

Medical Matters.  
Observations from *The Lancet* during 1879.

Collated by Adrian Greaves.

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February 15<sup>th</sup>. 'The Zulu War'.

A large number of medical officers have been placed under orders for immediate service at the Cape, and will leave England with the reinforcements as soon as the transport can be provided. A full company of the Army Hospital Corps, consisting of four officers and one hundred and fifty men, are also held in readiness to proceed to the seat of war. A batch of civil practitioners and several army surgeons left by the Cape steamers last month, and should reach Cape Town in a few days; they will be a welcome addition to the medical staff at the disposal of Surgeon-General Woofreyes, who, when recruited by those now on the eve of embarkation, will have a full complement of officers and men to work the medical machinery of the campaign.

Surgeon-Major Peter Shepherd, M.B., whose name we regret to observe is announced amongst the number of the officers killed in the late terrible defeat in Zululand, entered the army in 1864, and was promoted to the rank of Surgeon-Major in 1876. Dr. Shepherd had previously served for some years at the Cape and in Natal as assistant-surgeon in the 99<sup>th</sup> Regt., was afterwards stationed in India with the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars and 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, and after his return to England, which he only quitted a few months ago for the seat of war, had been a prominent member of the St. John's Ambulance Society, in the working of which he took great interest, delivering lectures and practical instruction to large classes of artisans at Woolwich, and to the police force in London. A popular, genial officer, his loss will be mourned by many friends, but "Dulce et decorum est patriâ mori."

February 22<sup>nd</sup>. 'The Zulu War'.

Deputy Surgeon-General J.L. Holloway, at present serving in Dublin, has been ordered to Africa with the reinforcements for Zululand, and, on arrival, will assist Surgeon-General Woofreyes, C.B., in the administration of the medical services for the campaign. Surgeon B.B. Connolly, from Woolwich, has been added to the list of medical officers under orders for the seat of war.

The men of the Army Hospital Corps proceeding on active service are to be armed with a revolver, a very necessary precaution in fighting against a nation of savages who would show no respect to the Red Cross. These men, though looked upon as 'non-combatants,' are called on to accompany medical officers in the fighting line, to aid in tending the wounded, removing them in stretchers to the first dressing station, often performing these duties under fire. Convoys of wounded, too, are liable to be attacked, so that some arm beyond the ornamental but useless sword bayonet with which they are now equipped is necessary. The strength of the company has been made up to 150 men, with four officers, and every man has passed through the course of instruction in stretcher and ambulance drill at Aldershot, under Surgeon Major Sandford Moore.

March 8<sup>th</sup>. 'Heroic conduct of Army Medical Officers'.

The following is the history of the sad death of Surgeon-Major Shepherd, as related by an eyewitness. Mr. Muirhead, Natal Carabineers: -

As Kelly and I were riding for our lives, the Zulus pursuing us, my companion – almost a boy, Trooper Kelly – staggered in his saddle, evidently hit. I stopped my horse to see what the matter was, and tried to support him, but I couldn't, and had to lift him off on to the ground. At that moment Dr. Shepherd came galloping past. I called out to him, and he dismounted to examine poor Kelly. After carefully examining him he called out, 'Ah! Poor fellow; too late, too late.' I had just mounted my horse, and Dr. Shepherd was in the act of putting his foot into the stirrup, when some instinct warned me to look round. As I did so I saw an assegai coming straight towards me. I turned to the left in the saddle: at the same moment it passed close to my head, and, unfortunately, struck Dr. Shepherd in the side. He immediately fell, and I put spurs to my horse, and galloped off as hard as the horse could go.

March 12<sup>th</sup>. 'Medical Losses'.

In addition to Surgeon-Major Peter Shepherd, Medical Department, who was killed at the battle of Isandula, on Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>, we regret to record the deaths of Acting-Surgeon Brice, 3<sup>rd</sup> Natal Native Contingent, to the Colonial forces, all of whom lost their lives on that day. Lieut. J.W. Hall, with one non-commissioned officer,

and ten privates, of the Army Hospital Corps, were also among the victims of the massacre. The whole of the medical supplies and equipment of the field hospitals of the 2<sup>nd</sup> column at Isandula and Rorke's Drift fell into the hands of the enemy, and were burnt or destroyed.

April 26<sup>th</sup>. 'The Zulu War'.

The force which started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March to relieve Colonel Pearson at Ekowe was accompanied by Surgeon-Major Thomas Tarrant as senior medical officer, with twelve medical officers to assist him, and a detachment of the Army Hospital Corps. Owing to the enormous difficulties connected with transport, only one field hospital, equipped as lightly as possible for fifty beds, was able to follow the column. A few ambulances, water-carts, and ship-cots, arranged like the 'Ashanti cot,' and carried by Kaffirs, also accompany the troops. The base hospital at Durban contained, the last week in March, 150 sick, the cases chiefly fever and dysentery; the more serious of these considered to require change to England will be invalided and despatched in parties by the mail steamers leaving Port Natal weekly. Fever is still very prevalent at Helpmakaar and Rorke's Drift. A letter from an officer at the latter post states that the body of Surgeon Major Peter Shepherd, who gallantly fell at Isandula, had been recognised by the party who volunteered to revisit the battlefield; his death was due to an assegai wound. Lieutenant Hall, of the Army Hospital Corps, who was also amongst the slain that day, was, at the time of the attack, on the sick list with fever and diarrhoea, and was assegaied in the ambulance-waggon.

June 7<sup>th</sup>. 'The Medical Service in the Zulu War'.

We reported many months ago that the hospitals were being raked for young lads who had just passed their examinations to volunteer as medical officers for the Zulu campaign, whither they were despatched in numbers without adequate preliminary training and without even having passed through a Netley course. The extreme unpopularity of the Army Medical Department with the medical profession of course impeded volunteering, even of the stamp with which the heads of the department were fain to be content, and we are not surprised to read in the correspondence of more than one journal such phrases as this: "Experienced surgeons are required; not the young apothecaries' lads now being sent out". Of course, the field-service includes a certain number of well experienced medical officers, very far, however, it is admitted, below the necessities of the force. It includes also a considerable number of quite young men, some of whom had failed to pass the examination necessary for admission to the medical service of the army. No doubt they have striven, and will strive, to do their best, and will fulfil their duties as medical officers in volunteer or in the regular service are wont to fulfil their duty, under whatever conditions they may be placed; but it is a lamentable reflection that the extreme mismanagement of the Army Medical Department has so reduced the efficiency and detracted from the popularity of that service that at the first touch of warfare, even on a limited scale and with a savage people, it is found to be thoroughly undermanned and quite inadequate to the demands upon it.

June 21<sup>st</sup>. 'The Cape War'.

On Monday, in the House of Commons, Lord Elcho called attention to the provision made for sick and wounded in Africa. He said that,

rightly or wrongly, an impression prevailed in this country that, as far as depended on the Government, sufficient provision had not been made for the care of the sick and wounded in South Africa. It was believed that the amount of medical stores was inadequate, and that there were not a sufficient number of doctors and nurses.

The Secretary of State assured the House that there was an ample staff of medical officers, and that in only one instance had there been a complaint of any deficiency in the medical stores. This was at the Lower Tugela, where, in consequence of an increased issue of quinine, probably as a prophylactic, the supply had run short. But this had been immediately made good, and there had been no demand whatever for additional medical comforts. He also stated that, by the latest returns, the sick amounted to only 5.75 per cent of the strength. This is a very low proportion of troops that have been so long in the field and have undergone the hardships and privations which are known to have arisen from the difficulties of transport. From Colonel Stanley's statement, it appears that there are at present sixty-two military and naval surgeons serving at the Cape nine more on their passage out, and thirteen under orders; and that there are thirty-eight civilian surgeons there, and two on their passage, exclusive of those employed locally. This makes a total of one hundred – actually serving, eleven on their way to join, and thirteen under orders, and is above the proportion laid down by regulation for an army of 22,000 men – the strength of the force, including native. Of the hospital corps there are nine officers and four

hundred men, including those recently sent out, which ought to be sufficient for the duties required of them. These statements are very satisfactory, as showing that the Government has been fully alive to the necessity for making ample provision for the sick and wounded.

June 21<sup>st</sup>. ‘The gallant conduct of medical officers’.

Writing from the front, an officer describes the gallant behaviour of the military and civil surgeons attached to General Wood’s column in the actions of Zhlobane and Kambula on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March. He mentions the excellent service rendered by Drs. Jolly and Connolly, civil surgeons, who, in the retreat on the 28<sup>th</sup>, dismounted several times to attend to wounded men, at their own imminent risk, several of their stretcher-bearers being killed while conveying wounded to the rear. The field hospital at Kambula was so situated as to be exposed to a severe cross fire, and was several times struck by bullets during the engagement. Here, however, surgeons O’Reilly, Brown and Thornton, and Dr. Connolly worked away for hours dressing and attending the wounded constantly under fire. During the hottest part of the battle an amputation was performed by Doctors Brown and Thornton, while Surgeon O’Reilly, the senior medical officer in camp, personally directed the removal of wounded to the hospital. In the published official despatches of these actions, General Wood mentions “Surgeons O’Reilly, Brown and the medical staff generally, as attending the wounded under fire,” &c. We are glad, therefore to receive further testimony and details of the excellent service and gallant conduct on the part of members of the Medical Department, military and civil.

June 21<sup>st</sup>. ‘Army medical officers’.

The House of Commons was the scene on Monday night of a very unseemly discussion. While the vote on the Army estimates for medical establishments and services was under consideration, Mr. Parnell asked whether the Zulu wounded were treated equally with our own, and whether there was any instance of a Zulu being brought into a British hospital. Colonel Stanley, in reply, stated that he could not say that he had seen in official documents any mention of wounded Zulu prisoners being treated in our hospitals, but he was perfectly confident that they would meet with every possible attention.

It is so much a matter of course that all wounded, whether our own men or our enemies, are treated alike in our military hospitals that we should never expect any notice of this to be taken in official reports. But Mr. Parnell was not contented with this assurance of the Secretary of State, and reverted to the subject in such terms, insinuating rather than directly charging cruelty and neglect on the part of the medical officers, as brought down upon him the indignation of the House.

Colonel North observed that,

the statements as to medical officers of our army having acted cruelly towards Zulu prisoners was so foreign to the character of our army medical officers – many of that class having lost their lives in assisting wounded men belonging to the enemy – that he thought it was unfair for the honourable gentleman to make the charge he had without stating a particular case.

He was backed in his remarks by Sir A. Lusk, Dr. Lush, Colonel Stanley and other members, while Mr. Parnell received support – and of a very feeble kind – from one or two members only. Colonel Stanley said,

that if honourable gentlemen, in their responsible position as members of the House, would send him any statements which they fairly believed to be authentic in regard to these cases, he wished to say, once for all, that he would forward them in order that they might be made the subject of inquiry and report. But he would not be the means of either directly or indirectly throwing broadcast on a noble body of men unfounded, and he had almost said the foul aspersion which had been referred to to-night.

With this statement, which was received by the House with marked approbation, the medical officers of the army may well rest satisfied, and may leave to the contempt they deserve the authors and supporters of these disgraceful charges. And finally,

June 28<sup>th</sup>. ‘The lash’.

It is a corollary of the reduction which has been effected in the lawful use of the cat as a persuader to the observance of discipline in the Army that a similar reduction should be made in the maximum number of lashes which may be administered in the Navy. A short Bill is, it is said, to be passed during the present session to carry out this intention. The same arguments are applicable to both services, and having been successful in the one case, can scarcely fail in the other.