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**Guthrie GJ (1815)**. A treatise on gun-shot wounds. London: Burgess and Hill.

**Title pages**

A  
**Treatise on Gun-shot Wounds,**

ON  
INFLAMMATION, ERYSIPELAS, AND MORTIFICATION,

ON  
**INJURIES OF NERVES,**

AND ON  
*WOUNDS OF THE EXTREMITIES*

REQUIRING THE DIFFERENT OPERATIONS OF AMPUTATION;

in which

*The various Methods of performing these Operations are shown, together with their  
After-Treatment;*

and containing an account of

**The Author's successful Case of Amputation at the Hip-Joint,  
&c. &c. &c.**

WITH FIVE EXPLANATORY PLATES.

Being a Record of the Opinions and Practice of the Surgical Department of the  
British Army, at the Termination of the Wars in Spain, Portugal, France,  
and the Netherlands, in 1814 and 1815.

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**BY G. J. GUTHRIE, F. R. S.**

Surgeon to the Westminster Hospital and to the Royal Westminster Infirmary for Diseases of  
the Eye; Consulting Surgeon to the Western Dispensary for the Diseases of Women and  
Children; Deputy Inspector of Hospitals during the Peninsular War; Doctor in Medicine in the  
University of Aberdeen; Associate of the Medical Societies of the Faculty of Paris; Lecturer  
on Surgery, &c. &c. &c.

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THE FIRST EDITION.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR BURGESS AND HILL, MEDICAL BOOKSELLERS,  
GREAT WINDMILL STREET, HAYMARKET.

1815.

## PREFACE.

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WHEN I printed the first edition of this work in 1815, I stated, that it contained “many opinions in opposition to those received in common by the profession, and even now taught.” I also said, that in publishing them I was desirous of making known “what had been the practice of the surgeons of the British Army during the Peninsular war, and to preserve for them the credit of improvements, which they alone have introduced into the science and art of surgery, and particularly in the operative part, in which they have been eminently successful.” In referring to my professional brethren that credit which was their due, I by no means wished to exonerate myself from any blame that might be attached to the practice recommended, for I was aware that some of these opinions were not common to the whole, and for these in particular, as well as for every one of them, I held myself responsible.

Previously to the termination of the war in 1815, and the appearance of the first edition of this work, the opinions of Mr. Hunter on the powers and capabilities of the human constitution were universally received. As general principles they did little mischief; but when they came to be acted upon, the results were not found to coincide with the principles from which they were deduced. When an injury had occurred to a person in health, rendering the loss of a limb necessary, he recommended that an operation should not be performed until after suppuration had been established, a period probably of six weeks, which, even if the patient survived, was often found to be too late to be serviceable. From the failure of this practice, the contrary one of immediate amputation became gradually more general during the war, and at its close, I not only advocated and established the propriety of it, but examined the reasoning on which Mr. Hunter's opinions were founded, and I trust have proved it to be defective. That it was so ought indeed to have been presumed, when the facts were found to be opposed to the reasons.

I have proved from official documents, that the great dread entertained of secondary hæmorrhage in Gun-shot Wounds was groundless, whilst the practice in all cases has been established on more certain principles than heretofore.

Mr. Hunter has here supported his opinion by an inference drawn from the bad success of some operations of amputation ; but it appears to me, on attentive consideration, that he drew the inference first, and afterwards shaped his theory to it. If

If Mr. Hunter had lived a few years longer, he would have rectified the error ; he would never have opposed (as many of his pupils have done) theory to facts, and obstinately persisted in that, which can neither be reasonably nor justly maintained.

Mr. John Bell has quoted these same opinions of Mr. Hunter, in the third edition of his *Discourses on Wounds*, 1812 ; and endeavoured to refute them, by bringing forward the old arguments used on this occasion. This was excusable in the two first editions, because Mr. J. Bell had had no practice of his own, and little opportunity of inquiring into that of others ; but it is not so in the third, because at that period the war in the Peninsula had afforded many opportunities of judging to which the preference should be given, and it was Mr. Bell's duty to have ascertained the fact before he wrote, and taught a practice, which all those who knew any thing about the matter had abandoned.

The cause of so much error on the part of Mr. John Bell and others who have followed him was, that they conceived the wound must inflame (in which opinion they were right) ; and that the whole limb must inflame also, in which they were totally wrong ; having reasoned from theory, probably on an individual case, and not from actual observation made on many ;

M. Lombard, Professor in the Military Academy at Strasbourg, in his "*Clinique Chirurgicale des Plaies faites par Armes à Feu*," published in 1804, and written professedly from experience, has endeavoured to support the arguments of the older French authors in favour of delayed amputation by advancing a number of reasons why immediate amputation must necessarily be improper, according to the rules of surgery ; but he brings few facts to support his opinion ; and it is easy to collect from his work, that he had not given amputation within the first twenty-four hours a fair trial in his own practice ; but has drawn his conclusions from the operations performed at, or sent into, the sedentary hospitals of Mayence, Landau, and Strasbourg ; and not from those performed by himself, in the hospitals accompanying the army. The cases of ill success following immediate amputation that he adduces, were not under his own care from the first, or performed by himself, but came to the hospitals in the rear, under a variety of circumstances that would militate against them.

The following statements of operations, performed on the field of battle, and at a subsequent period in general hospitals, in the army in the Peninsula, which were collected by Sir James M'Grigor for the purpose, fully bear out the opinions above related.

Return of the Capital Operations performed at the Hospital Stations, between the 21st of June and the 24th of December 1813, of the Army under the Command of his Excellency Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington; being a period of Six Months, from the advance of the British Army from Portugal until its establishment in Winter Quarters in front of Bayonne.

	Number operated upon.	Of which died.	Discharged, cured.	Under Cure.
Amputation of the Upper Extremities.	296	116	105	75
Lower Extremities .....	255	149	65	41
Total number of Operations .....	551	265	170	116

The operations at the shoulder-joint not included.

Return of the Capital Operations performed in the same Period on the Field of Battle, and for the most part kept in Regimental and Divisional Hospitals.

	Number operated upon.	Of which died.	Discharged, cured.	Under Cure.
Amputation of the Upper Extremities.	163	5	64	94
Lower Extremities .....	128	19	43	66
Total number of Operations .....	291	24	107	160

The cases marked "under cure," in both statements, having passed the period of danger, are considered as recovered; and from this it will appear, that the comparative loss, in secondary or delayed operations, and primary or immediate operations, is as follows:

	Secondary.	Primary.
Upper extremities.....	12	to 1
Lower extremities.....	3	to 1

This difference is certainly very remarkable, and it is so well known to all the surgeons of the British army, as a constant occurrence, that there is no longer among them any doubt on the subject.

In a report made by Mr. Gunning, the Surgeon-in-chief, to Sir James M'Grigor, on the wounded after the battle of Orthez, he states, that on the 24th of March, one month after the affair, the loss from amputation had been one in twenty of the upper extremities, and one in nine of the lower extremities; and that of eight hundred wounded on that occasion, fifty-one only had died.