

**THE SANITARY CONTRASTS
OF THE BRITISH AND
FRENCH ARMIES DURING
THE CRIMEAN WAR**

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The sanitary contrasts of the British and French armies during the Crimean war by T. Longmore

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BY
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THE object of the remarks which follow, is to bring to notice a special and very remarkable feature of the campaign against Russia, between the years 1854 and 1856, that, as far as I am aware, has nowhere hitherto received the amount of attention which it deserves. The particular point I have in view is the relative sanitary conditions of the allied French and British armies at corresponding dates, when they were acting side by side in the military operations before Sebastopol. I am the more desirous to place on record the true sanitary contrasts presented by the two armies, because certain references to the subject which have been introduced by Mr. Kinglake, in a recent volume of his history of "The Invasion of the Crimea," are calculated, in my opinion, to create erroneous impressions on the subject in the minds of his readers. Moreover, although the Crimean War was concluded more than a quarter of a century ago, and its events are fast receding into the distance of past history, I hope to be able to show, that while the particular points referred to are calculated to excite the interest of all sanitarians and medical practitioners, even at the present day, they especially demand study on the part of those who are engaged in military service. The whole professional history of the Crimean War, indeed, will afford a fertile source of instruction to army surgeons for all time ;

for the facts embodied in it, unexampled prior to their occurrence in that war, are likely to remain without example in the future, owing to their vastness, their completeness, and their peculiar associations with regard to the two armies concerned in them.

I may mention at once that a great mass of information was collected at the time, and remains available for investigation and study, concerning the sanitary condition of the British army during the Crimean War. In the first place, there is the admirable professional report of the war, officially prepared by the then Director-General of the Army Medical Department, Dr. Andrew Smith, and published under parliamentary sanction. In the two folio volumes which contain this Report may be found an elaborate medical history of each of the regiments of which the army was composed; an account of the principal diseases, considered separately, which prevailed in the army; a carefully classified history of the wounds and injuries inflicted during the war; and a variety of reports, meteorological tables, diagrams, and other documents illustrative of the professional aspects of the campaign. The medical and surgical history of the British army during the Crimean War remains a praiseworthy monument of industry and ability on the part of those who were concerned in its arrangement and production.

In addition to this history there are the published results of very exhaustive inquiries that were conducted while the war was in progress, as well as subsequently to its conclusion, respecting the sickness and mortality among the troops. Among these, the most valuable of all is the Report of the Royal Commissioners who were appointed in the year 1857 to inquire into the regulations affecting the sanitary condition of the army, the organisation of military hospitals, and the treatment of the sick and wounded of the army, together with the evidence on which the Report was based. This Report is a work of historical interest, for on it were founded important changes in military medical organization,

some of which are still making their influence felt in the public service. There are also very full reports by two separate bodies of Commissioners who were sent to the Crimea, while the war was in progress, to inquire into the causes of the sickness and mortality in the army; as well as several volumes of evidence collected by a Parliamentary Committee on the same subject.

The medical and surgical history of the French army during the Crimean War was compiled by the late Médecin-Principal, Dr. Chenu.* Although not of so full and searching a nature as our own history, nor so complete in its information, it still forms a most valuable record for study and reference. Dr. Chenu had to deal with very large numbers in his statistical tables of sickness and mortality—the dead alone in the French army, from wounds and disease, amounting to more than 95,000 during the campaign—and it was only by marvellous industry, method, and resolution that he succeeded in collecting the necessary facts which enabled him to classify and tabulate the information to be found in his work with the amount of precision it possesses.†

The situation of the French and British armies during the siege of Sebastopol was so similar in respect to soil and locality, the climatic influences to which they

* *Rapport au Conseil de Santé des Armées sur les résultats du service médico-chirurgical pendant la Campagne d'Orient en 1854-56.* Par T. C. Chenu, M.D., Méd.-Prin., &c. Paris, 1855.

† I had the advantage of a friendly acquaintance with Dr. Chenu, and knowing him to have been a most painstaking and earnest seeker after truth, self-denying to an extreme degree, pursuing his laborious task of collecting the materials for his great medical and statistical histories of the French campaigns in the Crimea and Italy, under an amount of difficulties and official opposition that most men must have succumbed to, and that even he could not have succeeded in overcoming had it not been for the enlightened encouragement and influential assistance of my eminent confrère and friend, Baron Larrey; knowing also Dr. Chenu's strict honesty of purpose, and the vast amount of good he was enabled through his exertions to accomplish for his country, it was with a feeling of pain that I found Mr. Kinglake could ascribe to him no better designation than that of a "distracted compiler," nor find for his works any less disparaging expressions than those which he has thought fit to apply to them in the eighth chapter of his well-known volume on the "Winter Troubles."

were exposed, and the nature of the work in which they were engaged, were so thoroughly alike, that practically the two armies might almost be regarded as parts of one and the same force. Although, however, the Allied Forces were thus similarly situated—and, indeed, formed but one continuous extended line of troops before Sebastopol during the siege—there was no similarity between them in respect to their conditions of health while they were thus acting in concert. It may be said, in general terms, that the British part of the Allied Force before Sebastopol was remarkably unhealthy during the first period of the siege, and as remarkably healthy during the second period of the siege; while a precisely opposite state of things existed in the French part of the force, which was in a generally good condition of health during the first period, but in an extremely unhealthy condition during the second period. In other words, at the period when the British troops were very unhealthy, the French troops in the same place, and at the same time, were healthy; and when the British troops were in a state of good health, the French troops in the same place, and at the same time, were in a condition of bad health. These statements I will verify presently, by the use of some of the facts statistically recorded in the British and French medical histories of the war, to which I have just now alluded.

The circumstances which led to the disastrous state of health of the British army in the Crimea at one period, and its remarkable improvement subsequently, have been fully considered in the official medical history of the war; but the relative conditions of the French troops during the corresponding periods have not been compared in it with those of the British. The materials were not then available for the contrast, for the statistical Report of Dr. Chenu was not published till seven years after the British Report. Dr. Chenu in his work has noticed the relative conditions of the British, as compared with those of the French army;