

Clinical and Other Notes.

"SCOTTISH PORTRAIT."¹

FOUNDER OF THE R.A.M.C. SIR JAMES McGRIGOR.

BY ALEXANDER KEITH.

SITTING in the Court Room of Aberdeen University the other day I found myself gazing at the portrait of a resplendent figure—half military, half academic. Obviously a person of some eminence, the robes of a graduate hung upon the full-dress uniform of a general in the British Army. Closer inspection revealed that the artist was William Dyce, R.A., a notable painter of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The subject was Sir James McGrigor, Director-General of the Medical Service of the British Army, and this was the portrait presented to the University by the students in the years 1826-27 when Sir James was Rector of Marischal College. A smallish spare man with iron grey hair, none missing, over a broad forehead, a twinkle in both eyes, a nose that conforms to no national standard, a wide mouth, again with a twinkle in it, and a strong square chin jutting out over the braided collar of the uniform. That is what I saw. It was very quiet in the Court Room but that same gentleman of the portrait, for all his robes and his twinkles, had been in much less peaceful places.

When the war with Napoleon I had ended and the British troops, who had fought their way through the Peninsula, were entering Toulouse, a British officer found himself mobbed by a huge crowd of the citizens. "Vivent les Anglais," they cried, but with far more animation than the presence of an ordinary officer warranted. Eventually he discovered that they had mistaken him for the Duke of Wellington. There was a likeness, except as to noses, and the officer in question had probably done more than any other individual, except the Duke himself, to ensure the victories that had carried the British colours over the Pyrenees into France.

Yes, you're quite right, the officer was the man of the portrait, James McGrigor, not yet Sir. When I called him an ordinary officer I did him an injustice. He was emphatically extraordinary. Wellington said he was worth a division to him any day. For James McGrigor was the founder of the British Medical Corps. You hear a lot about hospital mismanagement in the Crimean War but, if James McGrigor hadn't served some forty years before in the Peninsula, there would have been no hospitals to mismanage. I'd go further and say that had McGrigor been young enough to accompany the troops to the Crimea, the scandal of hospital inadequacy would never have arisen.

For James McGrigor was one of the great figures in medicine on, I think one should say, the business or organizing side of the profession. He was a bit of a pioneer. When he went out to the Peninsula in 1812 such hospitals as existed were in a deplorable state. In this respect the French Army was far in advance of ours, for Napoleon had eagerly adopted Larrey's system of flying field hospitals and Percy's introduction of stretcher-bearers. McGrigor's achievement lay rather in what, in the first Boche war of 1914-18, we would have called casualty clearing stations and base hospitals.

Before he went to the Peninsula he had seen service in India, the West Indies, Egypt and elsewhere and had carried a name for himself as the soldiers' doctor. On one occasion when he was posted to a regiment, the members exhorted his predecessor to "Get home as soon as you can, now your master has come." He strove to improve the very deficient quality

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of the medical service by getting better pay and pensions for Army surgeons, and by some means he infused his own spirit into the corps so that the medical officers, in intervals of peace, went and improved themselves in their profession.

While M.O. to the Connaught Rangers, McGrigor had been involved in several disputes with its Colonel, afterwards Marshal Beresford, the man who so nearly lost the Battle of Albuera. Beresford had the worst of the exchanges and became the firm friend of the doctor. Something the same, on a bigger and more influential scale, happened with Wellington. In 1805 McGrigor was promoted a deputy inspector of hospitals. He had the handling of the sick and wounded who were disembarked at Portsmouth from Sir John Moore's army after Corunna and during the disastrous Walchaeren expedition. His masterly improvisation and organization gave him a standing which was of the utmost help to him. He cleaned up the administration of the medical services in Portugal. Wellington objected to some of his regimental and brigade arrangements—and those arrangements are substantially the ones now in operation in the Army. McGrigor thereupon set up a field hospital which overtook the enormous congestion of casualties by wounds and disease caused by the capture and sack of the fortress of Badajoz.

At long last Wellington permitted McGrigor to establish regimental hospitals but this point was gained only after a bit of a struggle. Wellington, himself a great organizer, could admire an organizer and McGrigor proved conclusively that he was as competent in his own line—in planning and foresight—as Wellington in his. After Salamanca McGrigor ordered up commissariat transport and supplies to cope with the sick and wounded. Summoned to the Commander-in-Chief's presence, he found Wellington having his portrait painted. McGrigor told him what he had done. The Duke—always touchy upon the subject of orders—sprang up and talked very violently, "I shall be glad to know who is to command the Army, I or you?" However, an Aberdonian then was not easily intimidated. Very soon afterwards, when the British had to retreat from Burgos, Wellington was anxious not to leave his hospitals to their fate. McGrigor, however, despite his recent dressing-down, had already commandeered all the empty ration and ammunition carts and sent off all his casualties with them in good time to the rear. The result was that Wellington could withdraw his army without being hampered by hospital cases and with the roads clear behind him. He congratulated McGrigor who, greatly daring, recalled the Duke's recent reprimand and said in action for which he had reprovved him had justified itself. "It is all right as it has turned out," said Wellington, "but I recommend you to have my orders for what you do." But thereafter it was Wellington who did everything McGrigor asked, not the other way about and at Vittoria McGrigor repaid him by having 5,000 convalescents fit for service whose return to active duty had not been expected.

Here, now, is a curious coincidence. At one end of Europe the Director of Medical Services in the Army opposing Napoleon's was James McGrigor, M.D., of Marischal College, Aberdeen, who, between the battles of Salamanca and Vittoria, had put 93,000 sick and wounded through his hospitals. At the other end of the Continent where the Russian Army confronted Napoleon, the Director of the Tsar's army medical service was John Wylie, M.D., of King's College, Aberdeen's other University, who is credited with having performed over 200 operations at the Battle of Boredino alone.

Now having heard all this, you will have, I've no doubt, a big question mark in your minds. Why should a couple of unknowns from far Aberdeen have made such a reputation in medicine? Well, their medical pioneering was quite in keeping with an ancient and long-sustained Aberdeen tradition of being first in medical matters. But first of all, I should tell you that sometimes it is a little difficult to understand how Aberdonians in those days became doctors at all. McGrigor was educated at Marischal, the "toun's colledge" of Aberdeen, and in respect of medicine as easy going as the elder and rival University of King's. Thus McGrigor's Professor of Medicine combined lectures on that subject for many years with the hardly cognate chair of Oriental languages. That was not quite so bad as the worst spell at King's when two Bannermans, father and son, from 1793 to 1838, held the Chair of Medicine and never delivered

a lecture. It was the elder Bannerman's nephew, Sir Alexander, by the way, who became Governor of Newfoundland and, incidentally, was the husband of Margaret Gordon, the first sweetheart of Thomas Carlyle. Yet in those days Aberdeen turned out doctors who, for their time, were as progressive as they are now. To return to our Aberdeen medical tradition. In 1493 Aberdeen passed a regulation—the first of its kind in Britain—for the control of venereal disease—it runs this way. "The alderman and council statut and ordanit for the eschevin of the infirmitez comin' out of France and strange partis" certain rules which need not here be recapitulated. Though in McGrigor's time both colleges were slack in their attention to medical teaching, they could at least crow over all other universities in the land in some respects. King's College, founded on the model of the University of Paris in 1495, had a Professor of Medicine or Mediciner from the outset. It was not until 1540 that Cambridge had a medical chair and Oxford followed six years later. So Aberdeen was half a century ahead. Then, of course, medicine was just a subject in the ordinary course of general study. Not till 1654 did King's confer its first degree of Doctor of Medicine, and the recipient, John Glover, was described as of London, and was by some curious chance a B.A. of Harvard University. Before that time, the mediciner had petitioned the Privy Council in vain for the bodies of "executed malefactors, rebels and outlaws," to practise anatomy on. Before that time, too, three men had passed through one or the other of Aberdeen's Universities, taken their medical degree elsewhere, and become physicians to the King. Alexander Reid and Arthur Johnston were physicians to Charles I and Robert Morrison to Charles II. Reid's brother was Latin Secretary to James I and, in that way, came to present his alma mater with an unusual gift—a bundle of books belonging to the library of St. Paul's Cathedral, which the King had borrowed and forgotten to return—he was good at that. But if King Jamie had been quite honest and sent them back they would have been destroyed in the Great Fire of London. As it is, they and one other volume are the only ones remaining of the original library of St. Paul's Cathedral. However, that's by the way.

In the history of medicine, McGrigor deserves a place beside two other celebrated Aberdonian doctors—George Cheyne, London's fashionable physician in Queen Anne's day, who introduced dietetics to the notice of the public and inaugurated the first wave of nutritional fervour of which we are to-day experiencing the fourth tide; and Sir Patrick Manson, whose researches led directly to the discovery of the mosquito's part in the spread of malaria and so made possible a great advance in the civilization of the tropics.

But now to come back to my portrait—after the Peninsula War McGrigor was knighted and later got a baronetcy. He became Director-General of the Army Medical Department and remained at his post until 1850, about eight years before his death. He went to the Hunterian School to study anatomy and chemistry. He established insurance and benevolent funds for medical officers. He built up a military surgical museum, which at his retirement contained among other things nearly 6,000 specimens in natural, morbid and comparative anatomy, and a regular golgotha of skulls—over 500 human crania. To the library he gave 1,500 volumes besides begging nearly 9,000 more from his friends.

All this, you may say, is a pretty long way from the up-to-date R.A.M.C. of our own times. Since McGrigor's death in 1858 medicine has changed out of all recognition. Anæsthetics, marvellous curative drugs, the most delicate instruments, the motor car, the aeroplane, have revolutionized the medical side of warfare. Disease, which used to be as deadly as wounds, to-day claims a trivial number of victims, and wounds themselves, which meant death or complete disablement in nearly 50 per cent of cases in McGrigor's time, are now so promptly and effectively handled that the proportion of those who die after admission to hospital is quite incredibly low. Yet all things must have a beginning and, if McGrigor hadn't brought his genius for organization into the service, military medicine might not to-day have been in so satisfactory a condition. Even his experiments in hospital arrangement and management and in the transport of casualties, crude as they were by modern standards, helped to define the right road to efficiency which the Royal Army Medical Corps to-day faithfully follows.