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Robertson R (1790). Essay on fever. London: printed for the author.

Title pages

From the Author

To *Philip Stephens Esq.*

COLL. REG.
MED. EDINBURGH

AN
E S S A Y
ON
F E V E R S;

WHEREIN

THEIR THEORETIC GENERA, SPECIES,
AND VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

Are, from Observation and Experience, for thirty Years, in
EUROPE, AFRICA, and AMERICA, and on the
INTERMEDIATE SEAS,

Reduced under their Characteristic Genus,

F E B R I L E I N F E C T I O N ;

AND

THE CURE ESTABLISHED
ON
PHILOSOPHICAL INDUCTION.

BY ROBERT ROBERTSON, M. D.
A SURGEON OF HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY.

NULLIUS ADDICTUS JURARE IN VERBA MAGISTRI.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND SOLD BY G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER-ROW,
M. DCC. XC.

INTRODUCTION.

INFECTIONOUS diseases, in all countries and at all periods, have been ranked among the severest calamities incidental to mankind ; and febrile infection (one species of these) has ever been considered as a tremendous and fatal foe to human existence. The millions who perish in the fleets and armies of contending nations, are swept away in greater multitudes by the secret malignancy of this disease, than by all the destructive implements of war.

An exact register, not only of the *number* who fall victims, but of the *diseases* also of which they die, in the public service, (with the methods of treating the diseases,

in peace as well as in war) would greatly obviate this calamity, and be productive of general good ; and the plan might, I think, be extended beyond the limits of navies and camps, to civil society at large. The judicious and diligent practitioners would then be distinguished from obstinate or indolent theorists. The inexperienced would either be instructed, or compelled by shame to withdraw from a profession for which they were unqualified ; while those, who by an unwearied attention to diseases, and the effects of remedies, promoted the public good, would receive the well-earned rewards of their labour and skill. Young professors would no longer be led by any theoretic authority whatever, but would adopt those methods which experience had shewn to be most successful. Emulation to excel in so laudable a plan, instead of an am-

bition to establish the visionary theories of a day, would universally prevail. For God's sake, let mere theory or hypothesis no longer regulate the profession of a science, upon the success of which the interest and lives of mankind depend.

Fever has been my favourite study for thirty years; and having been chiefly employed in the navy during that period, I have enjoyed, in three quarters of the world, a more extensive field for observation than any man, as far as I know, who has ever written on the subject. Upon entering this field of observation, I was almost deterred from my pursuit by practical writers;

Even Sydenham, a favourite author, I observed, went on adding annually new ones to the immense stock; so that, instead of being instructed, I was bewildered and lost. In this state of perplexity, I resolved to attend diligently, and to mark down minutely, every case of Fever as it occurred to me in every country, climate, and season; and, upon comparing them together, I have found that Fever is universally one and the same disease.

As there were, at different periods various theories of Fever, so the treatment of Fever varied accordingly; some preferring one species of evacuation, some another: and the same difference of opinion in the choice of the medicines to procure the evacuations prevailed but the cure was always to be effected by evacuation. As their theories were incongruous, the practice was eventually

unsuccessful; so that here too I was compelled to lay down a new method of treatment.

Until 1779, when I was introduced to an acquaintance with Dr. Millar, I never met with any gentleman or book which agreed with me in opinion on the subject; it need not therefore surprize the reader, that I have made so little mention of systematic writers in my Observations, or in the following Essay. In discoursing with that gentleman, to my great satisfaction, I found that he had not only been employed himself, but that he had also been instrumental in engaging another very able gentleman in the same plan which I had been pursuing for years, viz. to consider Fever to be the same in all climates; and that it was to be treated very differently to what it ever had been, by medical professors. Dr. Millar's Observations on the prevail-

ing Diseases in Great Britain, together with a Review of the History of those of former Periods, and in other Countries, were published in March 1770* ; Dr. Clark's on Diseases in Long Voyages to Hot Climates, and particularly those which prevail in the East Indies, in 1773† ; and mine in the years 1769, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, and 78, had already extended to Africa‡, the West Indies, continent of America, and different parts of Europe. The success of the treatment in the different quarters of the world, which was seen in comparing our observations, proved on what a solid foundation the system was laid. My observations have since been made in

* For T. Cadell, successor to Mr. Millar, and T. Notman, in the Strand.

† For D. Wilson and G. Nicol, in the Strand.

‡ An Epitome of which was published, in 1771, by Dr. Lind, in his valuable book on Hot Climates, and fully by the Author in 1777. See the Physical Journal, published for J. Murray.

various parts of Europe, and are published up to May 1789*.

Such a collection of important observations to be made by gentlemen nearly at the same time, without each other's knowledge, was a little extraordinary; and, without vanity, I believe I may add, fortunate for mankind; as all the proofs which could be wished for on the subject are now furnished. Indeed many practitioners and writers have been so well satisfied with them, that they have secretly adopted them;

I hope it will be admitted, that, whatever respect is owing to the merit and characters of individuals, yet the regard due to the community is far greater; which reflection, I trust, will shelter me from reproach for stating facts so important to mankind. No other motive would have induced me to undertake so laborious and unprofitable a task.