

Notice of the professional life of the late John Walker, F.R.C.S.E : with an account of his method of treating stricture of the urethra by means of fused caustic potass / by William Brown, F.R.C.S.

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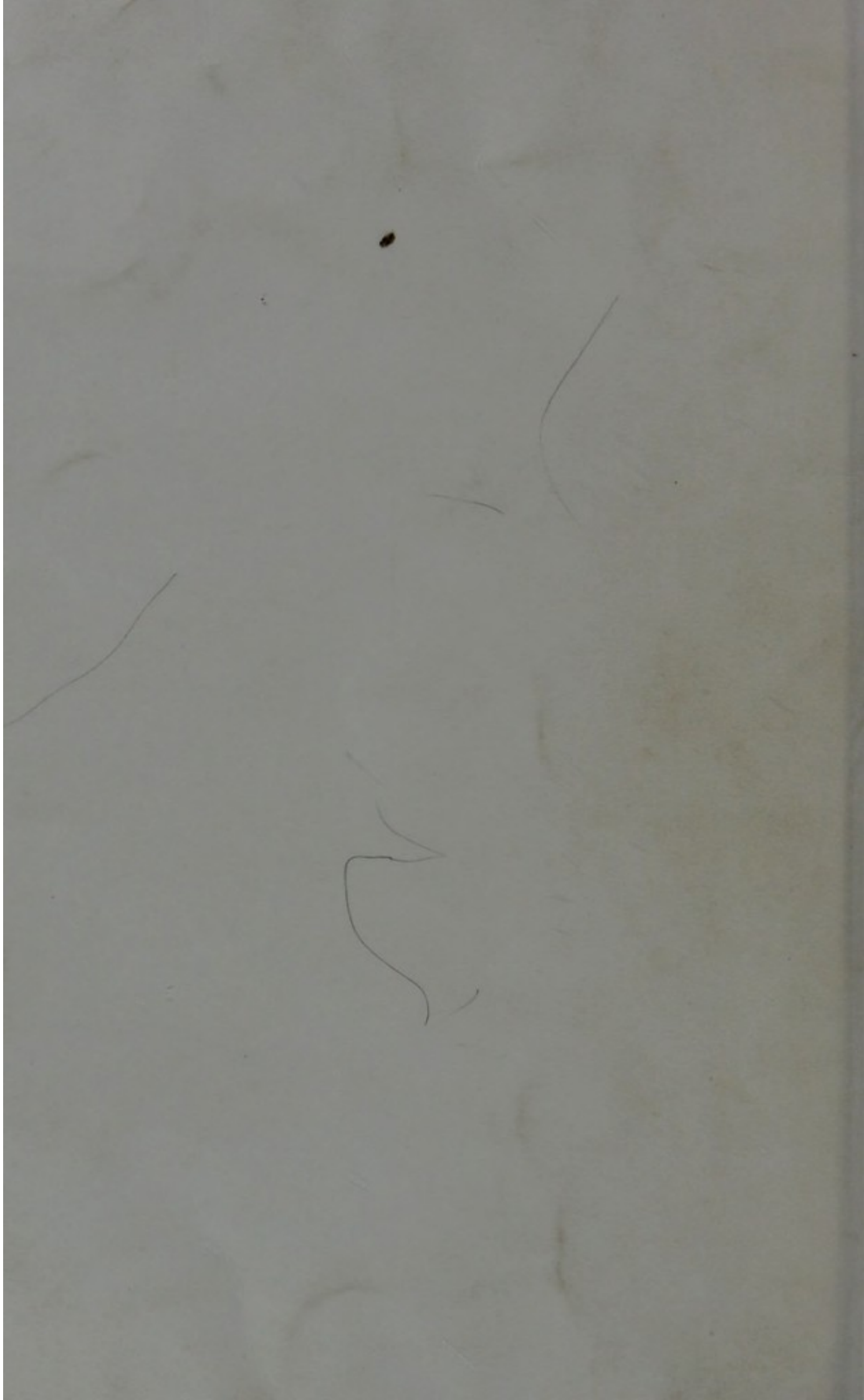
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NOTICE

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OF THE

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

OF THE LATE

JOHN WALKER, F.R.C.S.E.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIS

METHOD OF TREATING STRICTURE OF THE URETHRA
BY MEANS OF FUSED CAUSTIC POTASS.

BY

WILLIAM BROWN, F.R.C.S.

(From the Edinb. Med. and Surg. Journal, April 1851.)

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MDCCCLI.

[Read before the Medico-Chirurgical Society, 1st May 1850.]

NOTICE OF MR JOHN WALKER.

ONLY the elder members of this society will recollect Mr Walker; because, although his death did not take place till 1841, yet he had retired from practice for a long period, and, during many years, his infirm health excluded him from general society.

His father, Dr Robert Walker, was long a respected member, and for several years treasurer, of the College of Surgeons, and left, in his Treatise on Small-Pox, published in 1790, a favourable specimen of his professional attainments.

John Walker was born in 1766, and received his primary education, partly at Mr Ramsay's school in Dunfermline, and partly at the High School of Edinburgh, under Mr French.

For a number of years his father rented a cottage, with a few acres of land, at Lasswade, the same which long after was occupied by Sir Walter Scott. In that beautiful spot, the younger part of Dr Walker's family spent most of their summers; and to his country residence in childhood may be ascribed that unquenchable love of natural scenery, and that delight in open air occupations, which characterised the subject of this notice throughout his entire life.

He received his medical education in Edinburgh, where the lectures at the University, the wards of the Royal Infirmary, and the Public Dispensary, offered him very ample opportunities of learning his profession. He cherished a strong feeling of attachment to his teachers; and for Dr Duncan especially he always expressed much gratitude. In addition to these more public sources of instruction, he was favoured with the sagacious superintendence of his excellent father. There was much that was burdensome and unprofitable in the medical apprenticeships of that period, of which the sons of surgeons had their full share; but there was also a large amount of practical knowledge obtained, indeed larger than what now falls to the lot of students in general. There were opportunities of witnessing the progress of cases, and of assisting in their treatment. There were, above all, the daily, casual instructions of a superior, teaching the learner what he did not know, correcting him when he was in error, and encouraging him when he did well.

In September 1787 he repaired to London, to pursue his studies in that new and extensive field. He resided in Gerrard Street, Soho, with Mr Smith, a surgeon; but his studies were chiefly directed by Dr George Sandeman, who was his relative.

I possess the correspondence of his father and himself at this time. There is much in it that is interesting ; exhibiting as it does, on the one side a matured judgment, genuine affection, and sincere piety ; on the other, want of knowledge of the world, hastiness in forming conclusions, and yet honesty of purpose, without guile. A few extracts from these letters may be not unworthy of a place here.

One of his letters complains of the hardships of dress, which had annoyed him much, especially as the ship which carried his trunk had been detained in Leith for some time. His father writes in reply : “ I think in general, if you are clean and neat, and your hair scratched out with a very little powder, it will answer your attendance on the class and your ordinary company ; but when you are upon invitation to dine, or waiting upon any of your friends, you must certainly fall in somewhat to the taste of the times, and appear as a human creature, which the world interpret, *dressed a little*. A philosopher will easily perceive the insignificance of this ; but it is a tribute we must pay to the customs of people or to the fashion, unless we were people of importance or independence, who can take the liberty to do as they please. If any trivial disappointments in your situation lead you to relish home better, and engage you in study, writing, &c., and making the most of Mr Cruickshanks, it will be a noble acquisition ; your improvement in medical knowledge is the great point ; and remember you have either a physical or chirurgical examination waiting you. Keep up the languages, and try to get to the bottom of everything ; a superficial knowledge will neither answer this nor enable you to practise with satisfaction.”

He writes, on the 24th October : “ Mr Cruickshanks’s lectures are little better than the demonstrations of Aitken. Monro is as far superior in style and phraseology as you can well imagine any two things. He takes much pains in demonstrating, which is all required ; but he is a mere pedant and fop in language and dress. He has done with the bones, and has begun the muscles to-day.”

His father replies : “ As you are not attending Mr John Hunter’s lectures, I am not sure but Mr Smith can oblige you with a copy of them, or notes from them. He is a peculiar kind of man in his way, but has many original thoughts. Could you not get access to hear him some day ? ” He writes in answer : “ I am to get John Hunter’s notes soon.” — “ I am surprised Mr Smith should bestow such commendation upon the lectures here. Mr Cruickshanks has not above fifty, while all the others have at least 200. He gives, in my opinion, a very confused, dry, unmethodical course, far inferior to Monro’s. They spin out the time most stupidly ; and, as they follow no order or ar-

rangement in giving the muscles, they make them quite confused. They will fly from the *sterno-mastoideus* to the *rectus abdominis*, from thence to the *cucullaris*, then to the *buccinator*, without order or method. They take them just as they occur, but I trust more to the dissections than to them. Our resurrection man is taken up, which has produced great want of subjects. There has been a subscription to enable him to carry on his prosecution."

It was long after this ere the medical profession were enabled to escape from the degrading connection here alluded to. Honour to Mr Warburton and the other enlightened legislators who at length procured for us the Act of Parliament, which gives a legal sanction to the pursuit of anatomy !

A letter from his father inquires, "Can you get no opportunity of seeing John Hunter perform an operation in St George's Hospital, or any of the other surgeons of eminence ? I believe there is as much to be seen in our infirmary as in any of these hospitals ; the difference is, that here we have such a number of surgeons, each of whom only attend a short time, and so have a long interval before they come on again ; whereas it requires constant practice to render a surgeon any way neat and perfect in operations. In the London hospitals men of known character are chosen, who, by constant attendance and application, come to a great degree of perfection in all the different parts of surgery."

A letter of 12th Jan. 1788, says : "We are here in great fears about dissecting. They are cutting their fingers, and a number of people have lately died from the same cause. I have not yet begun to dissect." In the same letter he mentions a different subject : "When I called on the Doctor, he was preparing to go out, and the carriage was at the door. He scarce gave me time to speak to him, but hurried me into the vehicle, and without saying a word, drove to Covent Garden Theatre, where, astonishing to tell, I saw a man, ninety years of age, in the character of Shylock, in the Merchant of Venice. You may conceive how he performed, when I inform you that I, who look with such contempt and indifference at those things, was astonished to admiration ; indeed I never saw anything I could call a play before this. But what a prodigy, to see an old man at that time of life acting with such vigour and energy ! The farce was the old man's own ; but I have not told you his name : it is Macklin."

His father then writes : "In my last I told you of J. H.'s examination. He did not give that satisfaction I would have expected from him. His paper was short and trifling (upon issues), and he defended his own thesis very weakly. He was asked the number and situation of the ventricles of the brain, but was very deficient in his account of them, as also in several practical questions. Some he answered well enough. We however appoint-

ed him a second lesson, but gave him a longer time than he wanted for the discussion of it. I hope you will make your own use of this, and improve yourself in anatomy and practical surgery as much as you can." In another letter, 29th January, he adds: "I am glad to hear by Dr Sandeman this day, that you have entered the dissecting room; and I only give you this advice, in case of cutting your finger, to apply a little caustic to the wound immediately; it will give a little pain, but don't regard this."

A subsequent letter says: "Mr M'Pherson paid £21 to St George's Hospital for twelve months, and only stayed six. The doctor is going to ask John Hunter, under whose care he was, to allow me to make out his time, but the result is uncertain."

On 22d March he says: "I write you now with more satisfaction than I have done this some time; for I was really troubled and uneasy at not having had an opportunity of dissecting; but now I am engaged with all the enthusiastic ardour you could wish, for I hope, by the time I have cut up two or three youths, I shall be pretty well acquainted with the human body. I am sorry, however, I have been obliged to lay out more money than I intended, by entering with the great John Hunter, at his dissecting room. As my principal view in coming up here was dissection, I thought it was folly, for the sake of three guineas, to be wholly deprived of it, which must have happened had I continued where I was. I have got in amongst a chosen few, all friends, and old acquaintances. The whole that belong to the dissecting-room are Mr Home, brother-in-law to John Hunter, a very clever young man, and one that has shone forth in the medical world, and will in a still more eminent degree. He is surgeon to St. Martin's large workhouse, and has a pension from Government for some services; but above all, he has taken a liking to me, and will do all he can to serve me, he says. He carried me yesterday to a dissection of one of his patients; it was very kind and obliging indeed. He is to get me made a member of the Lyceum Medicum, a famous society in our neighbourhood; he is president of it. He is to make me a present of a ticket to his course of lectures on *Lues Venerea* which last six weeks. They are very fine indeed. Am I not well off, think you? The next is Mr Bell, at Mr Hunter's, he makes his preparations, &c.; a good lad indeed, and friendly to me. You desire to know remarkable occurrences, and I have just one to tell you, that perhaps you never before heard the like. There is in the dissecting-room a subject in which nature seems to have turned every thing topsy-turvy. The apex of the heart points towards the right side; the large lobe of the liver lies on the left side; the spleen lies on the right side; and several other particulars, which I have not time to tell you of."

All his subsequent letters are in this strain. Such was his zeal,

that even to his sister he writes: "I shall have a fine set of preparations when I come down, as they are all so obliging to serve me; I mean at John Hunter's. I am in the dissecting-room from nine to three."

On 19th April, he notices the weather being so warm as to interrupt the labours of the dissecting-room: "I believe I shall treat myself to the play to-night, I feel so jaded and worn out. John Hunter has been complaining these some days; it seems something resembling a putrid sore throat. He takes two quarts of bark decoction in 24 hours."

It cannot be doubted that in such a situation, and under such a teacher, his acquaintance with the structure of the human body would become familiar and accurate. This was truly the case; and during his professional life, the benefits of this dissecting room education were very conspicuous. It would not alone produce an accomplished surgeon, but it forms the best preparation for the study of disease; and no one who neglects it has a right to expect full success. There are indeed men who are ever thinking of the mere animal structure, and overlook the fact that the patient before them is a living man, who possesses feelings, and has acquired habits, which modify the functions of his body. These men are truly in error. The patient's bedside is the right place for learning disease, but it is learned best by those who have previously studied the structure in the dead body.

At the close of the winter session, he paid a visit to his uncle Dr James Walker at Falmouth, and spent several weeks in that part of the country. He thus writes of the vicarage of Linkenhouse: "It is, next to Lasswade, the most delightful place I ever saw, just Scotland over again. We are quite surrounded with hills and vales; wood and water giving the most pleasing variety. What a contrast with the dead level of the London country! My cousin makes all the butter herself, which is done every morning, but is made by a quite different process from ours. I will let you into the secret: after milking, they put it over the fire in a large ten pint earthen plate, and let it simmer there till the cream begins to bubble up. They then take it off the fire and let it stand two days to ferment a little; after which, cousin, with her own fair hands, presses it about half a minute, at the end of which, the butter is produced. The cream is called clotted cream, and is as thick as porridge almost. The buttermilk is quite sweet, and of this they make puddings for the children. You cannot conceive how fond Cornish people are of pies. Everything enjoying life, whether animal or vegetable, they clap into a pie."

While he was at Falmouth, the surgeon of the Duke, mail packet, was taken ill, and the captain induced him to occupy his

place in the voyage to Quebec. The voyage was not a very agreeable one. There was a great deal of rough weather, and the young surgeon suffered so severely from sea-sickness, that he was not of much service in his professional capacity. The sea-sickness continued during a great part of the voyage, and resisted every remedy, till he thought of a maxim of Hippocrates, that exercise of the upper extremities is good for sickness, and he was compelled to work at the pumps. This severe and continued exertion, with probably the mental effort which attended it, was the means of restoring him to health.

It was for some time expected that he would need to spend the winter in Canada, but he at length succeeded in getting away before the river was frozen over, and he reached Falmouth again in the end of December. In the homeward voyage, an incident occurred which made a vivid impression upon his mind, and which he afterwards referred to with grateful emotion. The run down the St Lawrence was rendered tedious and hazardous by a dense fog. One day, the fog suddenly cleared away so far as to expose to view a rock which was directly in their course, and on which they must have otherwise inevitably struck. Occurrences of this character, escapes from imminent danger, have been noticed by all of us, and ought not to be forgotten.

He spent the winter and spring of 1789 in London, and during this period he continued his anatomical and hospital studies. He was also a good deal occupied with the publication of his father's treatise on small-pox. One of the chapters, "On the Theory and Prevention of Pits," referred to the published observations of Mr Hunter; and the author being desirous of obtaining his opinion, sent him the chapter in manuscript. In reply, he received a letter which I have the pleasure of exhibiting to the society. A single sentence of this letter lets us into his mental character. He says: "I make it a rule not to read, but it is impossible upon all occasions to keep to that rule; and as a fact was to be settled, in which, although I was concerned, yet the public was more, I found myself called upon to assist in the establishment of that fact, whichever way it was; therefore I have read your manuscript."

Truly, had John Hunter read more of the writings of others, even his masculine understanding might have acquired more knowledge than he actually did. But his desire to establish a fact, "whichever way it was," indicated the true spirit of a philosopher, and was the secret of his successful investigations. Would that there were more of it among inquirers at the present day!

About this time Dr Walker wrote to his son respecting his future prospects in life, and received an answer expressing his purpose of settling in Edinburgh, mainly with the view of assist-

ing his father in his declining years. This frank and dutiful communication procured a letter, of which the following extract is worth giving: "Young people that have seen a little of the world might be ready to consider sitting down in such a place as this as unpromising and unequal to their own ideas of things. This led me to open up to you what my ordinary income has been for several years past,—no great inducement to an ambitious mind, but, in my own opinion, a sufficient encouragement for any sober-inclined person who is not seeking very great things for himself in this world, but who would rather wish to pass through it with a moderate competency, a Divine blessing, and laying himself out to be as useful as possible in the line of his profession to poor and rich. In the whole of this matter my thoughts are engaged for your advantage, and in looking round I cannot see any place you could settle in that could afford you an equal prospect. The surgeon of a ship, unless in time of actual war, is an idle life; the army is not much better, and even more unprofitable; yet one of these is commonly the way in which many of our medical youth spend some of the best years of their life before they settle to actual business. After all, it is the Lord alone that can put a blessing on the most rational schemes, and we must look to Him and depend upon Him for it. This I trust you shall obtain, as your motives for being here are pure and disinterested. I thank you most sincerely for this new testimony of your regard and affection for me, and wish I may have it in my power to return it suitably. Your affection for me I never called in question; but I could not use it as an argument to determine your conduct in a matter of so much importance to yourself. In short, I wished you to do this in a free and spontaneous manner, without constraint: but as you have expressed your own sentiments on this matter to my highest satisfaction, and more properly than I could do, I shall there let it rest, praying that you may experience all that happiness, comfort, and success, that your disinterested motives and filial affection merit."

After returning to Edinburgh, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, on 15th September 1791, and manifested his accustomed ardour in all its proceedings. For several years after this, the subject which most engrossed the profession, and divided it into two hostile camps, was the surgical department of the Royal Infirmary. Mr Walker joined the party of the younger surgeons, who demanded the continuance of the existing system, by which every Fellow had a right to two months' practice in rotation. The change which took place, by which the managers selected from the College a certain number of surgeons, was held by him to be a violation of justice, an injury to the patients, as well as to the profession. No one would now propose a return

to the old regime so pungently described, perhaps caricatured, by Dr Gregory in his famous memorials; and yet one would deprecate any arrangement by which the younger members of the profession should be excluded from the advantages of an opportunity of treating surgical diseases on a large scale.

Driven from the Infirmary by what he thought the tyranny of the managers, and indignant at the conduct of the majority of the College in yielding up what he considered the rights of its fellows, he kept very much aloof from both. He very rarely attended the meetings of the college; and, though he did not withhold his contributions to the funds of the Infirmary, yet he continued for many years to feel sorely aggrieved.

He became a successful practitioner. His income, which was entirely derived from his own professional exertions, was amply sufficient for his wants. When his infirm health compelled him to retire from active life, he invested the greater part of his means in an annuity, which permitted him to enjoy many of life's comforts, and among these, one which he valued much, the power of giving to the needy. Often was he deceived in the objects of his benevolence, and it must be acknowledged that he sometimes showed caprice in the way in which he bestowed his benefactions; but he was a kind-hearted and benevolent man, and very many had reason to thank him for his generous and untiring efforts on their behalf.

In later years, an overweening and morbid attention to his own health, which was much impaired by fever and other causes, led to his comparative disregard of every person and every thing which did not bear upon this. Even then, however, there were occasional exceptions, when some one case of disease or of distress interested his mind, and then he threw himself into the case with much of his former energy.

He did not commit to the press any of his writings, numerous as they were, except a "History of a Singular Case of *Petechiæ sine Febre*, accompanied with excessive hæmorrhagies, terminating favourably under the use of the vitriolic acid," which appeared in Duncan's Annals of Medicine for 1797.

He spent several of his latest years at Moffat, which was with him a favourite residence. He esteemed it, and recommended it extensively to invalids, not so much for its mineral water, which he did not himself use, and did not generally prescribe for others, but for its salubrious climate and beautiful neighbourhood. And who that has spent even a few days there, does not recollect with delight its green hills, its clear running waters, its very air, redolent of health? He died here 26th December 1841.

Life is made up of days and years. Each of these periods of time has in it incidents which are interesting to the individual

himself, but little so to the world at large. Every man is surrounded by a circle, of which, however small, yet he is the centre. To a well regulated mind, there is nothing in this to foster vanity; there is much to lead to humility. There were no incidents in Mr Walker's life to call for special remark in a notice of this kind; but I shall attempt to give a few of the salient points in his professional character, which may make the members in some measure acquainted with him, and which may fitly introduce his own letter on stricture.

1. Ardour in the exercise of his profession characterised him during his whole professional life. He may have been erratic in his medical studies, but he was not an idle student. He was peculiar in some of his professional views, but he was not inactive; he was in no respect a common-place or routine practitioner. He very much looked on a case with his own eyes, and treated it on his own views. When the case appeared interesting to him, he devoted to it all his energies, sparing himself neither time nor labour, and neglecting for the moment other cases which had no such importance in his estimation. He occupied hours with the case, watching every new symptom, watching the effects of his remedies, intensely thinking about the means of promoting the patient's welfare. He was certainly less anxious about the number of his cases than about the success of his treatment. It is not to be wondered at that when a case, which to the patient or his friends appears to be important enough, is overlooked by the medical attendant, he should meet with dissatisfaction from them; yet it is possible that the exclusive attention which each receives in turn may compensate for the comparative neglect which has been received. Such was certainly the experience of Mr Walker, and he did retain the confidence of a great number of his patients.

2. Perhaps, in consequence of this very ardour in the treatment of his cases, he demanded a corresponding submission on the part of his patients. He insisted on this even in minute particulars, and resented the neglect of his directions with a severity which might well be called unwarranted. He expected the patient to be unresisting, unhesitating, passive; and when from such passiveness the case became entirely his own, he put forth his entire power. He never showed the same interest when the patient complied with only part of his directions, or when in consultation with another practitioner he felt relieved of part of the responsibility. Indeed in consultation he always felt himself restrained, and the result was very often unsatisfactory to all parties. In professional consultations, how much is there for us all to learn! On the part of the junior, how much reluctance to obtain for his patient the assistance of another practitioner!—on the part of the

senior, how much a sense of his own superiority, and a tendency to cause this to be observed and felt by others ! It is most conducive to the welfare of the sick, and to the advancement of professional knowledge, that the men of superior skill and sagacity shall be cheerfully acknowledged as such by their brethren ; but their superiority will not be the less acknowledged by their abstaining from telling every one of it. There have been, and are still with us, men who are eminent as physicians and as surgeons, and to consult with whom is a pleasure and an advantage.

Medical practitioners of sagacity in other respects, commit grave errors in the tone of their directions to their patients. It is possible to make these so vague, and so contingent on the humour of the patient, or the patient's friends, that the value of the prescription is lowered in their estimation. But it is also possible to be so minute and unbending in particulars which are seen by others to be trivial, that they are led to infer that those directions which they do not understand may be equally troublesome and unimportant. There are particulars respecting diet and medicine, in which it is right to concede to the peculiar habits, or even to the harmless whims of the patient. There are others in which no concession ought to be made ; and if the practitioner should be indulgent enough to yield, he will soon find that his influence for good on his patient's mind has passed from him.

3. No one who was much with Mr Walker will forget how much his ideas upon *influenza* coloured and modified his views of disease. That curious epidemic, which has been witnessed probably by all of us, has characters which cannot easily be mistaken. Its appearance after irregular intervals ; the rapidity of its diffusion among the population ; the severity, but short-lived duration of its attacks ; its simulation of acute inflammatory disease ; but the decidedly injurious influence of depressing remedies ; and the debility which so generally attends and follows it,—are well known and acknowledged by all.

But Mr Walker supposed that the influenza did not terminate when the epidemic had worn itself out ; that an *influence* of some kind remained which tainted the constitution, so that diseases subsequently contracted were of a different character, in consequence of that taint. He thought particularly that cases of febrile and inflammatory disease, occurring after the great influenza of 1802, did not require, and did not tolerate blood-letting, as they formerly had done.

That this view was a correct one, I have no intention of asserting. It is more probable that he ascribed to this *influence* what was more justly due to his own more correct diagnosis between inflammatory and non-inflammatory diseases. There were, how-

ever, many cases of persons whose constitution was materially weakened by that and other epidemics, and who, therefore, behaved to be treated upon principles peculiar, as it were, to themselves. All of us have seen cases of weakened frames, whether from previous malady, from imperfect nourishment, from intemperate habits, from unhealthy dwellings, or from mental depression, where acute disease is not to be treated as in more robust subjects. In such cases, depletion is very guardedly to be had recourse to; stimulants are discriminately to be employed; and the local affection is more to be considered as being an indication of debility, or as an accidental occurrence.

4. He ascribed to medicines, and especially to their combinations, a power over disease which is not generally conceded to them.

During Mr Walker's active life, the surgeons of Edinburgh were apothecaries. They dispensed medicines to their own patients, and had in their houses a shop, or surgery, or study, in which these medicines were prepared. There were very few public laboratories, or shops of chemists and druggists, as they are now usually called. Since then a great change has taken place. Surgeons generally have given up the dispensing of medicines, and accordingly the number and respectability of druggist shops have greatly increased. Nor is the change to be in any respect regretted, because it is not easy for a medical man engaged in practice to attend efficiently to the details of a laboratory. It is of real importance to himself, and to his patients, that his prescriptions shall be correctly made up; but this is more satisfactorily done as a separate trade, and every means should be used to extend this arrangement. It is possible for a surgeon to be his own cutler, as it is to be his own druggist, but, as a general rule, each department of business ought to be conducted by one individual.

Mr Walker's knowledge of drugs was accurate, and his attention to their different qualities, their forms of preparation, and their effects, was very remarkable. He conducted a great variety of pharmaceutical experiments himself, and in the chemical ones he was aided by Dr John Murray, with whom he was in habits of intimacy. The *Materia Medica* is now better understood, and the processes employed in converting vegetable and mineral substances into remedies for the cure of disease, are more philosophical than they were. Mr Walker had not studied many of these; but he gladly received hints of new remedies or new processes from any quarter, and not many years before his death was engaged in inquiries respecting the best preparations of *digitalis* and of *cantharides*.

He used combinations of medicines more generally than others did. He combined aromatics or other stimulants with almost

every remedy which he employed. He seldom or never prescribed an emetic, a purgative, or a diuretic, without guarding it, as he expressed himself, with ginger, cinnamon, or such substances. I am aware that combinations are not fashionable, and that the tendency of the present views is rather to attempt to secure one result by one agent. But the experience of all ages is in favour of uniting two or more substances; and though many of the combinations of former times may have been unphilosophical, yet we may safely retain what is right in these, and reject merely what modern chemistry has proved to be erroneous. I possess numerous prescriptions of Mr Walker, which are valuable in this view.

5. The importance of removing an invalid or convalescent to the country was often dwelt upon by him. He thought that to give him an airing, and then to bring him to his own house in town, was to protract very much his period of feebleness, and that he ought to pass the night in a purer atmosphere. There is more in this than appears at first sight. Although chemical analysis may not be able to detect deleterious substances in the air of some one locality, yet experience may justify us in asserting that there is such an atmospheric constitution; and, while a man in perfect health may be able to tolerate it, yet when he is lowered by disease, it may impress its poisonous influence upon him to the extent of retarding his perfect recovery.

There is another principle calling upon the removal of the invalid, irrespective of the greater or less purity of the respirable medium. The efforts which a man makes to carry on his accustomed laborious pursuits must be unfavourable to his convalescence. It is natural for a man who feels that his labours are necessary for the maintenance of his family, who longs for activity, who knows that he is able for a certain amount of exertion, and who hopes that he may not suffer from a somewhat greater amount, to return to the post of labour too soon, and so to endanger his ultimate recovery. When such a one is removed entirely to a distance from his accustomed scene of labour; when he is precluded from his accustomed duties; when, in addition, he is placed in a sphere where everything is favourable for his recovery; where the natural objects spread before his eye and ear are all cheering; where town hours and town dinners are of necessity abandoned,—a revolution takes place in his weakened frame; his sleep becomes profound, and therefore more refreshing; his digestion becomes quicker, and therefore his appetite sharper; his muscular movements become more firm, and therefore he has more pleasure in walking; and when he returns to his home he brings with him a fresh stock of health, of mental and bodily vigour, which enables him speedily to make up what he may have lost by his absence.

6. Mr Walker insisted much upon the horizontal posture of convalescents from influenza and other debilitating maladies, as tending very materially to advance their recovery. He considered the upright posture as having the most injurious tendency. He exaggerated this as most of his practical cautions, but yet it is a caution of real importance. How often has a convalescent been thrown back by a prolonged upright posture, for the purpose of writing some important letter, or reading some engrossing book ! The feelings of the patient are far from furnishing a correct index of his real ability to bear fatigue, and he ought to be detained on his bed or couch, even when himself longs to hold his head up in some active exertion.

In such cases there is not only the tendency to faint, but there are the œdema of the limbs, the coldness of the feet even before œdema is discernible, the blueish skin,—all showing that the vessels need support which cannot be so well obtained as by the lying posture.

7. In mania his experience was very extensive, and his treatment was eminently successful. What his precise treatment was, I do not exactly know, as he was very reserved in his communications on the subject.* This, however, is certain, that (in accordance with his practice in other diseases) he devoted a large share of his attention to each individual case. His patients were generally of the upper ranks of society, and their treatment was conducted in separate residences in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, with attendants of his own selection and under his own control. He greatly disapproved of blood-letting and of lowering remedies generally, and considered these as being often the cause of protracted recovery, or of no recovery at all. He made much use of the cold bath in various forms. There was nothing of harshness, I believe, in his treatment ; but he aimed at the command of the patient's mind, and when he acquired this, he felt confident of success. I have met with several of his patients, who speak of him, in connection with their illness, with deep affection,

There can be no doubt that at a certain stage of mania complete isolation is indispensable ; and that, for the accomplishment of this, a separate dwelling, with various apartments in which the invalid may roam unobserved, or at least uninterrupted, is very well adapted. But when this stage has been passed through, the judicious arrangements of an asylum, and among these, the regulated social intercourse of patients in a similar state, will conduce to the recovery of all. By Mr Walker's plans, the first stage was conducted most effectively ; but in the second stage, his patients were placed in circumstances less favourable for early convalescence.

* Since writing the above, I have been informed that the circular cage, antimony, and digitalis, with moral control, formed his chief remedies.

8. In his treatment of syphilis, he was thoroughly of the old school. He could not acquiesce in the modern idea of the curability of the disease without the use of mercury. His experience had been very extensive. He had seen many cases in which he ascribed the greatest mischiefs to what he considered an imperfect course; and he believed that a lengthened perseverance in the sovereign remedy alone succeeded in eradicating the poison out of the system. He ascribed the evils attributed to mercury, rather to its abuse, and to its being administered while the patient was attending to his usual employments, exposed to the open air of our variable climate.

We, in the present day, are more disposed to ascribe the success which has doubtless attended treatment such as his, to the diet and regimen to which the patient is always subjected when he is entirely under the care of a judicious surgeon.

9. In stricture Mr Walker's experience was very extensive, and he had a large share of success. His success depended much upon his accustomed assiduous attention to each individual case; but chiefly, he believed, to his thorough and unhesitating confidence in the use of caustic.

It is not my part to defend his practice in this respect. He was not aware of those more correct views and more simple treatment which have been placed before the profession in later years. Whether these views will be universally adopted and carried out in practice, I do not know; but I am convinced that many a sufferer will be relieved, will be cured, by the perineal incision. Mr Walker, however, was a successful surgeon, and his treatment, unphilosophical as it may appear to us in principle, and severe as it certainly was in practice, was yet the means of a radical cure in many inveterate cases.

He was too much in the habit of making a mystery of his plans of treatment, and he was unwilling to exhibit his instruments to others. Liberality was not a very general character of the surgery of a large class of our surgeons half a century ago. Without boasting too much, we may claim for surgeons at the present day a greater share of regard for the profession at large, instead of a selfish regard to their own personal pecuniary interest.

Mr Walker evinced a very warm, almost a paternal regard, for his apprentices; and to one of them, Dr John Graham Stuart, stationed as assistant-surgeon in the Company's service at Ahmedabad, he sent a set of the instruments which he used in stricture, between twenty and thirty in number, specimens of which I now exhibit. He accompanied the present with a letter, dated 19th February 1824, detailing his mode of using them; and it is this which I take leave to submit to the notice of the society. I do it in accordance with the wish of Dr Stuart himself, that others

should be made acquainted with the views of one whom he esteemed, and of whose success he was at times a witness. The whole may appear to some, who do not know how imperfect the caustic treatment of that day was in the hands of others, as a piece of idle antiquarianism. But still the instruments have done good service in their day, and may do so still,—unless the cutting system is perfect, and in need of no help,—in the hands of one who has time and address to use them. The addition to the catheter, too, may be trifling, but it is one of great use in many cases; and the light, hollow, silver bougies are very elegant instruments. The plan of treatment described in the letter has been useful to many, and I do not think that the society will regret that it has been laid before them.

“I need not say with what pleasure I send the caustic instruments, and I hope they will be as successful in your hands as they have been in mine. I need not say the object of the instruments is to apply the caustic not to the anterior part of the stricture, but within it, and that this forms the great difficulty in the treatment, and cause of the tedious cure, particularly in the long or ribbon stricture, as it is called, which is generally more diseased also. I consider, therefore, an instrument that can convey the caustic with undeviating certainty in this manner is invaluable; and I am truly surprised that, with all the genius possessed by modern surgeons, quickened also by the *sacra fames*, nothing of the kind has ever yet been attempted in this way.

“The caustic used with the instrument is potassa, which should be as perfect and uninjured as possible by the air’s action. It must be reduced to fine powder in a small china mortar. To this add from a third to two-thirds of Spanish soap, also in powder. After incorporating them, a little soft water must be cautiously and gradually added, till it gets to the consistence of a paste, or soft mass for pills; and must then be put into a small wide-mouthed phial, firmly corked or stoppered. I sometimes add a small quantity of very pure and finely powdered opium, previously rubbing it with the soap, but whether with any advantage I cannot say. It will be as well not to prepare much of the paste at once. I seldom prepare above a drachm or a drachm and a-half at one time.

“In using it, take a small portion out with a silver knife or probe, and put it upon a bit of soft leather, which rub upon the holes of the instrument, till they are filled. Then wipe it clean with a soft rag, that the paste may be nowhere but in the holes. It must then be oiled, and introduced with as much quickness as the feelings of the patient will admit, down upon the stricture, which you must now *enter*, and after remaining a few seconds within it, move gently backwards and forwards three or four times,

taking care not to go, if possible; beyond the limits of the stricture. After withdrawing it, I sometimes used to inject a syringe full of warm oil, which soothes the parts; and generally give an opiate, which is preferable *per anum*, by means of a small one-ounce syringe, which will convey an ounce of mucilage and 40 or 80 drops of laudanum with great ease.

“ Before introducing the caustic instrument, it will be proper to pass a full sized common or silver bougie down to the stricture, but not to pass it. This widens the passage, removes spasm, and facilitates the introduction of the other.

“ Should much pain, irritation, or suppression take place from the use of the caustic, I need not say fomentations to the perinæum, and opiate clysters, will be required, with the camphor mixture used for three or four times a day.

“ I suppose you are aware that the slough produced by this caustic is quite different from that by the nitrate of silver. The latter is a tough tubular membrane, while by *this* it is gelatinous and bloody, as it acts at once, and dissolves the stricture, particularly if it is spongy and tender, of which we generally can judge by the feel in passing, by its bleeding readily, and by its being accompanied by a puriform discharge. When it is in this state, the potass acts powerfully, and brings away a great deal of gelatinous brownish slough.

“ After the lapse of a few days, it may be as well to examine the stricture by the bougie, so as to ascertain if you have gained ground, and determine both the propriety of another application, and the size of the instrument to be employed; because a single application may have been sufficient to put the stricture in a state to be afterwards managed by the bougie; at the same time, as this mode requires the instrument to be firmly grasped by the stricture in order to its effectual action, we must enlarge the instrument as we gain upon the stricture, at the same time we must guard against undue irritation from the too frequent or too severe application of the caustic, and use as little of it as we can, till we know more of our patient, and what he can bear. Indeed, at all times, as a general maxim, I would say, never use the caustic when you can do your purpose by the bougie, though I know most strictures of long standing will not do without a few applications of the caustic; then the bougie acts with the utmost advantage, after the diseased surface is removed, which is the business of the caustic, and not of the bougie.

“ I have often been surprised at the effects of a single application of caustic, when I have not had an opportunity of examining the patient for two or three weeks after it has been used and when, therefore, all invitation and swelling have left the parts. This should lead us not to be too hurried in renewing our applications; for, till the swelling subsides, we never can know what we have

gained, and better act with caution. Though some recover much sooner than others, I should say a week is the usual time.

"I do not think this caustic acts so readily upon healthy parts as the nitrate of silver. If, after one or more applications, therefore, you find the instrument, when withdrawn, clean, without slough, I should be disposed to consider the parts much improved, and perhaps not requiring the use of more caustic.

"After withdrawing the instrument, it should be cleansed from slough as well as caustic, by dipping it in hot water, and, with a bit of pointed wood or tooth of a comb, clearing the holes; and this will be completed by the aid of a brush, so as to remove all remains of caustic. The instruments are covered with leather slips, which I have used for many years. Too great attention cannot be given to preserve the polish of the instrument; the slightest scratch is like a file to the delicate membrane."

The letter contains directions for the construction of bougies armed with lunar caustic, which he considered an aid in some forms of the disease. He describes a valuable varnish with which he used to coat his bougies. He describes also silver bougies fitted with a joint ivory dilator for the stricture very near the extremity of the urethra, and some other ingenious mechanical contrivances. The letter was written in the confidence of friendship, without study. I have extracted those parts which related chiefly to the caustic treatment.

EDINBURGH :

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