

**A CONTRIBUTION TO THE  
MEDICAL  
HISTORY OF OUR WEST  
AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS**

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A Contribution to the Medical History of Our West African Campaigns by Albert A. Gore

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**ALBERT A. GORE**

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A CONTRIBUTION  
TO THE  
MEDICAL HISTORY  
OF OUR  
WEST AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS.

BY  
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*Late 56th Regiment.*  
SANITARY OFFICER ON THE STAFF OF THE QUARTER-MASTER GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT,  
DURING THE ASHANTI WAR OF 1873.

"Facts are the Materials of Science."



LONDON:  
BAILLIÈRE, TINDALL AND COX,  
KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND.  
1876.

151. 64.

**To the Memory**  
OF  
AN AMIABLE AND ACCOMPLISHED  
GENTLEMAN,  
THE LATE  
PROFESSOR EDMUND ARTHUR PARKES, F.R.S.,  
THIS VOLUME  
IS  
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,  
BY  
ONE OF HIS FIRST MILITARY PUPILS,  
THE AUTHOR.

## P R E F A C E.

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THE great charm in the writings of the older military surgeons was, that they were unpretending narratives of the campaigns in which they served, and of what they had heard and read of the wars to whose success they contributed not a little.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to follow their example, and to collect together in systematic order the many interesting facts bearing upon the health and efficiency of the soldier in a malarial climate, which lie scattered through the very voluminous literature of our West African Campaigns, adding in addition many personal notes and recollections. Of these wars the Ashanti campaign was undoubtedly the most important, as being the only one where a successful attempt had been made to conquer with European troops a great African kingdom, hitherto deemed to be impregnable. The volume I feel to be a very imperfect one, yet it may not prove the less interesting as a medical souvenir.

In conclusion, I must say I feel convinced that it is only by a repetition of similar independent literary ventures upon the part of others, that the quiet and useful profession to which I have the honour to belong will gain that status in the army which the great and varied experience of its executive officers in every clime so justly entitles it.

THE AUTHOR.

DUBLIN, *January 1st, 1876.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### EARLIER HISTORY.

NEARLY every attempt to wage war in Western Africa in former years was unsuccessful, as much from the neglect of the most obvious hygienic precautions as from the admitted deadly nature of the climate. Either men were sent to Africa who should never have been allowed to garrison its forts and settlements, or where soldiers were required to operate against the enemy they had been obliged to fight or march under the most adverse sanitary conditions; the result very naturally under such circumstances, was death, disease, and subsequent inefficiency to an unprecedented extent. Scarcely could it be wondered then, that this *terra inhospita* was looked upon as the white man's grave.

Up to a comparatively recent period little was known of Western Africa outside a very limited circle, comprising the few *savants* who sought notoriety in endeavouring to penetrate its distant forest paths, men in search of mercantile adventures, and the small Colonial and Military Staff of the settlements, whose miserable banishment was the constant theme of their friends. To the physician its medical history was not uninteresting, as embracing the whole range of the most important of the tropical diseases—yellow fever, paludal remittents and intermittents, dysentery, cholera, splenitis, hepatitis, guinea-worm, lethargus, tropical ulcers, yaws, leprosy, elephantiasis *græcorum*, and a host of other affections whose etiology is still very much a matter of disputation among the learned of our ever speculative profession.

The earlier records of disease, or rather the brief glimpses we obtain of them, are very instructive. If, to commence, we turn back to the four years following the great European peace of 1815, when the effective and non-effective force serving in Western Africa was as below, we see in the brief record, at a glance, the influence of climate, want of attention to personal hygiene, and general insanitary conditions at that early date, causing a force of Europeans, equal in strength to an ordinary regiment of infantry, to die out and become inefficient in the short space of four years, in a ratio increasing directly with length of service on the Coast; while the native troops, serving side by side with their white comrades, lost only, on an average, 3.72 per cent. per annum during the same period.

YEAR.	Mean average effective.			Sick included.			Deaths.			Men.	Officers.		
	Europeans.	Blacks.	Total.	Europeans.	Blacks.	Total.	Europeans.	Blacks.	Total.		Invalidd.	Average number present.	Died.
1816	540	538	1,078	55	22	77	115	17	132	32	45	6	6
1817	246	304	640	25	9	34	62	18	80	23	32	3	5
1818	102	326	428	7	6	13	38	10	48	10	21	2	2
1819	54	391	445	2	4	6	5	12	17	45	18	1	6

In other words, the ratio per cent. of invaliding and deaths among the European officers and men was :—

In 1816	. . .	Officers, 26·66	. . .	Men, 27·41
„ 1817	. . .	„ 25·00	. . .	„ 34·51
„ 1818	. . .	„ 19·05	. . .	„ 47·06
„ 1819	. . .	„ 33·88	. . .	„ 92·60

The native troops who were then serving on the coast of Africa had been originally embodied from slaves, procured by purchase in the West Indies; while on the Coast they were largely recruited from liberated Africans, who were being captured in increasing numbers, no less than 9,502 having been taken from slavers between the years 1819–26, inclusive, of which number 1,500 died before adjudication from previous ill treatment, unsuitable food, water, and overcrowding, a ratio of 15·78 per cent. of the whole.

Dysentery and diarrhœa accounted for a very large proportion of this mortality—attributed in part by some writers to the use of the meal of the bitter cassada (*Jatropha Manihot*), which, in the absence of rice or corn, was shipped as food for the unfortunate beings cooped up between decks. This source of recruiting naturally ceased with the stoppage of the slave trade. The last recruits were obtained for the 2nd West India Regiment from a cargo of Congoes (liberated at Sierra Leone in 1861), in a very simple fashion: drawn up in line, such of them as were found of sufficient height, physique, and chest measurement by the adjutant and surgeon, were drafted at once into the ranks, and christened from the *Army List*, by which means many distinguished names have been handed down to subsequent generations, in a manner admitting of a double construction, which the original owners would, probably, have strongly objected to.

Now, upon first arrival, West Indian troops are alien to Africa; they consequently suffer more from climate than they would have done under the old system they, however, are not singular in this respect, as the Dutch at Elmina observed a similar result in their recruits brought from