

Honman, Andrew (1858-1926)

Andrew Honman was born at St. Andrews, in Fifeshire, Scotland, in 1858. He attended school in the same town. His father died while he was still at school. At the age of fourteen he passed his preliminary examination and in due course he went to London. He became a student at Charing Cross Hospital and studied under Mitchell Bruce, James Cantlie, T. H. Green, A.J. Pollock and Francis Hird. He was regarded as an unusually competent student, industrious, conscientious and intellectual. James Cantlie referred to the great reputation he had gained as a student. He secured a silver medal in pathology and was successful in several other prize competitions. In the year 1879 he obtained the diploma of member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (MRCS) and in the same year he passed the examination for the licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries.

In those days relatively few students in London entered for the degrees of the London University, for this institution was not a real university, but was merely an examining body. Moreover, the students of the medical schools save those of University College and King College were not encouraged to present themselves for degrees. After having qualified Andrew Honman was advised to seek a warm climate on account of his health. It is said that he would have lived but a few years had he remained in England. He therefore travelled around the world for two years with a wealthy member of the Council of the Iron and Steel Institute, S. Gilchrist Thomas. He also served as surgeon on board ships of the British India Steam Navigation Company.

In 1883 cholera broke out in Egypt and a mission of twelve medical practitioners was sent to combat the epidemic. Honman was among the twelve. He was placed in charge of Mehallet Kebir on the recommendation of Sir Joseph Fayrer. It is said of him that he was the most valuable of the medical officers and that he faced the dangers of his position with calm courage and determination to render efficient service. His report on the epidemic was the one selected for reproduction in the form of a blue book.

On his return from Egypt, he went to Germany and studied for a year at the University of Bonn. He then turned his face to the other side of the world. In 1884 he arrived in Victoria and settled at Williamstown. He soon gained a reputation among the people of the district as a very kindly, sympathetic practitioner, a most capable physician and surgeon, an untiring worker and a genial friend. His practice grew at a rapid pace and his popularity spread farther and farther afield. For twenty years he worked assiduously for his patients and tended the poor with as much consideration as he gave to the rich.

He held the position of quarantine officer under the colonial government and of health officer. He initiated a movement for the establishment of a public hospital in his district and was largely responsible for the organization of the Williamstown Public Hospital. He was the first principal medical officer and at a later date he became consulting surgeon.

In 1889, at the age of thirty-one, he joined the Victorian Military Forces. When the South African War broke out in 1900, he volunteered for active service and embarked with the second Victorian contingent with the rank of major. His was distinguished service and he received official recognition in

the form of the Queen's medal with five clasps. He returned after the end of hostilities and immediately resigned his commission in the Militia. He then relinquished his practice in Williamstown and started practice in Melbourne, at first in Collins Street and later in Spring Street. At this stage of his career, he was attracted to the wonderful work of the Salvation Army and became a staunch supporter of this movement. He planned the Bethesda Hospital. At first there were but two beds in a small room, but in the course of time the institution expanded and has now substantial proportions. He was attached to the hospital at its inception as active surgeon and later as consulting surgeon. In addition, he served in an honorary capacity as medical officer to the Salvation Army in Victoria.

His work in Melbourne was almost entirely devoted to surgery. He realized that every surgeon tends to specialize to some extent and his choice was abdominal surgery. He acquired a considerable reputation as a safe and clever operator and a sound diagnostician.

Andrew Honman was fifty-six years of age when war was declared in Europe. Notwithstanding the disability of advancing years, he offered his services. He received a commission in January 1916, and on April 1, 1916, he was appointed Officer Commanding the No. 5 Australian General Hospital in St. Kilda Road, Melbourne. His previous military experience combined with his keen sense of justice and regard for humanity rendered him an exceptionally valuable officer in this position. The soldier patients under his charge were indebted to him for very many privileges; they reaped the full advantage of his wide professional knowledge and of his keenness to serve them as they had served their King and country. He fought for their rights but maintained strict discipline. He then held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. During this period his son was killed on active service in France. Major Andrew Victor Honman had distinguished himself as a Captain in the Australian Army Medical Corps, had been mentioned in the official despatches and had received his majority.

The blow was a very severe one to the father. He was promoted in 1917 to the rank of Honorary Colonel. Toward the end of the year he was transferred to No. 16 Australian General Hospital which was situated in the buildings of the Hospital for the Insane at Mont Park. In April 1918, he was commissioned in the Australian Imperial Force to visit the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom to study the methods employed of treating limb-less soldiers and of conducting vocational training. He went to France in August 1918, and thence he visited Italy. He collected much valuable information on his journey and was given unusual opportunities to acquire much knowledge of modern orthopaedics.

On his return to Australia at the end of February 1919, he was placed in charge of No. 11 Australian General Hospital at Caulfield. Here he set to work to apply the best methods he had studied in other countries. He established curative workshops and introduced many important reforms. A little later he found that the years of continuous strain at home and abroad had left their impression on his strength. His health began to fail and he was compelled to resign his commission. He returned to his private practice in Spring Street. The winter's cold and the heavy calls of his professional work prevented him from recovering his previous energy and he recognized that he had grown old.

In March 1921, Andrew Honman was appointed by the Prime Minister Principal Medical Officer of the mandated Territories of New Guinea. The appointment at first was in the Australian Naval and Military Forces, but in November 1921, the military occupation terminated and the medical service was transferred to the civil administration. He found a great deal of organizing work to do and he was

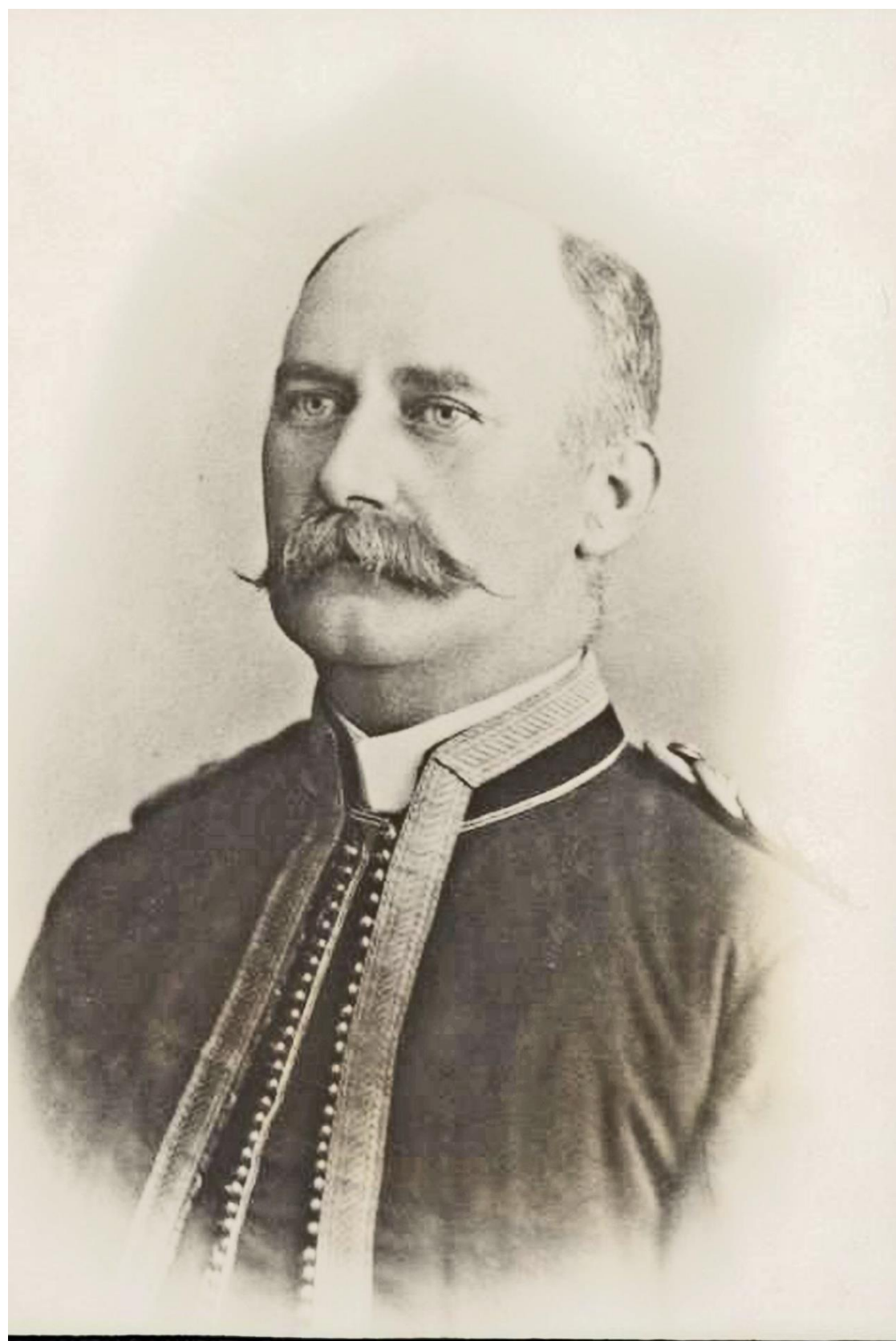
required to attack it with a smaller staff than that of the military authority. Moreover, the conditions of service were less favourable. Andrew Honman met his difficulties with resource and carried out his duties in a most admirable manner. He undertook many tours of inspection himself and visited the most inaccessible parts of the Territory. At times he tramped through jungle and roughed it like a young patrol officer. He was faced with special duties during an outbreak of variola. A man with less energy and smaller experience might have failed to meet the situation with adequate action, but Honman was equal to the task and acquitted himself splendidly. He did not fear the dangers of fever-stricken districts and answered the call wherever and whenever it came. He took a prominent part in the hookworm survey work of the International Health Board and the Federal government. This work had been begun by Dr Waite in 1918 in Papua and at the time of Andrew Honman's activity in New Guinea was being carried out by Dr. S. M. Lambert. His report of the medical service of New Guinea to the League of Nations was favourably commented on and makes very interesting reading. Some of the accompanying photographs are particularly arresting. During the whole of this time he was suffering sub-tertian malaria; his health, previous undermined by the shock of his son's death, by the hard work and heavy load of his military appointments and by his increasing years, began to fail. On reaching his sixty-fifth birthday he was required by the service regulations to resign his appointment.

He returned to Victoria and lived quietly in his home at Montmorency. He did some work both from his home and in Collins Street, but he was not able to do much, owing to repeated attacks of malaria.

Reference has been made above to the fact that he was President of the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association in 1915. In 1911 he had held the office of Honorary Assistant Treasurer of the Medical Society of Victoria after having been a member of the committee of that body for sixteen years. He was always actively interested in the affairs of his profession and indeed he was a ceaseless worker. He took few holidays and did not often indulge in recreation. He was one of the kindest and most generous men in his profession. He was always ready to assist others with advice, encouragement and even some tangible aid. He was an insatiable reader and spent many hours at home reading medical and other works, always for his mental benefit. He was an animal lover who gathered together a strange collection of pets. Wherever he went he earned respect and admiration – often earning affection. The medical profession offers sympathy to his widow and to his son and two daughters.

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Source: Obituary, MJA 1926, II, p.780



ANDREW HONMAN
— President 1915 —