



Saving the Army: The Life of Sir John Pringle

Morrice McCrae

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Sir John Pringle was born in 1707 in the Scottish Borders, where his ancestors had held land since the thirteenth century. He studied philosophy at St Andrews University and medicine at the universities of Edinburgh and Leiden. During the War of the Austrian Succession, Pringle was made Physician General to the British Army and was appalled to see the huge number of deaths resulting not from casualties of battle but from diseases such as typhus and dysentery. He introduced a wide range of improvements in hospital management and discipline, and in standards of care and sanitation/hygiene. His reforms helped to reduce the appalling number of deaths from disease that had previously been thought inevitable. His published account of this achievement, Observations on the Diseases of Army, brought him fame across Europe. Honoured by learned societies, he was made physician to King George III and the royal family, and was elected President of the Royal Society in London. At a time when medical practice was still guided by theories that had hardly changed for two thousand years, Pringle's revolutionary approach and scientific investigations earned him a place in medical history.



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