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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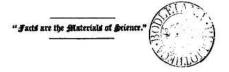
WEST AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS.

BY

SURGEON-MAJOR ALBERT A. GORE, M.D.,

Late 34th Regiment.

SAINITARY OFFICER ON THE STAFF OF THE QUARTER-MASTER GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, DURING THE ASHANTI WAR OF 1873.



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

151. A. 64.

Co the Memory

OF

AN AMIABLE AND ACCOMPLISHED

GENTLEMAN,

THE LATE

PROFESSOR EDMUND ARTHUR PARKES, F.R.S.,

THIS VOLUME

18

APPECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

BY

ONE OF HIS FIRST MILITARY PUPILS,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

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, splenetis, 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.

- 1	Mean average effective.			Sick included,		Deaths.		Men.	Officers.				
YEAR.	Europeans.	Blacks.	Total.	Europeans.	Blacks,	Total.	Europeans.	Blacks.	Total.	Invalided.	Average number present.	Died.	Invalided
1816 1817 1818 1819	540 246 102 54	538 394 326 391	1,078 640 428 445	55 25 7 2	22 9 6 4	77 34 13 6	115 62 38 5	17 18 10 12	132 80 48 17	32 23 10 45	45 32 21 18	6 3 2 1	6526

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

In 1816	į,		Officers,	26.66	3	3	Men,	27:41
,, 1817			,,	25.00			,,,	34.51
,, 1818		10.00	,,	19.05		1.0	,,	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 diarrhoea 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