

**THIRTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE  
OF A MEDICAL  
OFFICER IN THE  
ENGLISH CONVICT SERVICE**

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Thirty Years' Experience of a Medical Officer in the English Convict Service by John Campbell

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**JOHN CAMPBELL**

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# THIRTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE

OF A MEDICAL OFFICER

IN THE

ENGLISH CONVICT SERVICE.

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## Preface.

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THE treatment of our criminal population has been a subject of close attention and much interest to men occupying the highest position as statesmen and philosophers, and to philanthropists imbued with the spirit which actuated John Howard in his noble and self-sacrificing exertions. Many good people of our own time have also offered suggestions for the management and reclamation of convicts; but most of these plans, when tried, have failed to realize the expectations of their authors. This failure has been owing in a great measure to inexperience in matters regarding prisoners and prison life; for without experience it is not easy to estimate the difficulties to be encountered.

Of the value of experience John Howard afforded a perfect example. He began by actual inspection of prisons and prisoners, obtained personal knowledge unique in its extent and minuteness, and then proceeded to suggest beneficial reforms, sanitary and disciplinary. His great example, by which we are now profiting, followed by that of others working in the same spirit, changed our convict prisons from being habitations of pestilence and vice to models of cleanliness, humane discipline, health, and good order.

To the late Sir Joshua Jebb much credit is due for the improvements that have taken place in more recent times. By working on sound principles in the construction and arrangement of prisons, as well as by his treatment of prisoners, he greatly promoted the health and reformation of criminals.

Let me add that his kind yet firm manner of dealing with prisoners made a deep impression on them, while his genial and courteous bearing toward those under him cannot fail to be remembered with pleasure.

Many humane persons since Sir Joshua's time have warmly advocated the cause of prisoners, seeking to improve their position during confinement, as well as on discharge. These efforts have often proved successful ; but it is very desirable to bear in mind that in carrying out any system prompted by humanity everything approaching to mistaken sympathy with its objects should be avoided, as suggesting to their minds excuses for their misdeeds, and tempting them to look upon themselves as ill-used individuals. This is perhaps the most important matter on which I could insist. Subjects less weighty, but none of them in my judgment trivial, are treated of in the body of this small work.

In submitting my experience and views to the public, I trust that I am furnishing useful materials and suggestions to others who may be able to enforce them with greater ability than I am conscious of possessing.

EDINBURGH, 1834.

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THIRTY YEARS  
IN THE  
ENGLISH CONVICT SERVICE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CONVICT SHIP.

I HAD been a surgeon in the Royal Navy for about fourteen years, and had seen service in different ships of war in the West Indies, and afterwards on other stations, when in 1850 I received an appointment as surgeon-superintendent of a convict ship—a duty which had for many years been intrusted to naval medical officers. Though the accommodation on ship-board, and the dietary, have been greatly improved of recent years, when compared with the state of things at the early period of transportation to Australia, the charge which devolves upon the medical officer, even under the most favourable conditions possible, is sufficiently onerous.

When we compare the magnitude and the great

prosperity of the colonies at the present time with the first settlement at Sydney in 1788, we cannot but be struck with their wonderful growth from that small beginning. Truly it is a proud instance of the energy and industry of our race.

A recent interesting work, entitled "The First Twenty Years of Australia," enters fully into the struggles and difficulties the earlier settlers had to contend with, and the deplorable privations they had to encounter, both during the long sea passage, and afterwards on landing.

We may realize what their sufferings were by referring to the statements of eye-witnesses. Governor Phillip, for instance, found the convicts who had landed at Port Jackson "emaciated" and "worn away" by long confinement and by want of food, or from both of these causes; and Dr. Whyte, the colonial surgeon, reports, in 1790, that of the nine hundred and thirty-nine males sent out by the last ships two hundred and sixty-one died on board, and fifty more since landing.

The convict ships in those days appear to have been destitute of all naval authority; for it is stated that Governor Hunter humanely suggested that a naval officer should be sent in each vessel. After mentioning a case that occurred in 1795 of a ship on which the convicts were put in irons during the long voyage, in consequence of some conjecture that they meant to seize the ship and murder the officers,