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5

EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY

BY

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THE SURGEONS MATE BY
JOHN WOODALL

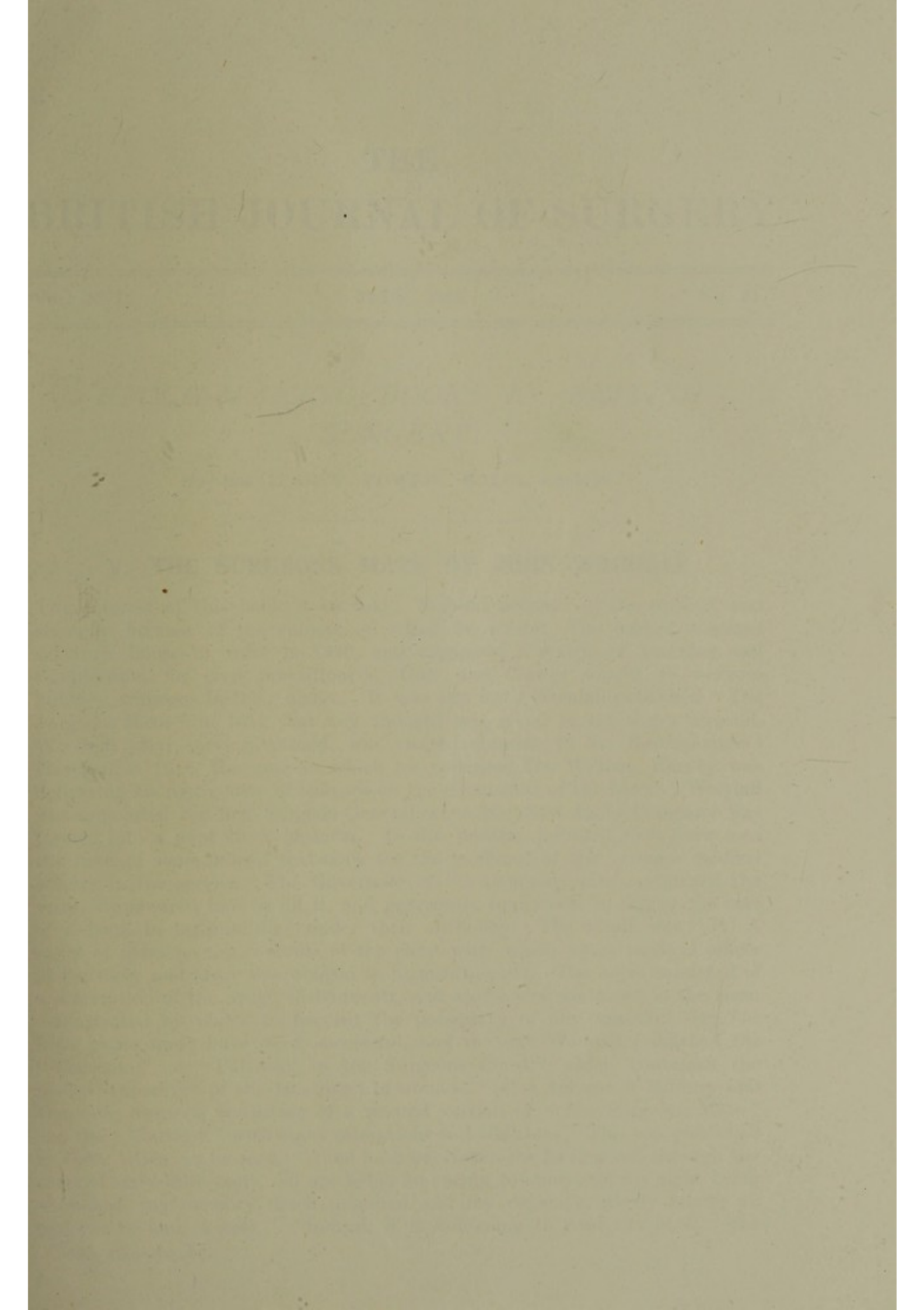
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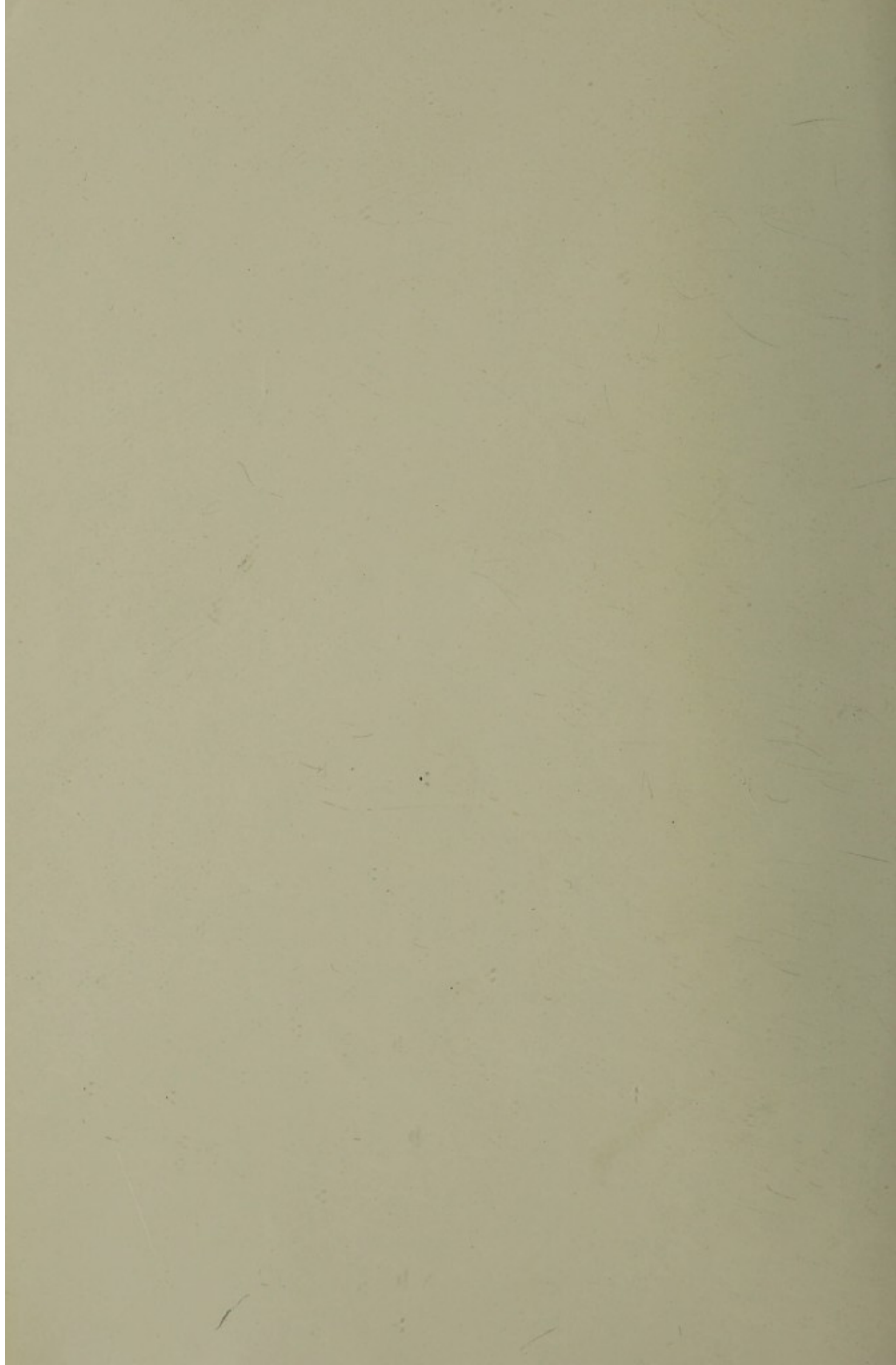
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EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY.

BY SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., LONDON.

V. THE SURGEONS MATE BY JOHN WOODALL.

THE interest of this book is twofold; first on account of the author, and secondly because of the subject on which he wrote. The barber surgeons set their house in order in 1540, and organized a system of teaching and examination for civil practitioners. Gale and Clowes sought to instruct military surgeons in their duties. It was not until Woodall published "The Surgeons Mate" in 1617 that any thought was given to the ship's surgeon. Woodall, after serving abroad, was elected surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1616, the year in which his colleague Dr. William Harvey was delivering his first course of lectures on the circulation of the blood. Woodall was appointed the first Surgeon-General when the East India Company was formed into a joint stock business. In this position he must soon have seen the need of some official text-book for the guidance of the younger medical officers in the service. The Governors of the Company also recognized the want, empowered him to fill it, and generously undertook to defray the cost of a book to be published under their authority. The result was: (1) A series of notes on the contents of the chest with which every medical officer in the navy and army was obliged to furnish himself. The notes consisted of a description of the drugs, instruments, and appliances contained in the chest—illustrated by plates to prevent the possibility of any mistake. (2) The little guide must have been successful, and in 1628 Woodall published the "Viaticum" or "Pathway to the Surgeons Chest," which contained the general principles of the treatment of wounds. (3) A volume of Military and Domestic Surgery, consisting of a revised version of "The Surgeons Mate" and the "Viaticum" with many alterations and additions. This was published in 1639, when, as he says, "time hath overtaken me having run through the cares of sixty-nine years, old age being an enemy to study, for my sight being weakened, my memory much impaired and my capacity utterly unable to perform so hard a task". Indeed, it is saddening to read the book. The

earlier parts are well and clearly written, giving dogmatic accounts of Woodall's own experience : the later additions show that he has become lost in mysticism and alchemy. He relies upon the experience of others rather than upon his own, and describes in doggerel verse what he should have said in prose.

The Surgeons Mate was written for use "on a great Ship upon a long voyage for sea service as suppose for an East India voyage". It deals entirely with the diseases and injuries of seamen, for, as Woodall says, "women in long voyages are rare creatures". The advice offered to the Surgeon's Mates, or Assistant Surgeons as they would be called nowadays, is thoroughly practical. The duty of the Surgeon's Mate is to behave to his chief surgeon "wisely, lovingly and diligently ; and in many respects he is obliged to his Mate as the wife to her husband for he ought to be in every point ready to obey his reasonable will, I mean only in things concerning his calling ; dutiful, diligent, willing, careful, secret and loving, yea to show his love in covering his Mate's weakness. He ought to be gentle and kind in speech and actions towards all ; pitiful to them that are diseased and diligent in ministering to them such fitting remedies as he shall receive or be directed to give from his Mate, but none without his order, for that the Surgeon's order is his discharge or warrant whatever happen. Yea, let him privately lend his best advice to his Mate, the prime surgeon, on every needful occasion, kindly, submissively and lovingly ever as under correction, for if comparisons or oppositions take place betwixt them it is not only dangerous to all the ship's company but also a disgrace to themselves and a great scandal to their calling for avoyding which it is fit that the younger obey the elder. . . . It showeth an excellent thing in a young man to please an honest, quiet man but to live in love with an ambitious or otherwise a froward, vicious man showeth wisdom in the sufferer." The advice is excellent for those who were thrown into intimate contact with each other during the many long months of a voyage to the East Indies round the Cape of Good Hope, badly housed, worse fed, in calms and in storms. It was perhaps worth while to give it, but in most cases it must have been a counsel of perfection.

"The Surgeon's Mate ought daily to visit the cabins of the men to see who hath any sickness or imperfection. Yea, and the Chirurgeon ought morning and evening to seek for poor men in their cabins, or as soon as they are missing at their Messes and inquire for them and see that their cabins be sweet and their provisions suitable, or to move and intreat the Master or Governor of the Ship for redress in such cases for fear of a general infection. Likewise his care must be to keep all the instruments clean from rusting and to set his lancets and razors as oft as need be. It may be that he will say to himself ; it is a base office belonging to mere Barbers and Grinders. I never give my mind to it &c. But let me friendly tell the Surgeon's Mate it is to the credit of a young artist to take a vein smoothly and neatly, as also to shave well is praiseworthy. Whereof I wish him to practise to do it and to be ever learning, for I am sure he shall never know half he ought to know though he do his best."

Woodall's teaching, as might be expected, extends both to medicine and surgery. On the medical side constipation of the most severe character was an ever present trouble, and for its cure clysters and mechanical means of

relief are recommended to the exclusion of purgatives, of which Woodall seems to have had an especial abhorrence. Diarrhœa—fluxes, as he calls them—were also of common occurrence. He had no means of discriminating them, so he groups them roughly into Lienteries, Diarrhœas, and Dysenteries. For them “Laudanum is the only sure help and if at first it cure not, yet it giveth rest, whereby the party afterwards will be the stronger to endure other reasonable medicine, always remembering there be three or four hours betwixt each dose”. “And among other needful instruments for poor sea-men in fluxes never be unfurnished in the ship of one or two close-stools with doors to them and brass pails, that poor miserable men in their weakness may be eased thereon and not be constrained to go either to the beake-head, or shrouds (as they term it) for that not only increaseth the disease but also causeth the falling down of the Ano, a fearful accident.”

Of scurvy Woodall says, “some men conceive this disease happeneth to sea-men only, through long being at sea without touch of land, as is seen in the East India voyages; our men have it betwixt England and the Cape *de bon speranze*”. It was so common indeed that “A fever at sea commonly ends in the Scurvy, wherefore by the way beware of too large purging or phlebotomy which increase oft the grief and makes it incurable. I speak this because I have noted there is a fault in young Surgeons of forwardness in taking too much blood at Sea.”

The best-known passage of Woodall's writings occurs in his treatment of scurvy, where he says: “The Chirurgeon or his Mate must not fail to persuade the Governor or Purser in all places where they touch in the Indies, and may have it, to provide themselves of juice of Oranges, limes, or lemons and at Banthame of Tamarinds, for these good helps which you shall find in the Indies do far exceed any that can be carried thither from England, and yet there is a good quantity of Juice of Lemons sent in each ship out of England by the great care of the merchants, and intended only for the relief of every poor man in his need, which is an admirable comfort to poor men in that disease. Also I find we have many good things that heal the Scurvy well at land, but the Sea Chirurgeon shall do little good at Sea with them.”

Woodall's surgical treatment is excellent, for it is simple and is the outcome of his personal experience abroad and at home. Speaking of the treatment of fractures he says “it is manifest that in simple fractures the placing of the bones and keeping them so is the most work of the Cure and nothing cureth a fractured bone so much as rest, wherefore when a bone is newly placed and shall be troubled with much lifting and rowling [bandaging] it cannot but hinder union.”

Of dislocations he says, wisely enough, “When the Surgeon taketh a view of a member dislocated it were good that the other side also were uncovered, that thereby the true form and situation of the diseased limb being well regarded and compared together with the whole joint the better judgement and truer indication might be taken. I mean if one shoulder or elbow be out of joint let the Surgeon make bare the other side also. Then seek to reduce or place the bone by those means which in thy own reason seem fittest.” For his own part Woodall preferred to reduce dislocations of the shoulder by an instrument “which I learned the practice of in Poland whilst

I lived there. . . . I may truly say I have set with it above 500 joints at times". It consisted of an oval-headed wooden rod which fitted into the axilla and acted on the same principle as the more usual method of reduction by the heel in the axilla.

He advocates free drainage of gunshot wounds in the following words: "But ever take heed to avoid the old received error of unwise practitioners whose use is to cram the wounds, be they incised wounds or contused wounds, full of bole or restraining powder, or some other stuff and then thrust in pledgets or dossels into each corner of the wound, yea sometime forgetting to take all out at the next dressing yet think they have done all workman-like and very artificially, not considering the harm that often ensueth thereby."

The farewell appended to his last treatise shows Woodall to have been an honest, strict, but not dogmatic Puritan who endeavoured to serve his generation to the very best of his ability. It runs: "Loving Brethren, if the meanness of my style, the weakness of my aged memory, capacity or what else soever is not answerable to thy expectation from me, yet take it in good part I pray thee, as proceeding from a Friend, who, if his talent could have afforded better, would willingly have imparted it to thee. The former was the fruits of my youth, this, such as the weakness of old age can afford. The public good acceptance of the former hath purchased the latter. Vale in Christo."

The portrait by G. Glover in the lower central panel of the title page is clearly a speaking likeness. George Glover (fl. 1625-1650) was one of the earliest and most successful engravers of his day. He used his graver boldly and effectively, and was especially noted for his portraits. The frontispiece, here copied from the 1639 edition of "The Surgeons Mate," is a good example of his work.

