

**MEDICAL  
RECOLLECTIONS OF THE  
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC**

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Medical Recollections of the Army of the Potomac by Jonathan Letterman

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**JONATHAN LETTERMAN**

**MEDICAL  
RECOLLECTIONS OF THE  
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC**



MEDICAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF THE

Library of the New York  
State Medical Association.

ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

BY

JONATHAN LETTERMAN, M.D.

LATE SURGEON UNITED STATES ARMY, AND MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF THE ARMY OF  
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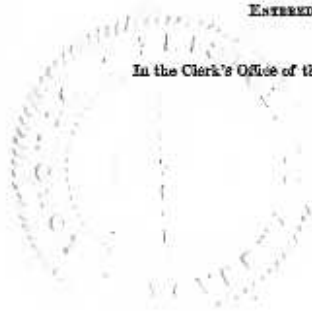
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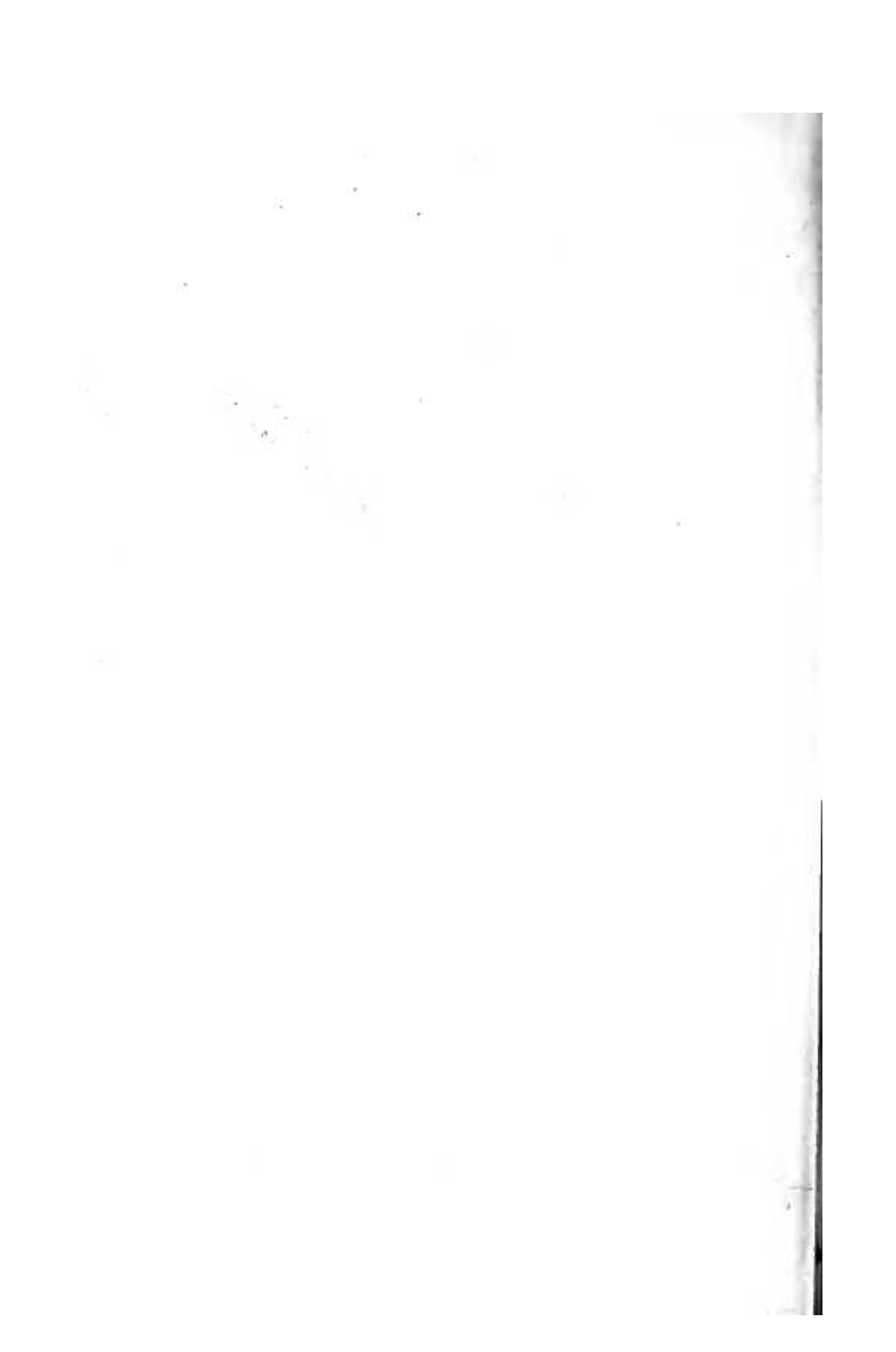
## P R E F A C E .

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THE following account of the Medical Department of the Army of the Potomac, has been prepared amidst pressing engagements, in the hope that the labors of the Medical Officers of that Army may be known to an intelligent people, with whom to know is to appreciate; and as an affectionate tribute to many—long my zealous and efficient colleagues—who, in days of trial and danger, which have passed, let us hope never to return, evinced their devotion to their country and to the cause of humanity, without hope of promotion, or expectation of reward.

Near SAN BUENAVENTURA, CAL., }  
February 1st, 1866. }

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In obedience to orders from the War Department, dated June 23, 1862, I reported on the 1st day of July to Major-General McClellan at Haxhall's Landing, on the James River, for duty as Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, and on the 4th took charge of the Medical Department of that army.

On arriving at the White House, June 28th, I found there was no communication between that depot and the headquarters of the army, then *en route* for James River. At the former point I met Mr. Olmstead and several other members of the Sanitary Commission, whose labors, here as elsewhere, were arduous and successful. It was necessary that the medical supplies and the transports for the wounded

and sick should be sent up the James River to meet the wants of the army. And as it was impossible to obtain the requisite orders from Dr. Tripler, then Medical Director—as the telegraph wires had been cut—and feeling sure that that experienced officer would approve my exerting authority in such a case, I directed Assistant-Surgeon Alexander, U. S. A., and Assistant-Surgeon Dunster, U. S. A., the Medical Director of Transportation, to proceed up that river with their supplies and vessels with all possible despatch. They reached Harrison's Landing in time to be of the greatest service. The troops for several consecutive days and nights had been marching and fighting among the swamps and streams which, abounding in this part of Virginia, render it almost a Serbonian bog. The malaria arising from these hotbeds of disease began to manifest its baneful effects upon the health of the men when they reached Harrison's Landing. The labors of the troops had been excessive, the excitement intense; they were obliged to subsist upon marching rations, and little time was afforded to prepare the meagre allowance. They seldom slept, and even when the opportunity offered, it was to lie in the mud with the expectation of being called to arms at any moment. When it is remembered how short a time this army had been under discipline, we are surprised that it should have

submitted so cheerfully to the orders of the commanding General, and endured the sufferings which, for the sake of the country, those orders of necessity entailed. This marching and fighting in such a region, in such weather, with lack of food, want of rest, great excitement, and the depression necessarily consequent upon it, could have no other effect than that of greatly increasing the numbers of sick after the army reached Harrison's Landing. Scurvy existed in the army when it reached this point. The seeds had doubtless been planted by want of vegetables, exposure to cold and wet, working and sleeping in the mud and rain, and the inexperience of the troops in taking proper care of themselves under difficult circumstances. This disease is not to be dreaded merely for the numbers it sends upon the Reports of Sick: the evil goes much further, and the causes which give rise to it undermine the strength, depress the spirits, take away the courage and elasticity of those who do not report themselves sick, and who yet are not well. They do not feel sick, and yet their energy, their powers of endurance, and their willingness to undergo hardship, are in a great degree gone, and they know not why. In this way the fighting strength of the army was affected to a much greater degree than was indicated by the number of those who reported sick. All these hardships reacted upon the Medical officers in common with the