

MR. YEARSLEY'S LETTERS to THE PRESIDENT and COUNCIL of the ROYAL COLLEGE of SURGEONS in LONDON, on the UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT of Mr. LISTON.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—Most reluctantly I come before you in the character of a complainant, more especially as the gentleman whose conduct I must arraign is a member of your honourable Council.

It may still be in your recollection that, in the month of March, 1841, I addressed a note to many of the leading members of the profession, inviting them to witness and investigate the effects of extirpation of enlarged tonsils, and also of the uvula, in certain cases of Stammer and defective speech. In the course of my professional practice, I had frequently performed the former of these operations for the cure of deafness. For this I claim no merit. It had frequently been done with the same intention. Neither was the latter operation novel. Both, in short, had long been recognised as minor surgical operations. The only novelty consisted in their application to the treatment of Stammer, and that I freely own was the result of accident.

In some cases in which Deafness and Stammer were associated with enlarged tonsils, and an elongated or thickened uvula, I found that on the removal of these morbid conditions, not only the deafness, but the defective speech was cured or relieved. The observation of this fact led me to direct my attention to Stammer; and after the treatment of numerous cases, with more or less success, I gave the result of my researches to the profession; and in selecting the mode of doing this, I consulted the feelings of the profession, my own duty as a member of the College, and altogether waived my personal interest.

Among others whom I invited to be present were Sir Benjamin Brodie and Mr. Robert Liston. I have preserved the replies of these gentlemen. The first, from Sir Benjamin Brodie, is remarkable for its gentlemanly and candid tone. It is as follows:—

“14, Saville-row, March 8, 1841.

“Dear Sir,—I thank you for your invitation, and am sorry that I cannot avail myself of it. It will give me great pleasure to learn that your efforts to cure so great a calamity prove successful.

“Your faithful servant,
“B. C. BRODIE.”

The second reply is more brief. It is from Mr. R. Liston.

“Mr. Liston presents his compliments to Mr. Yearsley, and regrets he cannot be present at his meeting to-morrow.

“5, Clifford-street, March 8, 1841.”

Upwards of five hundred medical men did, however, witness my operations; and I may say that almost every one was struck with the surprising success which appeared to attend them.

The consequence of this discovery to myself has been a very great influx of patients with Stammer and other defects of speech. The fact of my having thrown open my doors to the profession contributed, no doubt, to this result, for many of them sent me patients, and some even entrusted members of their own family to my care.

That the new practice, like every novelty, should meet with enemies, might be expected; but that the operations in question should be termed “unwarrantable incisions,” and “horrible mutilation,” and that such epithets should be applied to them by a member of the Council of the College of Surgeons, will, I conceive, excite your surprise and astonishment.

In the *Literary Gazette* for March 6th, there is a pretended review of my recent publication “On Deafness, from Morbid Conditions of the Mucous Membrane,” &c. &c. The editor departs from the fair line of criticism to denounce my operations for stammering,

concerning which the book has not a single word; and not content with grossly libelling me himself, and attributing to me the most monstrous absurdities, calls Mr. Liston to his aid.

“This gentleman’s (Mr. Yearsley’s) mania (says the editor) for cutting away the organs of speech and hearing for stammering and deafness, appears to us to be quite horrible. We refer for confirmation of our opinion to as high an authority as lives.” See p. 161, col. 2. E. L. G.; and upon turning to the page indicated, I find the following testimonial:—

“5, Clifford-street, March 1, 1842.

“I have, with much pleasure, witnessed Mr. Hunt’s process for the removal of stammering. It is founded on correct physiological principles; is simple, efficacious and unattended by pain or inconvenience. Several young persons have, in my presence, been brought to him for the first time; some of them could not utter a sentence, however short, without hesitation and frightful contortion of the features. In less than half an hour, by following Mr. Hunt’s instructions, they have been able to speak and to read, continuously, long passages without difficulty. Some of these individuals had previously been subjected to painful and unwarrantable incisions, and had been left with their palates horribly mutilated, hesitating in their speech, and stuttering as before.

“ROBERT LISTON.

“Mr. Hunt, 224, Regent-street.”

The language of the testimonial is only a repetition of the attacks in the *Literary Gazette*. I feel assured, therefore, you will think me justified in writing to Mr. Liston the following note, after the perusal of the testimonial:—

“Mr. Yearsley presents his compliments to Mr. Liston. Mr. Yearsley’s attention has been drawn to a testimonial published in the current number of the *Literary Gazette*, and stated to emanate from Mr. Liston in favour of a Mr. Hunt, who professes to cure stammering by some elocutionary process. In this testimonial it is asserted that Mr. Liston saw certain persons relieved of impediment who had previously been ‘subjected to painful and unwarrantable incisions, and had been left with their palates horribly mutilated, hesitating in their speech, and stuttering as before.’

“As Mr. Yearsley originated his operations upon the throat and palate, not from mere theory, but from actual experience, for the relief of certain varieties of Stammer, dependant on physical obstruction; and as similar language to that employed by Mr. Liston has been directed against Mr. Yearsley personally by the *soi-disant* professors of elocution for some months past, by public advertisement, he begs to know whether the patients alluded to owe the alleged mutilations to operations performed by him?

“In order to ascertain the final results of treatment, Mr. Yearsley has forwarded a copy of the enclosed circular* to each of his patients, and has yet to find one case in which he has inflicted inconvenience or injury, even where no advantage has been derived.

“29, Sackville-street, March 11, 1842.”

Receiving no answer, I again wrote—

“Sir,—On Saturday morning, the 12th instant, I sent you a note, upon a subject which appeared to me calculated to compromise my professional reputation. May I beg the favour of an answer in the course of to-morrow?

“I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

“J. YEARSLEY.

“29, Sackville-street, March 14, 1842.”

Time wore on without bringing me any reply from Mr. Liston. My letter had laid him under an imputation most nearly affecting his honour. His testimonial had been made, either with or without his

[See next page of Wrapper.

connivance, the handle of aspersions on myself, or, at all events, on the operations I had originated, of the grossest kind. On his own words alone had been reared a tissue of falsehood and unmerited calumny. I gave him an opportunity of setting himself right by acknowledging that his testimonial had been turned to improper uses, or of allowing me to adduce evidence for the correction of his judgment, if that had led him wrong. But his silence was a tacit refusal to accord me either the one or the other mode of justice. I may ask, was this conduct indicative of an honourable mind, which, feeling a stain like a wound, would have lost not a moment in repairing an injury unjustly or unconsciously inflicted? Was it the behaviour of one who felt himself above all shadow of suspicion of having acted with intentional injustice? Above all, was it honourable to the head or heart of one who, on taking office as a member of the Council of the College of Surgeons, bound himself by the most solemn obligation "to demean himself honourably in the practice of his profession, and to the utmost of his power maintain the dignity and welfare of the College?" or of one who, on the same occasion, swore "not to advertise or publish anything prejudicial to the interests, or derogatory to the honour of the College, or disgraceful to the profession of surgery?"

My first impulse, under the wrong from which I suffered, was to resent Mr. Liston's conduct to the utmost, and endeavour, as I felt I had the means, to convict him, in the eyes of the world, of a false and malicious slander. On mature consideration, aided by the counsel of friends on whose judgment I rely, I came to the determination of submitting the whole matter to a more impartial tribunal than Mr. Liston's sense of justice, or my own feelings—to your own honourable body, from whom I feel secure of fair and candid treatment.

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I read in the regulations "that the College will at all times protect and defend every member who may be disturbed in the exercise and enjoyments of the rights, privileges, exemptions, and immunities acquired by him as a member thereof."

Relying on this liberal and just regulation, nothing would give me more pleasure than that my operations and their results should be made the subject of your most rigid scrutiny, either by examining the subjects of them yourselves, or the medical gentlemen, members of the College, who witnessed them. If, in any instance, they have been "horrible mutilations," "unnecessarily severe," "sanguinary," or "unwarrantable," let me receive the full measure of your disapprobation and censure. If, on the other hand, they have been such only as you yourselves have, under the same or other circumstances, performed—if cure in some, amelioration in others, and injury in none, have been the result, I would claim the expression of your sympathy with me, under a gross act of unprovoked injustice.

Whether Mr. Liston has demeaned himself honourably as a member of the Council, in encouraging quackery, by giving a testimonial in favour of a *secret*, and therefore empirical, process, which nobody knows better than Mr. Liston, is of merely temporary service, I leave to your consideration. The more immediate object of my appeal is to claim your protection as a member of the College, and to seek your opinion on the conduct of Mr. Liston, in going out of his way in the testimonial to make an attack on myself of a nature calculated to do me professional injury, when, as I maintain, and am, with your permission, prepared to prove, it has no foundation whatever.

I have the honour to be,

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

Your very obedient and humble servant,

JAS. YEARSLEY.

15, Saville-row, March 30, 1842.

"Royal College of Surgeons in London,

March 14, 1842.

"Sir,—The President yesterday laid before the Council of this College your letter of the 30th ultimo, complaining of a certificate given by Mr. Liston to Mr. Hunt. And I am directed to acquaint you that the Council have invariably refused to interfere in disputes between members of the College, and see no reason to depart from their rule upon this occasion.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your most obedient servant,

"EDMUND BELFOUR.

"James Yearsley, Esq., &c. &c."

15, Saville-row, April 16, 1842.

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I regret that you should have interpreted my complaint as a mere "dispute between two members of the College." I beg distinctly to state that I have no dispute with Mr. Liston. In a testimonial given to an unprofessional man, Mr. Liston chose to reflect upon certain operations which I had originated, denominating them "unwarrantable incisions," and "horrible mutilations." I required an explanation, which was refused me. Apart from this uncourteous conduct I deemed myself injured, and unjustly aspersed, and I arraigned my asperser before you, at the same time inviting inquiry into my own professional conduct, expecting that if I had done aught discreditable to me as a surgeon, or as a member of the College, to meet with your disapprobation—if I had done right, to meet with the expression of your sympathy under the wrong I suffered. On the other hand, if Mr. Liston had compromised himself, that he should be visited with your censure, and be required to make the *amende* due from one professional man to another.

These are the simple facts. Your not entertaining my appeal leaves me without faith or reliance on that regulation of the College which promises protection to its members, and which led me to seek it at your hands.

I have the honour to remain,

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

Your very obedient and humble servant,

JAS. YEARSLEY.

To the President and Council, &c.

* "29, Sackville-street, Piccadilly.

"—months ago I performed an operation on you for the relief of an Impediment in Speech. I shall esteem it a great favour if you will make me acquainted with the results up to the present time; and as to its—

Effect upon the impediment,

Effect upon the strain or pain with which it is generally accompanied,

Quality and power of the voice,

Compass or range of the voice,

Distinctness of articulation,

Swallowing and breathing,

Susceptibility to cold,

General health.

"These, and any other particulars, are only required to enable me to draw up correct statistical details of the results of my operations, and not with any view to the publication of particular cases.

"I am, yours, very obediently,

"JAMES YEARSLEY."

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