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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION



WESTERN AUSTRALIA,

AND

ON ITS ADAPTATION TO THE PURPOSES

OF

A SANATORIUM

FOR

THE INDIAN ARMY.

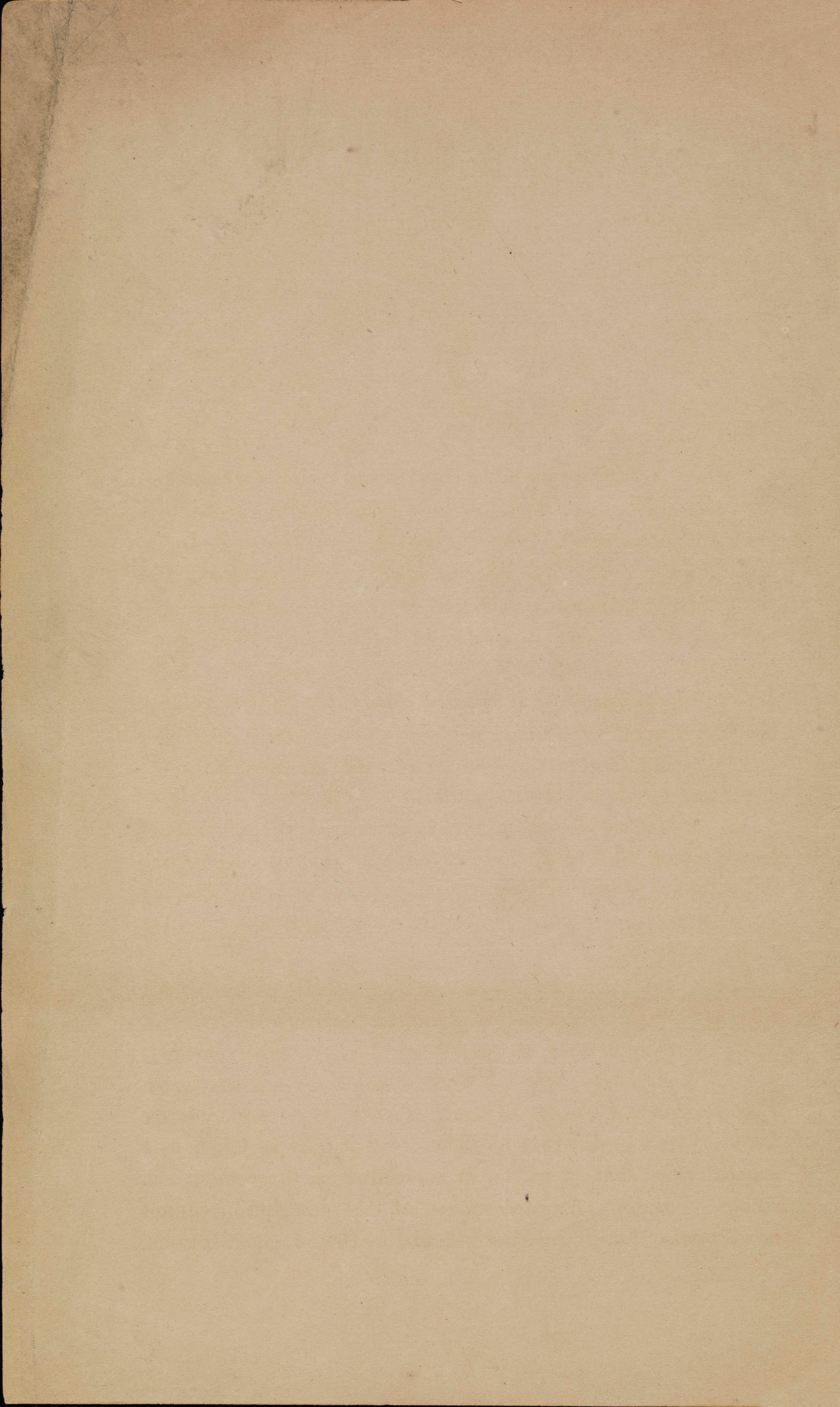
IN A

LETTER ADDRESSED TO J. R. MARTIN, ESQ.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY J. C. BRIDGEWATER, SOUTH MOLTON STREET,
OXFORD STREET, W.

—
1859.



London,
24th November, 1859.

MY DEAR SIR,

Having reason to believe that, in the spirit of a wise and generous policy, a Board has been appointed to inquire into the circumstances which affect the health of Troops in India, and into the means by which it may be best promoted; and understanding that any authentic information as to the suitability of Western Australia to the purposes of a Sanatorium, would be acceptable to you at the present moment, I venture, on the ground of much experience in that Colony, the Government of which I held for many years, to send you the following Observations on its climate, geographical position, and means of communication with the Ports of India.

In proceeding to explain the nature of the climate of the Western side of Australia, you will, perhaps, excuse me if I offer a few preliminary remarks on that of India, for the purpose of pointing out how much they stand in contrast to each other.

The climate of India appears to be generally characterised by a high degree of temperature, occasionally varied by great and sudden chills,—and, whenever this prevailing heat is aided by moisture, unwholesome exhalations are produced. The nature and effects of the malaria thus engendered, are found to vary in different localities; but it may be taken, as a general rule, that it exists, in some degree, throughout the whole of India. An atmosphere of this description cannot be otherwise than highly uncongenial to British constitutions,

even under the most favorable circumstances; but when to these predisposing causes of disease are added all the various depressing incidents of the private soldiers' life in India, it need not be wondered at that 6·94 per cent. of the European Troops die annually, and that 94 per cent. of the whole European Force either die, or are invalided before they reach the age of 35.—(Vide *Ewart's Vital Statistics of the Indian Army.*)

To the climate of India, as above described, the climate of Western Australia affords a very remarkable contrast. The Colony, as at present existing, is situated on the Western shore of New Holland, between the 28th and 35th degrees of Southern latitude. It is, consequently, within the range of the perennial Westerly winds, which pervade the whole of that region of the Globe. Its climate is, in a measure, brought to it, and regulated by these Western breezes. In winter, they take a direction from the North of West, and moderate the coldness of that season. In summer, they come from the Southward of West, and temper the heat of summer. There are occasions in the course of summer, when, from some accidental failure in the usual sea-breeze, the heat becomes intense; but these occasions are rare, and of short duration; and even then, although the thermometer may sometimes range as high as 100 degrees in the shade, the extreme dryness of the atmosphere prevents that heat from being injurious to health, and Europeans follow agricultural avocations without serious inconvenience.

From this description you will perceive that the climate of Western Australia is formed and governed by a constant cause—the prevailing Westerly wind;—that it is essentially a sea-climate, fresh and invigorating; temperate in point of heat; equable in point of temperature; free from sudden chills; and with this remarkable circumstance attaching to it—that the season of greatest heat is also the season of

greatest draught, and, consequently, malaria is not produced to any appreciable extent. Hence, therefore, fever, dysentery, cholera, and liver-complaints, are almost unknown in Western Australia. The causes which produce these diseases in India do not exist in the Colony—their climates are essentially and entirely the reverse of each other.

I regret much that I have not at present access to those reports, which would show in full detail the opinions of medical men upon the subject of the climate of Western Australia, and its effects upon European constitutions; but I may confidently affirm, that the medical officers employed from time to time in the Colony have invariably borne testimony to its extreme salubrity. Those reports may be consulted, if you should deem it necessary. They are contained in the Blue Books periodically transmitted to the Colonial Office; but it appears to be sufficient, for the present purpose, to point out that a climate of the nature herein described, cannot be otherwise than conducive to health; and especially curative in its effects upon Patients suffering under maladies contracted in India.

In geographical position, as in climate, Western Australia is unequalled by any of the other Australian Colonies. It is the nearest to the Ports of India. A voyage of fourteen days would amply suffice to convey passengers between India and Swan River, and that voyage would be made, for the most part, within range of the healthy breezes of the South-East Trades. A much longer and more boistrous voyage intervenes between India and the Eastern Australian Colonies, and the cost of conveyance must necessarily be in proportion to the length of voyage.

The last advantage arising from position in favor of Western Australia to which I shall advert, is that any Troops stationed in that Country for the recovery of health, and fit to return to duty in India, might be instantaneously recalled in case of

need by Electric Telegraph, and re-conveyed to India in a few days, and therefore would scarcely be further from their work than if they were in any Hospital in India.

The means of communication at present existing between India and Western Australia are the Postal communication about to be re-established between Pt. de Galle and King George's Sound, and an irregular mode of communication by means of Sailing Ships, which occasionally carry timber for the Railways in India, and horses of an admirable description for Military purposes; but neither of these modes would afford suitable accommodation if a Sanatorium were established in Western Australia. I would therefore suggest and recommend, if such an Establishment should be formed, that two or more Steam Ships should be placed upon the line between Calcutta, Madras, Pt. de Galee, and Swan River; that they should be specially adapted to, and devoted to the Sanitary Service; that one should start on a regulated day in every succeeding month from Calcutta, and contrariwise on the same day another should leave Swan River for Pt. de Galle, having corresponding communications with Bombay, in order to accommodate the Patients from the latter Presidency. I believe that such a line might be established and maintained at a definite and moderate expense, and that private persons might be found willing to establish and maintain such a line of suitable vessels under contract with the Indian Government, by which Patients might be conveyed from and to the Indian Ports and Swan River at an expense not exceeding £10 per head each way, the Government engaging only that a certain number should be embarked, or at all events paid for in every month.

It is not for me to offer any opinion as to the advantages to be expected from the timely removal of certain classes of Patients from the unhealthy Plains of India, to Sanatoria in the Hills, or in other localities exterior to Hindostan; but I

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may be permitted to observe, that there is a growing impression that many thousands of valuable lives might be saved by such occasional removal, and that there is an opinion gaining ground amongst those who are best qualified to judge, that the climate of the Hills is only Preservative and not Curative in its effects on Indian maladies. If this should prove to be the case, the establishment of Sanatoria in places out of India will naturally engage the attention of a beneficent Government, and I feel assured, in that event, that Western Australia in climate and position, will be found to possess unequalled advantages over all the other Colonies for the formation of such Establishments.

I am, my dear Sir,

Very truly your's,

J. STIRLING,

Vice-Admiral.

To J. R. MARTIN, Esq.

Battery 58

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BRIDGEWATER, PRINTER, SOUTH MOLTON STREET, OXFORD STREET.