

## EPILOGUE

THE brief quotation from Amiel's *Journal Intime* which stands at the beginning of this volume sets up as an ideal of life triumph over sickness of body and spirit. This constant assertion against the forces that threaten to destroy us may be applied with some realism to the struggle of a military force against a dangerous enemy in a hostile environment, but it is not enough. Amiel, though a poetic observer of the scene of life, was not a man of action, and despite his clear perception of the risks of "annulling or dispersion of our physical and moral being" he could produce no sure guide from his life as a didactic philosopher.

The struggle to overcome, and, more important, to prevent the dangers of injury and infection in a tropical campaign has been a leading theme of this book. We have seen that here is a need greater than a mere passive act of living; action is needed, and action on a scientific basis which appeals to the medical services. Only constant striving can prevent those slips that perpetuate infectious diseases, especially those associated with the tropics, and it is the incessant application of the practice of medical science that preserves a force and makes possible the triumph of which Amiel speaks. Indeed it is the narration of these doings, the daily service of the doctor in the field, which fills a gap in the teaching of the moral philosopher.

But we must touch a little deeper. The last phase of the operations whose medical story we have followed was that of liberation, and thrilling though this reward was, even liberation is not enough unless it leads to freedom. Further, the task of releasing fellow men from bondage is not the whole end, for this is concerned with an individual freedom such as the famous four freedoms. We cannot here discuss self-determination in the light of national action, but we are concerned with all that is implicit in its gift to every man. In order that men may be made free of serious illness of body or mind it is necessary that they be led to follow the way of health, free from the bonds of selfishness or ignorance. Every man has his own personal responsibility, but this varies in importance and in the understanding with which its ideals are transformed into action.

The work of an army is carried out by a chain of responsible persons, many of whom, particularly in the medical formations, are surprisingly youthful. Even superficial study of the work of young medical officers will reveal a remarkable ability to accept and use responsibility with courage and tolerance. Responsibility is a jealous privilege of the medical profession; it is essential for the maintenance of the closest relationship between the sick and the healer. The guarding of this privilege is necessary, for in the past and during recent times legal judgments have placed some restriction on this particular freedom, though as it has been pointed out, "the quality of medicine will suffer by every diminution of the doctor's responsibility".<sup>1</sup> Organised medicine has tended to encroach on

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<sup>1</sup> *British Medical Journal*, Editorial, 31 July, 1954, p. 290.

this privileged duty, and perhaps the reaction of those who practise medicine is natural. One outstanding feature of military administration is that of delegation, a form of action which may be utterly sterilising if poorly conceived and carried out, but which may richly reward its intelligent use if responsibility be delegated with both hands when the need arises. The value of independence of spirit, and loyalty of purpose may be seen in medical work under action conditions, for these qualities are not incompatible, and are equally desirable in time of peace.

The medical profession in Australia has brought forth a number of distinguished members who have made many noteworthy contributions to medical science as studied in the tropics. The problems of the tropical areas of the world are many and great, and Australia must bear her own increasing share. Opportunity stands waiting today and many specialised workers are needed. Australia could not have been made safe in the years of war without the toil and effort poured out on the field of battle, and the medical workers played their part in those technical labours which did much to mitigate losses of life and of the ability fully to live. It must be realised too, that the practical action which inspired medical work in the Pacific Islands was not based merely on a desire to benefit our own people, for the claims of those peoples indigenous to the country were beyond question.

To ideals, then, we must add action: the flame of health of body, mind and spirit must be tended and kept aglow; our corporate and individual safety depend upon it. The hand that seizes responsibility and uses it as an unselfish weapon is the hand that gives freedom.