

Book Reviews

There are similar problems in medical history where medicine is juxtaposed to other areas of knowledge, and one of our primary tasks is to break down the barriers that are encountered.

RICHARD L. BLANCO, *Wellington's Surgeon General; Sir James McGrigor*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1974, 8vo., pp. xiv, 235, illus., \$9.75.

During the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars vigorous attempts were made for the first time by both the French and the British to improve the soldier's health and welfare. No doubt this was a direct result of eighteenth-century enlightenment and the consequent humanitarianism. The French military surgeon, Baron D. J. Larrey (1766–1842), is well known but his British near-equivalent, James McGrigor (1771–1858), is less renowned. Nevertheless, his role was almost as important, and this book is the first to trace his career in detail. He introduced sweeping reforms in preventive medicine, evacuation of the wounded, organization of hospitals, field and static, medical and surgical therapy as applied to soldiers, and in the administrative and other aspects of military medicine. From the national point of view, as well as raising the status of the military surgeon himself, McGrigor was largely responsible for the creation of the Royal Army Medical Corps. He served in many parts of the world, and like Larrey, recorded his experiences in an autobiography and reports of clinical cases; he encountered eye diseases and plague in Egypt, typhus in Germany, yellow fever in the Caribbean, typhoid in Holland, and scurvy when in the Indian Ocean. At Waterloo he was Wellington's Director-General of the Army Medical Department, and he retired in 1851. Throughout his service, by means of his immense energy and devotion to duty, he could demonstrate to sceptical generals the great benefit that healthy troops with improved sanitary, surgical and medical facilities were to an army.

The author is a historian and has produced an excellent, scholarly account of McGrigor, based on his *Autobiography* and *Medical sketches*. A lack of medical knowledge is at times apparent, but there are no serious errors. There are copious notes, an extensive and valuable bibliography, and finally a useful 'Bibliographical essay on British military medicine, 1750–1850'.

Little serious work has so far been carried out in the field of military medicine and many fascinating topics await the competent and qualified scholar. Even in the vital period 1793–1815, covered by this book, there is still ample room for further investigation, and one such endeavour has just begun.