
 “ times when there is danger of their  
 “ expiring on the way, in order that  
 “ their deaths may not happen in the  
 “ hospital of the regiment, and that  
 “ the responsibility thereof may attach  
 “ solely to the officers on the hospital  
 “ staff,” I give not the smallest credit.  
 The charge is a libel on the whole body  
 of regimental officers.

In pages 46 and 47 of his letter to  
 you, the writer, after a specimen of  
 pomposity and rhodomontade truly ridi-  
 culous, and an affectation of humour for  
 which no man will envy him, proceeds  
 with great formality to adduce a fact,  
 which, I dare say, the Doctor chuckled  
 when he wrote, believing it, I doubt not,  
 to be a decisive blow to his opponents.  
 He tells you, that, notwithstanding the  
 general establishment of regimental hos-  
 pitals, and, as he poetically observes,  
 “ the mode of conducting them being  
 “ in full bloom and activity,” the last  
 monthly returns of the regimental sur-



geons, made up to the 20th of March, exhibited the deaths of between 4 and 500 men in the preceding month. No man can deplore this mortality more than I do. But, when it is considered that a great number of men had been, in the beginning of the year, drawn from civil life into the militia, in consequence of a late act of parliament, and that these men having received large bounties, would, while their money lasted, naturally indulge in every species of intemperance; and when it is farther considered, that these men, when they joined, were badly clothed, that the season was extremely unfavourable, and that epidemic diseases of a peculiar cast were generally prevalent, it is not to be wondered, that great numbers were attacked with sickness, and that a more than usual proportion fell victims partly to their own indiscretion, and partly to the causes, which I have now mentioned.

But, Gentlemen, I would ask, were not these causes of the mortality in question known to Dr. Bancroft? If they



were not, he is justly chargeable with a degree of inattention, highly discreditable to him as a medical man. The same source of information, whence, I presume, he derived the knowledge of the fact, would have also acquainted him with the causes of that fact; and I beg leave to say, that when any fact is adduced against any proposition or theory whatever, the previous circumstances should be strictly investigated, otherwise the fact, even if admitted, may not warrant the conclusion. If the causes *were* known to him, he has by the suppression of these, been guilty of an act of the most culpable disingenuity; and all we can say is, that he suppressed them, only because it suited his purpose. It is likewise, Gentlemen, a circumstance not unworthy of your attention, that during this extreme prevalence of mortality, the sick in my district, and I presume also in others, had the assistance of an *army physician*.

But, as Dr. Bancroft has brought forward this instance of extreme mortality



in regimental hospitals, as an objection to their establishment, it is but fair to hear the return from the general hospital at the Isle of Wight (the only one now existing) for the same period. This return Dr. Bancroft had an easy opportunity of knowing; but, if he did know it, for obvious reasons he thought it prudent to suppress it. It is right, however, that you, Gentlemen, and the public at large should be informed, that while the mortality in the regimental hospitals, great indeed, I must acknowledge, was in the proportion of one out of sixteen, the mortality in the general hospital in the Isle of Wight was not less than one out of ten. What will Dr. Bancroft say of this comparison? *prima facie* at least, it furnishes no ground of triumph to the advocates for general hospitals.\*

\* That I may not be conceived by this statement, as insinuating a reflection on Drs. Moore and Lempriere, who are in charge of this hospital, I feel it incumbent on me to declare, that I know them to be men of superior talents, great attention, and of no common degree of medical science.



I have said in my evidence, Gentlemen, that in consequence of the sick being removed from the regimental and sent to the general hospitals on the continent, and from the regimental surgeons not being permitted to take care of their own sick, they became less active in the service, and felt disgusted. Now, whether the regimental surgeons will or will not thank me for this statement, (the learned Doctor inclines to the negative) is to me a matter of very little consequence. My statements are not given, to procure the thanks of any party. But this I may venture to say without incurring the charge of illiberality, that the Doctor has probably oftener than once experienced in his own feelings, that physicians are, like poets, an *irritable genus*; and that to remove a patient from under the care of any medical man, and place him under the charge of another, as it generally implies some incompetency in the former, seldom or never fails to excite in his mind dissatisfaction and disgust.



At the period alluded to (1794), the generality of the regimental surgeons were of considerable standing in the service---many of them men, who were looked up to for professional ability, and who, in the estimation of the army in general, were considered as superior to those who were comparatively strangers in the service, and who acted in the general hospitals. In these circumstances, the feelings of the surgeons appear to me to have been very natural. Dr. Bancroft, perhaps, gifted with high superiority of mind, and conscious of his own superlative merit, might not perhaps have felt these painful sensations; but he should have some compassion for the infirmities of those, who have not yet attained his transcendent magnanimity.

The Doctor, in order to controvert my evidence in favour of regimental hospitals, proceeds, in page 38, to observe, that it is expedient he should request me to explain “by what singular means the  
“greatest mortality from fever among  
“the British troops in Flanders should



“ have happened, as Dr. Jackson informs  
 “ us (in his Outline, p. 21), in that regi-  
 “ ment (the 88th), and in one other, the  
 “ 80th; and also to explain, by what  
 “ greater singularity of causes sickness  
 “ raged with violence and devastation in  
 “ the (same) 88th regiment, during the  
 “ time it remained in Jersey, previous to  
 “ its being sent to the continent in 1794,  
 “ as Dr. Jackson also states from his own  
 “ personal observation.” In answer to  
 the question in the first part of this quo-  
 tation, you, Gentlemen, will be surprised,  
 when I tell you, that Dr. Jackson no  
 where makes the assertion imputed to  
 him. Now, Gentlemen, had this writer,  
 who really in every step of his progress  
 betrays either wilful ignorance or a stu-  
 died desire to mislead by suppression of  
 important facts, taken the trouble to read  
 Dr. Jackson’s work with any other view,  
 than to garble and select, as suited his  
 own particular purpose, he would have  
 been at no loss for an answer to the se-  
 cond question in the quotation. Dr.  
 Jackson himself, then likewise a regimen-



tal surgeon in Jersey, tells him the “singular means” by which sickness raged with violence and devastation in other cases, as well as the 88th regiment. In page 5, of the Outline, Dr. Jackson informs him, that “the 88th regiment arrived in Jersey from Ireland, about the beginning of June.” He tells him, “that this was a new regiment, and therefore like most other new regiments, was composed of heterogeneous and unsound materials.” He tells him also, “that it was sickly when it arrived.” Now, surely, after this plain statement of facts, it requires no great portion of sagacity to discover, why sickness was so very prevalent in the 88th regiment;---but the Doctor’s discernment is not always in exercise. I now revert to the first part of the quotation, and I must particularly request your attention to the disingenuity of a man, who really seems determined to misrepresent and mislead. He affirms, as he pretends, on the authority of Dr. Jackson, that the greatest mortality from fever among the British troops in Flan-



ders, consisting, I believe, of about 20,000 men, happened in the 80th and 88th regiments. Now, on turning to the page of Dr. Jackson's Outline, to which the writer refers, I find that the Doctor advances no such assertion as is here ascribed to him. He informs us merely of the state of his own regiment, with which, of course, he was intimately acquainted. He tells us, also, the condition of other three regiments, adjacent to his own; with these, however, he acknowledges that he had but an imperfect acquaintance. Of the rest of the army, he professes no knowledge. Where then is the authority for Dr. Bancroft's assertion? Had he told us, that the mortality in the two regiments, the 80th and 88th, was very great, he would have told the truth. Had he told us further, that Dr. Jackson had stated this as a fact, this would have been equally true. But when he tells us, that of all the British troops in Flanders, the greatest mortality prevailed in the above-mentioned regiments, he advances an assertion, for which



Dr. Jackson gives him no authority whatever.

If Dr. Bancroft should contend, that the difference between Dr. Jackson's account and his representation of it is very immaterial: and if he should still wish to know "by what singular means" this very great mortality prevailed in these regiments; in order to gratify his curiosity I have only to remind him, that their sick were sent to the *general hospitals*, his own favourite institution, and then doubtless he will be at no loss to ascertain the real cause.

But, Gentlemen, the candid and learned Doctor has not yet done with his misrepresentations. In pages 39 and 40, he attempts next to prove, that my evidence, respecting the superiority of regimental hospitals in the West Indies, is inconsistent with my own opinion, as published some years ago: and further, that I had no opportunity of observing it, if any such superiority had existed, "*for that I was not then in Grenada.*" These, Gentlemen, are two very serious



charges; the latter imputation is peculiarly enormous. If I *was not* in Grenada, I have published a falsehood: if I *was* in Grenada, Dr. Bancroft asserts a falsehood. Which is the fact, we shall proceed to enquire.

To establish his first charge, that of inconsistency, illiberally insinuating at the same time that I have changed my opinion to promote my interest, he compares the evidence which I gave before you, with a passage in a work, entitled *Medical Sketches*. In answer to your question, “whether I had observed the  
“ comparative advantages of the treat-  
“ ment of sick in general and regimental  
“ hospitals in the West Indies;” I told you that I had. I told you, “that in  
“ the island of Grenada, in the year 1796,  
“ from the want of a medical staff, the  
“ sick and wounded, while the army con-  
“ tinued in the field, were treated regi-  
“ mentally; that though under many dis-  
“ advantages, the mortality was trifling,  
“ till after the return of the army to



“ quarters, when the sick were ordered  
 “ to be sent to general hospitals.”

Now, Gentlemen, as I am extremely anxious to set this matter, important as it is to my character, in its true light, you will, I trust, pardon me if I trespass on your patience, by quoting first the whole passage from the Medical Sketches, on which Dr. Bancroft founds his charge of inconsistency ; and secondly, the passage from his Letter, in which he endeavours to substantiate that charge. The passage from Medical Sketches is as follows:---

“ In Barbadoes, both in the end of  
 “ 1795 and in the beginning of 1796,  
 “ the only disease which prevailed was  
 “ typhus. The 88th regiment was  
 “ healthy at St. Lucia, and continued  
 “ pretty healthy at Grenada for three  
 “ months after their arrival there, or as  
 “ long as they remained to the windward  
 “ side of the island. This was likewise  
 “ the case with the 10th, 25th, and other  
 “ regiments. It was only after our re-



“ turn to St. George’s, and to Richmond  
“ Hill, after we had communication with  
“ the 68th regiment and the general hos-  
“ pitals, where the yellow fever had for  
“ many months prevailed, that it ap-  
“ peared in the 88th and in other corps.  
“ Before the appearance of this fever, in  
“ the 88th, as well as in other corps,  
“ dysentry and intermittents prevailed  
“ the most. On the 12th of July 1796,  
“ a detachment of the 88th regiment was  
“ embarked at Grenada in the Betsey  
“ transport for England. We embarked  
“ 140 men; and I was most particularly  
“ careful not to take any man on board  
“ with the slightest appearance of ill-  
“ ness. Every precaution, which re-  
“ garded cleanliness, ventilation, or fu-  
“ migation, was adopted. The remains  
“ of the 8th, 10th, 25th, and other regi-  
“ ments were at the same time embarked  
“ at Grenada for England. From the  
“ time we sailed from Grenada, on the  
“ 19th of July to the 5th of August,  
“ seven days after we sailed from Tor-  
“ tola, (where we had touched for water)



“ no case of this fever appeared in the  
 “ Betsey.”

You have now before you, Gentlemen, the whole of the materials from whence the writer has constructed his charges. I will now exhibit Dr. Bancroft's proof. Adverting to my answer to your question, respecting the superiority of regimental hospitals, he observes, in page 39 of his Letter, “ Concerning the  
 “ true import of this answer, no difference of opinion can possibly arise; you  
 “ have properly understood and interpreted it to mean, that, whilst Dr.  
 “ M'Grigor served in Grenada, the mortality under the regimental treatment  
 “ was trifling; but that when the sick  
 “ were sent to the general hospitals, the  
 “ mortality became very considerable;  
 “ or, in other words, that Dr. M'Grigor,  
 “ from personal observation, had been  
 “ able to ascertain, that under similar  
 “ circumstances and solely from the difference of treatment, a much greater  
 “ mortality had occurred in Grenada in  
 “ the general than in the regimental hos-



“ pitals; and you may probably be sur-  
 “ prised to learn *by the testimony of Dr.*  
 “ *M’Grigor himself*, (given on another  
 “ occasion, when he had no particular  
 “ purpose in view to bias his testimony)  
 “ that there was in reality no room or  
 “ foundation for any such comparison as  
 “ is here stated; and that, if there had  
 “ been any, it could not have fallen un-  
 “ der Dr. M’Grigor’s observation, as  
 “ you have naturally been led to sup-  
 “ pose, because *he was not then in Gre-*  
 “ *nada.*

“ In the year 1804, Dr. M’Grigor  
 “ published a small volume under the  
 “ title of ‘ Medical Sketches of the Ex-  
 “ pedition from Egypt to India, pub-  
 “ lished for John Murray, 32, Fleet-  
 “ street, &c.’ From this work it ap-  
 “ pears, that the 88th, or Dr. M’Gri-  
 “ gor’s regiment, which made part of the  
 “ army employed under the command  
 “ of Sir Ralph Abercrombie in the con-  
 “ quest of St. Lucia, during the month  
 “ of May 1796, was sent with others  
 “ *about the beginning of June to Grenada,*



“ where it arrived in two or three days,  
 “ and was employed in the reduction of  
 “ that island.

“ According to his positive statement,  
 “ the 88th regiment continued pretty  
 “ healthy at Grenada for three months  
 “ after their arrival there, (i. e. *until the*  
 “ *month of September*) or as long as they  
 “ remained to the windward side of the  
 “ island.” “ This,” he adds, “ was  
 “ likewise the case with the 10th, 25th,  
 “ and other regiments. It was *only after*  
 “ *our return to St. George’s and Richmond*  
 “ *hill*, after we had communication with  
 “ the 68th regiment and the general hos-  
 “ pitals, where the yellow fever had for  
 “ many months prevailed, that it *ap-*  
 “ *peared in the 88th and other corps,*”  
 see p. 227. “ Now, it is well known,  
 “ that the *windward* or *eastern* parts of  
 “ the island in the West Indies are ge-  
 “ nerally the most healthy; and Dr.  
 “ M‘Grigor, in the work before us, na-  
 “ turally and justly ascribed the absence  
 “ of disease among the regiments before-  
 “ mentioned *solely* to the circumstance of



“ their having been *stationed in the wind-*  
 “ *ward parts of Grenada.* He manifestly  
 “ had not, while writing that work, the  
 “ least idea of ascribing it to any supe-  
 “ riority or difference in the *regimental*  
 “ over the general hospital treatment,  
 “ neither had he then the smallest dis-  
 “ position to suspect that the subse-  
 “ quent mortality arose from any such  
 “ difference. He was, and perhaps now  
 “ is, a believer in the contagion of the  
 “ yellow fever; and it is to *that cause*  
 “ *alone* that he in this work intended to  
 “ impute the change in question. He  
 “ is far from alluding, in any way what-  
 “ ever to any thing unfavourable in the  
 “ treatment of the sick in the general  
 “ hospitals at Grenada: on the contrary,  
 “ he says, the mortality resulted, not  
 “ from *treatment*, but from a *communica-*  
 “ *tion* with the 68th regiment (which is  
 “ totally distinct from treatment, and  
 “ the *general hospitals* ;” “ either of which  
 “ causes, on the supposition of conta-  
 “ gion, might prove equally destructive.  
 “ Those, however, who do not believe



“ in the contagious quality of the yellow  
 “ fever, nor in the alledged mischievous  
 “ effects of general hospitals, will readily  
 “ account for the increased number of  
 “ deaths among the regiments in ques-  
 “ tion, after their return to St. George’s  
 “ and Richmond hill, in the month of  
 “ September, by recollecting that those  
 “ places are surrounded by an abun-  
 “ dance of local causes of disease, such  
 “ as are found to produce the yellow fe-  
 “ ver in all hot climates, at certain sea-  
 “ sons of the year; these regiments ar-  
 “ rived at those places from more healthy  
 “ stations in September, (commonly one  
 “ of the most sickly months of the year)  
 “ and also that this was one of the years  
 “ in which the yellow fever prevailed the  
 “ most fatally in Grenada, occasioning  
 “ the deaths of those who were attacked  
 “ by it, whether they were in one kind  
 “ of hospital or in another, or in no hos-  
 “ pital at all. So much for this part of  
 “ Dr. M’Grigor’s testimony: of the  
 “ other part, which regards the extent  
 “ of his opportunities for ‘*personally ob-*



“ *serving,*’ what he states to have hap-  
 “ pened, I must leave him to reconcile  
 “ some contradictions which seem to me  
 “ irreconcilable. For he tells us, at  
 “ p. 227, of his Medical Sketches, that,  
 “ ‘ on the 12th of July 1796, a detach-  
 “ ment of the 88th regiment was em-  
 “ barked at Grenada in the Betsey trans-  
 “ port for England,’ and that he was one  
 “ of that detachment.”---He adds, ‘ we  
 “ embarked 140, and I was most parti-  
 “ cularly careful not to take any man  
 “ on board with the slightest appearance  
 “ of illness.’ He next says, in p. 228,  
 “ ‘ we sailed from Grenada on the 19th  
 “ of July,’ &c. and it appears that he  
 “ afterwards arrived safely in England.  
 “ Now, as *he has told us* that the regi-  
 “ ment of which he was the surgeon, and  
 “ the other regiments, ‘ continued pretty  
 “ healthy at Grenada *for three months*  
 “ *after their arrival there,*’ and that he  
 “ ‘ embarked for England’ within little  
 “ more than half of that time, I can-  
 “ not help feeling a considerable degree  
 “ of curiosity to know by what super-



“ natural means he ‘ had (as he states)  
 “ in the year 1796, an opportunity of  
 “ *observing* the (comparative) advantage  
 “ of taking care of the sick regimentally,  
 “ instead of sending them to general  
 “ hospitals.’ See Report, p. 185. And  
 “ how he was able to know, from *per-*  
 “ *sonal observation*, that, upon ‘ the return  
 “ of the army to *quarters*’ when *he* must  
 “ have been *far on his voyage to Europe*,  
 “ ‘ the sick were ordered to be sent to  
 “ general hospitals, and then the mor-  
 “ tality was very considerable indeed.’ ”  
 Ditto, p. 185.

Now, Gentlemen, whoever reads the  
 extract from *Medical Sketches* with an  
 ordinary degree of attention, cannot fail  
 to perceive that, so far from ascribing  
 the increased mortality of the 88th regi-  
 ment to their removal from the wind-  
 ward side of the island, there is no cause  
 whatever directly assigned for that mor-  
 tality. I state merely that, after their  
 removal to St. George’s and Richmond-  
 hill, and their communication with the  
 68th regiment and general hospitals, this



increased mortality commenced. From this statement a candid and impartial reader would have inferred, not surely that I meant to say that the removal was the only cause of this mortality, nor even the principal cause; but that communication with the 68th regiment and the general hospitals contributed much, if not chiefly, to this devastation of human life. The passage is too plain to admit of misconstruction. Intelligible, however, as it is, it did not suit the Doctor's purpose to understand it; for that he might have understood it, I cannot for a moment doubt, without questioning the clearness of his optics or the sanity of his intellects.

Now, Gentlemen, observe, I pray you, the ingenuity of this man. Fearful that, as there are three causes indirectly assigned for the increased mortality of the 88th regiment, the reader might advert to all the three; or, if the Doctor's ill luck should have it so, might lay the chief stress on those two he wished him to overlook, he resorts to an expedient,



by way of argument, which, as far as I know, is completely new in the dialectic art. He instructs his printer to exhibit the two principal causes in the common type, for these he wished to be thrown into the back-ground; and in order to fix the attention of his reader on his own favorite cause, and to give it a degree of prominence, to which it would have no claim, he desires it to be printed in striking italics. That case indeed must be truly wretched, which requires such artifice as this to support it; and its defender must be a miserable logician, who depends on the printer for the strength of his argument.

It did not answer his purpose to have the communication with the general hospitals considered in any degree as a cause of the great mortality; he therefore pitches on the removal as the sole cause, and he even pays me a sort of compliment for having made the discovery, by commending my judgment in forming this opinion. The art here practised deserves a harsher name than I am inclined



to affix to it. In one part indeed of the passage extracted, you will perceive that he *does* mention the communication with general hospitals as one of the causes which I might have had in contemplation ; but he mentions it only to insinuate an error, and to impress you with a belief that I now represent the *treatment* in regimental, to be superior to that in general, hospitals, and that at the period alluded to I entertained no such opinion. Now, Gentlemen, if you will take the trouble to re-peruse the passage from the Medical Sketches, you cannot fail to perceive, that not a single syllable is said concerning the *treatment* in either of these hospitals---no opinion advanced in regard to their comparative advantages in respect to treatment. Nor have I, on any occasion whatever, expressed any opinion on this point. It is the system itself, and not the practitioners or the treatment that I have uniformly assailed.

But suppose that I had not been at that time so fully convinced of



the superiority of regimental above general hospitals, does it follow, that after an uninterrupted and pretty extensive experience for twelve years, I am to think, in opposition to innumerable facts, as favourably of general hospitals now, as he would persuade you, I did at that time? No man in his senses would entertain such an opinion. Consistency, Gentlemen, does not consist (pardon the pun) in an uniform adherence to the same opinion, either of men or of things, but a steady, zealous, and disinterested pursuit of truth. And I presume to add, that Dr. Bancroft has lived for the last twelve years of his life to very little purpose, if he has not seen reason to alter many of his opinions. If he has not, I am curious to know “by what supernatural means” he was at an early age protected against error, and saved the necessity of gaining wisdom by years. Experience, which, to use an old and vulgar adage, teaches fools, imparts, it would seem, no knowledge to the learned doctor.

But this instance of disingenuity is



perhaps too flimsy to escape the detection even of the most inattentive reader. I must now request your attention to another much less pardonable, because much more criminal; for its manifest purpose is to deceive you, and to involve *me* in the charge of falsehood. He states, that the regiment to which I was then surgeon (the 88th) was sent to Grenada in the beginning of June, and sailed for England on the 19th of July. This too he presumes to state, *on my authority*. He then triumphantly asks, by what means could I, in the short space of a month and a half, learn by observation the superior advantages of regimental hospitals there, and he tells you, “that he feels a considerable degree of curiosity to know, the supernatural means” by which this knowledge was acquired.

Dr. Bancroft, I have no doubt, Gentlemen, is gifted with no common share of curiosity. Had he possessed as much accuracy in his statements, as much candour in the construction of other men's



motives, and as much impartiality in the pursuit of truth, and the investigation of facts, his curiosity, if painfully excited, would have been cheaply gratified, without the fatigue of any elaborate enquiry. But, Sir (pardon me, Gentlemen, if I address myself to him for a moment), where or whence did you learn that I arrived at Grenada in the beginning of June? Who, or what is your authority for this assertion? Who told you this *important* fact, which has excited in your breast so great a degree of curiosity, and on which hangs the whole of your vile argument, and your still more detestable charge. No man, I venture to affirm, ever gave you such information. The discovery is wholly your own. And, Sir, what shall we say of your pretended candour, and respect for truth and character, when we find you either wilfully fabricating, or carelessly assuming dates to suit your own purposes, giving on my authority, a statement which I never warranted, and which is disgracefully incorrect?



I arrived, be it known to you, in Grenada on the 4th of March, and not in June, as you falsely state. And while I thus correct your error, and reprobate the motives, in which it seems to have originated, I blush for the man, who is capable of committing it.

On no better foundation, Gentlemen, than this unpardonable mis-statement, is founded the second charge, which he alleges against me, a charge so abominable to my feelings, that words fail me to chastise it in terms of sufficient sharpness or severity. With a view of discrediting my evidence, and impressing upon the public a belief, that in that evidence I did not scruple to deviate from truth, he asserts, that I was not in Grenada at the time when the 88th regiment became unhealthy; and had therefore no opportunity of making those observations, which in my evidence before you, I professed to have made.

Now, Gentlemen, the fact is, as I have just now stated, that we arrived in



Grenada on the 4th of March---that my stay there was not for *five or six weeks*, as he falsely asserts, but for *four or five months*---that, when the army took the field, I, as senior surgeon, was appointed to the superintendence of all the military hospitals, and that during this period, I had many and various opportunities of observing the superiority of regimental hospitals.\* This, Gentlemen, is the fact; and had Dr. Bancroft's mis-statement been made for any other, than the insidious, purpose of wounding my character, vilifying your labours, and misleading the public mind, I should have treated it with that indulgence, which the fallibility of our nature, and the principles of charity, require us to exercise. But, when I contemplate the purpose, which this

\* This statement may be corroborated, not only by my own case-books, but also by the testimony of Mr. Bruce, now surgeon to the 88th regiment, and who arrived with me at Grenada at the period alluded to; and if required, likewise by others of the surviving officers who served in Grenada.



statement subserves; when I regard the motives in which it appears to originate; my indignation swells against the audacity of its author: and I am compelled to tell him publicly the most unpleasant of all truths, that, in endeavouring to fix on me the vilest of all charges, he has himself asserted a most palpable falsehood.

It is said in evidence, that many soldiers who had been sent into general hospitals with slight ailments, caught fevers there and died. Dr. Bancroft, though a bold disputant, does not venture to controvert this assertion. But, while he admits the fact, he tells you in the first place, that the same has often happened in regimental hospitals. True, sapient Sir; it is not an uncommon thing for the member of a private family to catch a fever; but does he run the same risk, as a nurse or a servant in a public hospital, even on the most contracted scale? We do not say, that in regimental hospitals patients are absolutely not subject to contagion; but



we affirm, without fear of contradiction, that contagion is much less frequent in regimental than in general hospitals: and this is enough for the purpose of our argument.

He tells you next, p. 48, “ that if  
 “ the fact alluded to in evidence have any  
 “ weight as an argument, that weight is  
 “ perhaps in favour of general hospitals,  
 “ because by receiving all the cases of  
 “ contagious disease, they save great  
 “ numbers affected with slighter ailments in the former, from the danger of infection, to which they must  
 “ be otherwise exposed.” This observation would be good for something, if general hospitals were receptacles for contagious diseases only; but the fact is, that patients of all descriptions are admitted into them, and thereby frequently catch those diseases, which may happen to be prevalent in them, at the time of their admission. The observation, therefore, is futile and irrelevant.

He tells you next, “ that the existence of contagious disorders is not



“ necessarily connected with any hospitals, but is an accidental calamity, to which all are obnoxious.” If this observation have any meaning, it must be this, that every man, who is sent to an hospital, does not necessarily catch contagion. This is truly a wonderful discovery, of which the Doctor may claim the sole merit.

It was likewise said in evidence, that soldiers tarried long in general hospitals, and that the worst characters in the army ---malingerers---found their way into them, and frequently imposed upon medical officers of no previous regimental experience.\* I will not fatigue your attention with quoting from the Doctor's letter a specious sample of *a priori* reasoning, for he alledges no fact to prove the improbability of this statement: it is sufficient to say, that there is not an officer in the army, of whatever description, who cannot attest it from his own experience. And I beg leave to observe, that much greater medical science than

\* For a definition of *malingerers* I beg to refer to Dr. Bancroft.



is possessed either by Dr. Bancroft himself, or any of his physicians of “superior attainments,” has been imposed upon by the tricks of these malingerers. Of this fact it would be easy to produce the most incontestible evidence. A physician or surgeon, whatever may be his previous “scientific acquirements,” or however well “grounded” in the Doctor’s “invaluable principles,” in order to detect the arts of these malingerers, must have been some time conversant in a military hospital.

But the Doctor, as if aware of the weakness of his argument, perhaps also recollecting that his own skill had been sometimes defeated by the artifices of these malingerers, adduces another, I will not say a better answer to the statement in question. He tells you, that no patients are admitted into general hospitals, who have not been sent thither by the surgeons of their respective regiments; and that these malingerers must therefore have first imposed upon their own surgeons. Unfortunately, however, for the validity of this argument, like some



others of the Doctor's, it is not founded in fact. And it is to me not a little surprising, that Dr. Bancroft, even with *his* slender acquaintance with military hospitals, should advance so unqualified an assertion. Does not the general hospital at the Isle of Wight receive patients, who have not been under the charge of a regimental surgeon? Has not this also frequently been the case with the late general hospital at Gosport? And has it not been more or less the case, wherever a general hospital has existed? General hospitals *were* proverbially the hot beds of malingerers. When he rashly asserts, that the number of malingerers in the whole army does not exceed fifty, the statement must be pronounced by every military man too ridiculous to require refutation.

The sixth and last head of evidence to which the Doctor adverts, is the great waste and profusion of expense, with which the establishment of general hospitals has been attended. By adverting to my evidence, Gentlemen, you will



find, that the question proposed to me on this subject regarded only the general hospitals on the continent, and to this question I gave a specific answer: but that the expense of these establishments *has in general* been unnecessarily great, is one of those facts, which no man acquainted with them will venture to deny. The Doctor, however, labours hard to weaken this fact; and to induce a belief, that the profusion of public money in the medical department has not been greater, than the nature of the service and a due regard to the healths of the men rendered unavoidable. To impress this belief, he brings forward a string of observations, evidently calculated to mislead such of his readers, as are not acquainted with the subject, and to display his own superior tenderness and humanity towards the army. He tells you, that it is impossible to calculate the number of medical officers, and the quantities of hospital stores, which may be necessary, especially on foreign service. He tells you, what no man will deny, that, as we cannot



foresee the possible extent of sickness, true wisdom will direct us to provide for the worst. He tells you also, that we ought rather to incur a superfluity of expense, than suffer men to perish by deficiency of medical aid. All this would be extremely fine and very pertinent, if any retrenchment of expenditure were recommended, which could militate against the health or comfort of the army. All this would be very fine, if the sick soldier either had been, or could have been benefited by this profusion of expenditure. This, however, was not the case: there was a profusion of expense, which could in no respect contribute either to his health or to his comfort. And, before I dismiss this part of the subject, I must take the liberty to observe, that there is something extremely illiberal and insidious in Dr. Bancroft's observations on this point. They are intended evidently to impress the public with a belief, that it is our\* wish to circumscribe the com-

\* In this charge, he does me the honour to couple me with Drs. Borland and Jackson.



forts of the army, to deny the sick the necessary medicines, and to introduce a system of economy incompatible with the welfare of the troops, and repugnant to the common feelings of humanity. That such, however, can be our intention, no intelligent man will for a moment believe. What rational motive can we have for curtailing the accommodations and comforts of those committed to our charge? Is such a plan subservient to our interests? Would it advance our reputation? Would it be consistent with our duty? In short, will Dr. Bancroft inform us, what motive could prompt us to recommend a system as repugnant to humanity as it is irreconcilable with the acknowledged principles of human action? No man surely can feel a deeper interest in whatever concerns the health and comfort of the soldier, than he who has tented with him in the field, has shared in his hardships, witnessed his deprivations, and has known his services.

The Doctor next asserts, that I affirmed in evidence that the medical esta-



blishment of the Indian army in Egypt was fully competent to the care of their own sick. Here is another of his unaccountable mis-statements. A reference to my evidence will convince any reader, the Doctor himself perhaps excepted, that I made no such assertion. He affirms also, " that the Indian army was generally " kept together in healthy stations, and " suffered very little sickness." This is equally untrue, unless those stations can be deemed healthy, where plague or ophthalmia were never absent; and where one-fourth of the army was at one time confined by illness. He says, " that I " have totally forgotten the dismay, " which pervaded the medical officers of " the Indian army from the *highest* " to the lowest, when the plague was " officially reported by *him* to exist in " one of the regiments composing that " army, and though that regiment was " *my own*." I have indeed forgotten it, if that can be forgotten, which never existed.

The plague, Gentlemen, made its first appearance in two hospital servants of



the 88th regiment. Dr. Bancroft was ordered to visit them; he did so, and--- never saw them afterwards. That some apprehensions of the spread of this disease, and its fatal consequences, might have been created by this discovery, is very possible. Should the plague appear in St. George's hospital, I dare say the Doctor would be somewhat alarmed, if not for himself, at least for his patients. But that any sensation, like dismay, was excited, I have no recollection; and I am confident, that no such feeling existed among the medical officers of the Indian army.

He tells you also, “ that I have forgotten the embarrassment it (the plague) created, and the difficulties of procuring any of these gentlemen to assume ‘ *the post of honour*,’ and the ultimate necessity imposed upon the British general hospital establishment, of *taking the sole charge of the plague patients of the East Indian army.*” When first I read this paragraph, I was utterly confounded. I could hardly cre-



dit my own senses. I read it again ; and I could not help exclaiming, “ the Doctor here outdoes himself!!! ” I have already had occasion to expose several of his mis-statements : what character, or what name, shall be attributed to the one which is immediately before us, you yourselves shall be able to judge. As soon as the plague was discovered in the 88th regiment, it became necessary, without delay, to provide one or more receptacles for patients afflicted with this disease, and likewise to appoint medical officers for attending these patients. Now, it is to be observed, that, antecedently to this event, our medical establishment had been strengthened by the accession of some hospital mates, who had been sent out to us by the British government ; and when the plague made its first appearance, these Gentlemen were doing duty with us. Immediately on the disease being discovered, Dr. Shapter, then at the head of the staff, assembled the medical officers of the Indian army, and informed them, that the appointments to the pest



houses should be determined by *lot*, that a given number of the first drawn, as circumstances might require, should first take the duty, and that, in case of any of their deaths, the vacant places should be filled, according to the order of the ballot. Agreeably to this arrangement, the names of the medical officers of our army, amounting to about sixteen, with those of the hospital mates already mentioned, belonging to the British establishment, and amounting to five or six, were put into a hat, and drawn by lot in the usual manner. The precise number of each establishment, and the order in which they were drawn, not having the documents in my possession at present, I cannot now with certainty recollect. But to this I pledge myself, that if there be any error in this statement, respecting the former of these two points, the error must be so trifling that it may be deemed evanescent.

Soon afterwards, the plague appearing also in the British army, a part of their staff, in conjunction with the others, was



ordered to attend in the several pest-houses. I mean not to dissemble, that Mr. Price also very early volunteered his valuable services ; and that latterly, Dr. Buchan, in a manner the most magnanimous and disinterested, rendered the most essential service to the army, by voluntarily undertaking this most dangerous duty. But it deserves your attention, Gentlemen, that during the whole of this time, the Indian establishment never failed to furnish its full contingent of medical officers. It deserves your attention, that the first medical officer that entered a pest-house, belonged not to the British, but to the Indian establishment. The gentleman I allude to is Mr. Thomas, who, I believe, is now in London. This being the case, I leave it to you to determine, how far Dr. Bancroft is justified in asserting, that the British hospital establishment took the *sole charge* of the plague patients of the Indian army. I leave it to you to estimate the correctness of that man's statements, who has either inadvertently or wilfully advanced



an assertion so totally unfounded. And, is this the man whom, in the prosecution of your important inquiries, it was your duty to consult? Is this he, who vainly enough insinuates his own superior competency to counsel and instruct you? Is this the man who, himself, loaded with errors, arrogantly assumes the province of correcting your's, *proh pudor,---hominis stultitiam*.

I will not fatigue your patience by any animadversions on the observations, which he has offered on the medical establishment of the India Company. I dismiss them with simply remarking, that they are both illiberal and unfounded. The officers of that establishment are men truly respectable, and in evidence of their talents, their zeal for knowledge, and scientific acquirements, I need only appeal to the volumes of the Asiatic Researches. Whatever he himself may feel, I have no hesitation in saying, that to be compared to such men, would reflect no dishonour on Dr. Bancroft.



Before I conclude, Gentlemen, I must once more request your permission to address myself to Dr. Bancroft. You have said, Sir, “that *you* do not wish “to excite painful recollections in the “minds of those who served with the “Indian army, and that *you* therefore “abstain from mentioning any more of “the occurrences of that period,” of which you say, “*I* must admit that *you* “had personal knowledge.” Away with such dark and assassin-like insinuations. Speak out like a man. I am fully prepared to meet you. I challenge you to state any one circumstance, which can occasion me the least pain on recollection. And to compel you, if possible, to accept this challenge, I thus publicly declare, that, unless you do speak out, I shall regard you in no better light, than that of a malignant and dastardly assassin.

It would be endless to pursue this writer through all the mis-statements in his letter. I have endeavoured to repel, and I trust successfully, every attack,



which he has made upon myself. I have now only, Gentlemen, to request your forgiveness for having trespassed on your patience, and addressing to you this my hasty production.

I have the honour to be,

with much respect,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

JAMES M'GRIGOR.

*May 30th, 1808.*



## POSTSCRIPT.

ON reviewing my evidence delivered before you, I find only one mistake, which it may be necessary to correct. I stated that the medical staff which came from the Cape of Good Hope to accompany the Indian army, consisted of between twenty and thirty. By this statement, I have since understood, that I have considerably overrated the number. The error, however, no wise affects the general question.

As material documents, I have here added a letter from Mr. Bruce, now surgeon to the 88th regt. relative to the time that regiment was in the island of Grenada; and an abstract of the total sick and deaths of the army in Great Britain, for every month from May 1807 to April 1808. As this return exhibits the sick and deaths in general, as well as in regimental hospitals, with the proportions which they bear to each



other, it will elucidate materially one part of my statement. I obtained this document from the records of the Army Medical Board, in consequence of the orders of his Royal Highness the Commander in Chief and the Secretary at War.



Gravesend, 25th May, 1808.

SIR,

IN reply to your letter of the 22d inst. which, on account of our regiment being now on its march to Essex, only reached me this morning, I beg to inform you that the detachment of the 88th regiment, under the late Major Houstoun, which you, as well as myself, accompanied in the West Indies, embarked at Barbadoes in the *Expedition*, of 44 guns, on the 28th of February, 1796, and landed, together with detachments of the 10th and 25th foot, under Brigadier General Mackenzie, at St. George's, Grenada, on the 4th March following.

The renewal of military operations against the posts in possession of the enemy, in the interior of the island, took place, as far as my memory reaches, on or about the 29th March. But as a reference to the public dispatches on this subject, transmitted to government by Brigadier General Nicholls, who then commanded, is easily practicable, the



matter may be established beyond the possibility of doubt.

The detachment of the 88th, together with part of the 8th and 68th foot, embarked at Grenada, I think, on the 19th, and sailed for St. Kitt's on the 20th July following. I am positive that this embarkation took place later than is stated in your volume, published in 1804. Ample documents are now in my possession, *written* while I was in the West Indies, which can be produced, if necessary, to substantiate the above statement.

I am,

Sincerely your's,

N. BRUCE,

Surgeon First Batt. 88th Regt.

To DR. M'GRIGOR,  
*Deputy Inspector of Hospitals,*  
*British Coffee House, London.*



ABSTRACT of the MONTHLY RETURNS  
of SICK and DEATHS in the ARMY in  
GREAT BRITAIN, from May 1807 to  
April 1808.

Date.	In Regimental Hospitals.		In the General Hospital Isle of Wight.	
	Sick	Deaths	Sick	Deaths
May, 1807 . . . .	4625	130	162	24
June . . . . .	4185	80	205	10
July . . . . .	4244	70	173	8
August . . . . .	3304	84	153	3
September . . . .	3818	48	189	4
October . . . . .	3954	61	221	10
November . . . .	4528	95	280	5
December . . . . .	4997	81	272	12
January, 1808 . .	5255	163	235	12
February . . . . .	7006	292	256	11
March . . . . .	7906	411	252	5
April . . . . .	7763	472	249	25
	61,585	1987	2647	129

Deaths as  
1 in 31.

Deaths as  
1 in 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

Average Strength of the Army in } 110,000 men.  
Great Britain - - -



ABSTRACT of the MONTHLY RETURNS  
of SICK and DEATHS in the ARMY in  
Great Britain, from May 1807 to  
April 1808.

Date.	In Regiments Hospitals		In the General Hospital &c. in Wight	
	Sick	Deaths	Sick	Deaths
May 1807	4093	150	163	24
June	4185	80	205	10
July	4244	70	173	8
August	3304	83	111	7
Sept. & Oct.	3318	83	180	9
Nov.	3664	61	197	10
Dec.	4028	43	230	7
Jan. 1808	4007	81	919	12
Feb.	5255	108	555	13
March	4000	203	950	41
April	4203	141	912	3
May	4763	159	910	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>61,385</b>	<b>1087</b>	<b>5017</b>	<b>149</b>

Deaths as  
1 in 201.

Deaths as  
1 in 31.







