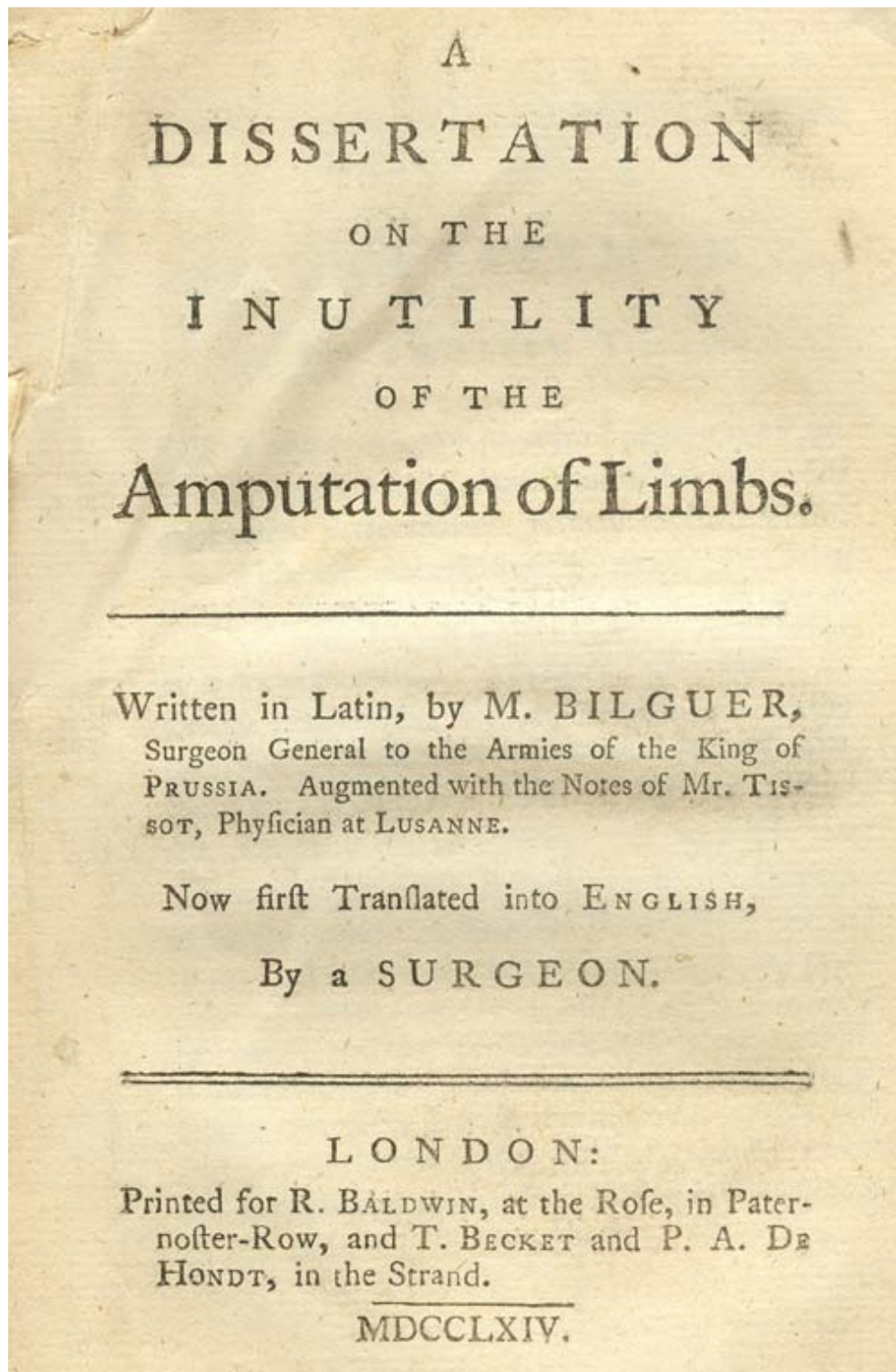


Bilguer JU (1764). A dissertation on the inutility of the amputation of limbs. London.

Title pages



S E C T. XXVII.

I H A D at one time, during the war, in a military hospital, six thousand six hundred and eighteen wounded patients, who were all treated according to my direction, and part of whom I attended myself; of these, five thousand five hundred and fifty-seven were perfectly cured, and in a condition to support all the fatigues of the service; a hundred and ninety-five were able to do duty in garrison, what they call half-invalides *, or to work at any trade; two hundred and thirteen remained incapable of any labour, civil or military, what they call grand invalides †; and six hundred and fifty-three died.

* *Halbe Invaliden.*

† *Ganze Invaliden.*

These hundred and ninety-five half-invalides, and the two hundred and thirteen grand invalides, in all, four hundred and eight, were of the number of those who had their bones bruised, broken and shattered; of those, in a word, whose wounds were called complicated and dangerous *: For it is well known that with us, a man is not put on the list of invalides for a wound of the head, or of the fleshy parts; if, after wounds of this kind are healed up, there remains any weakness, stiffness, or tension of the part, we employ various medicines, both internal and external, ointments, liniments, fomentations, warm baths, by means of which they are commonly compleatly cured.

Let us at present suppose, that of the six hundred and fifty-three who died, no more than two hundred and forty-five died from the consequences either of a violent concussion, from wounds of the head, thorax, lower belly or spine; from a complicated fracture of the os femoris, or from putrid fevers, fluxes and other inward diseases, which often happen in military hospitals, even in cases of slight wounds, from the bad air which is breathed there; there will re-

* *Schwerfracturirte.*

main four hundred and eight, who may have died from the consequences of wounds with shattered bones; and this number is equal to that of those who were cured without amputation, although their wounds had been of the same kind *. If, after making these calculations, we compare them with the prodigious number of wounded men, who, at the beginning of the war, had their limbs taken off on account of dangerous wounds, of whom scarce one or two escaped with their lives; we may very safely conclude, that much the greater part of those four hundred and eight men cured and sent to the invalides, would have died if amputation had been performed on them, and this shocking artificial wound added to what they had already received. It would be trifling to pretend that amputation would have saved a great many of those who died, had it been timeously and properly performed †.

* It is obvious that Mr. Bilguer has not made his calculations in so favourable a manner for himself, as he might have done; I am persuaded that in 6618 wounded men, a much greater number than 245 must have died from the consequences of concussion, large flesh wounds, fevers, fluxes, and other diseases, owing to a bad habit, bad air, the season of the year, &c. TISSOT.

† Such a pretence would in effect be absurd: The reasoning would amount to this; it is demonstrated that the danger arising from amputation, joined to that attending wounds of themselves curable, has killed a great many patients; therefore the danger arising from this operation, joined to that attending wounds which have proved incurable, would have saved a great many patients: Only the most blinded obstinacy could reason in such a manner. TISSOT.

Further, if it be considered, that many of those who died, might have recovered, had they been taken care of any where else than in an hospital, where the air is very bad; and if it be called to mind at the same time, what some very eminent surgeons have observed, that two thirds of those die who have their limbs cut off *, I hope it will be readily acknowledged, that my method of treating wounded limbs, by saving them, is highly preferable to that of amputation.

* See the memoirs of the Academy of Surgery, t. 2. p. 256. where Mr. Boucher, in speaking of gunshot wounds, with the bone shattered near the articulation, shews that amputation commonly proves fatal, and that of three patients on whom it is performed, generally two die; whereas out of an hundred and sixty-five who had had the bones shattered, on whom amputation had not been performed, not one died. A degree of success which he ascribes, it must be owned, to the management of the surgeon; who, instead of spirituous applications, only made use of emollients, light digestives and anodynes.

S E C T. XXVIII.

FINALLY, I must add, that the greater number of those who died in our hospitals, in consequence of wounded limbs, were of those who had the os femoris shattered near its upper articulation; and as we are not at present acquainted with any means of relieving that accident; and as it has not as yet been attempted to amputate at that part, if we deduct these cases from the number mentioned in the preceding section who died, we shall see that the number of those whose lives were saved without amputation, considerably exceeds that of those who died. Since wounds near the superior part of the thigh bone, or shoulder, where the bones are shattered, ought always to be looked on as desperate.