

**Official papers relating to operations performed by ... the Royal Hospital for Seamen, at Greenwich, ... for the cure of the various species of cataract, and the Egyptian Ophthalmia / published by order of the Directors.**

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*The Royal College of Physicians  
from Greenwich Hospital*  
**OFFICIAL PAPERS**

RELATING TO

**OPERATIONS PERFORMED**

*By Order of the Directors of the*

**Royal Hospital for Seamen, at Greenwich,**

ON SEVERAL OF

THE PENSIONERS BELONGING THERETO,

For the Purpose of

*Ascertaining the general Efficacy of the New Modes of Treatment*

PRACTISED BY

**MR. ADAMS,**

FOR THE CURE OF

**THE VARIOUS SPECIES OF CATARACT,**

AND THE

**EGYPTIAN OPHTHALMIA.**

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*Published by Order of the Directors.*

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**LONDON:**

**PRINTED BY W. WINCHESTER AND SON, STRAND.**

**1814.**

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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*IN the Autumn of 1812, the Directors of Greenwich Hospital were informed that great improvements had been recently made by Mr. Adams, late Oculist to the West of England Eye Infirmary at Exeter, in the modes of operating on the different kinds of Cataract; and as the practice of Extraction heretofore performed on the Pensioners had not been attended with the desired success, he was requested to examine the Blind Pensioners, and accordingly reported, that, "with the Surgeon of the Hospital, he had selected " twenty cases for operation, consisting of Cataracts, Closed " Pupils, and the Egyptian Ophthalmia; and as on the " two former Diseases he had recently published some important discoveries, and also successfully adopted a novel " mode of practice in the worst stages of Ophthalmia, he " entertained a confident expectation that the superior efficacy " of his operations over those usually practised would enable him, in some of the most formidable Diseases of the " Eye, to afford relief to many of the Pensioners, whose " cases had been considered incurable; but he utterly disclaimed all expectation of remuneration for his professional services on this occasion."*

*The Pensioners being desirous to be placed under the care of Mr. Adams, the Medical Officers of the Hospital were directed to attend the operations, to afford every*



*assistance, and to report to the Directors the progress and result. A House was accordingly taken in Air-street, Piccadilly, for the accommodation of the Pensioners, and the convenience of the Oculist ; but being found, in many respects, unsuitable, another was afterwards hired in Lisle-street, Leicester-square, every way adapted to the comfort of the Patients.*

*It appearing, by the Reports of the Medical Officers of the Hospital, that the operations performed on the Blind Pensioners by Mr. Adams had been attended with great success, the Directors were desirous of viewing the men, and for that purpose convened a special meeting, at which the Pensioners, as well those who had been under the care of former Oculists, as the Patients of Mr. Adams, were examined and individually interrogated ; and as the effect of the operations performed by the latter, as stated in the Reports of the Physician, Surgeon, and Apothecary, was found to be accurately detailed, the Directors have considered it to be their duty to give publicity to the Official Reports and Proceedings on a subject so interesting to humanity.*



# OFFICIAL PAPERS,

&c.

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(COPY.)

*May 25th, 1813.*

SIR,

CONCEIVING that it will be gratifying to the Governor and Directors of the Royal Hospital to hear that the new practice for the cure of Cataract, and the formation of artificial Pupil, proceeds most favourably on the Pensioners placed under the care of Mr. Adams, I have great pleasure in acquainting you, for their information, that the first set of Patients sent to London, requiring thirteen Eyes to be operated on, are all cured, with the exception of one man, David Hoar, a person of notoriously perverse character, who was attacked with Fever, and sent back to the Hospital for the cure thereof; but even in this case there is every prospect of success, from a repetition of the operation. Eleven other Patients who were sent to replace those already cured, have all been operated on, and with the prospect of complete success (excepting two that had been previously couched by another Oculist), five being already capable of seeing, and the others proceeding as favourably as could be expected.



The superior success of Mr. Adams's new modes of practice, when compared with the operation performed on the Pensioners for the last fifteen years, is very striking. On examining the latter it appears, that out of *twenty-four Eyes*, operated upon, several had been destroyed; in other instances the Pupils had become obliterated, and *one only* had been benefitted, and even in that the success is incomplete.

Among the men already cured, some of the cases are so remarkable as to merit particular notice.

Edward Turner had, during six months that he was a Patient of the London Eye Infirmary, undergone *thirteen* operations; nevertheless, he obtained but very little benefit in one eye, and none in the other: Mr. Adams has cured both by *one operation on each*.

Hartgill had been blind for near twenty years, and was considered by every Oculist of eminence in London to labour under Gutta Serena. Mr. Adams has successfully operated on him, and he is now capable of reading the *smallest print*.

Bray, aged seventy-nine years, is cured of Cataract in both Eyes, and was capable, in the space of a fortnight, of seeing the *minutest objects*.

Douglas, aged thirty-two, with closed Pupils, after having been above five years a Patient of the Oculist before referred to, without experiencing the least benefit, has had an artificial Pupil formed, by which he is enabled to see the most minute



objects with distinctness ; his other Eye has been since operated on, and promises to be equally successful.

I cannot, in justice to Mr. Adams, conclude this Report, without expressing to you how greatly I am indebted to his liberality and disinterestedness in communicating to me much valuable information and instruction relating to Diseases of the Eye, which I trust will eventually be attended with considerable advantage to that class of objects, the afflicted Blind, who constitute no small proportion of the Invalids admitted into this noble Asylum.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

B. M'LAUGHLIN,

*Surgeon.*

*John Dyer, Esq.*  
*Secretary.*

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(COPY.)

*Royal Infirmary, Aug. 26, 1813.*

SIR,

MR. ADAMS's professional avocations requiring his absence from London for a few months, I have to acquaint you, for the information of the Governor and Directors of the Royal Hospital, that all the Pensioners placed under his care for the cure of Blindness have returned to the Hospital ; and I have infinite pleasure in repeating that Mr. Adams's practice and operations upon them have been successful in a most extraordinary degree. Many are perfectly restored to



sight; and all the others, where there was any reasonable prospect of a cure, though as yet necessarily only convalescent, are going on favourably; and should it be the pleasure of the Governor and Directors to review those that have undergone operations, I beg that they may be presented before them, for that purpose, at the next Board at the Royal Hospital.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

B. M'LAUGHLIN.

*John Dyer, Esq.*

*Surgeon.*

*At a Meeting of the Directors of Greenwich Hospital, at that Place, on Saturday, the 28th of August, 1813.*

PRESENT,

LORD VISCOUNT HOOD, Governor.

Right Hon. LORD AUCKLAND,  
Reverend Mr. COOKE,  
Dr. ROBERTSON,

Mr. GOODENOUGH,  
Hon. and very Reverend the  
DEAN of Windsor.  
Mr. ANGERSTEIN.

A LETTER of the 26th instant from the Surgeon was read, representing that Mr. Adams's professional avocations requiring his absence from



London for a few months, all the Pensioners placed under his care have returned to the Hospital; and that his practice and operations upon them have been successful in a most extraordinary degree, many being perfectly restored to sight; and all the others, where there was any reasonable prospect of a cure (though at present only convalescent), are going on favourably.

ORDERED,

That the Secretary do transmit to Mr. Adams copies of the Surgeon's Reports on the above-mentioned subject, and express to him the great satisfaction the Directors have experienced at the result of his skilful and successful operations on the Eyes of the blind Pensioners committed to his care, and the high sense they entertain of his gratuitous services, and unceasing attention; and also to thank Mr. Adams for the liberal and important scientific information he has communicated to the Surgeon of the Hospital relative to the treatment of Diseases of the Eye.

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*Royal Infirmary, Dec. 27, 1813.*

SIR,

WE enclose herewith, for the information of the Directors, separate Reports of the results of the *new* and *old* operations for the cure of Cataract which have been practised upon the Pensioners of



the Royal Hospital, the great disparity in which cannot fail to make a strong impression on the minds of the Honourable Members of the Board.

In order to bring them equally acquainted with the extent of the failures in extracting the Cataract, as formerly practised, as well as with the great success of Mr. Adams's improved modes of curing that Disease, we have given a detailed description of the result of each, with the present state of the Eyes which have been submitted to the trial of the two Systems.

The proportion of Eyes totally destroyed by the operation of extraction amounts to one-half the number operated upon; to this the success of Mr. Adams, more particularly in the cases which had been considered incurable, as well as those previously operated upon without benefit, forms a very striking contrast, as it will be seen that his operations have failed but in one instance.

To enable the Board fully to appreciate this success, we think it proper to point out, that even in the men whose vision is not at all, or but partially, benefited (with the exception of Ford), the operations were as perfectly executed as on those whose sight is completely restored. To the disease of the Optic Nerve, therefore, and not to the failure of the operation (as was the case where extraction had been formerly performed), is to be



attributed the want of that perfectly successful issue which is so conspicuously displayed in the "*unexceptionable cases.*"

This diseased state of the Optic Nerve in those Patients was originally apprehended by Mr. Adams ; and when, at their urgent solicitations, he was prevailed upon to perform the necessary operations, he stipulated, that, should the event confirm his unfavorable opinions, we should attest the circumstances under which they were undertaken.

It is, however, very important to have ascertained, by actual experiment, as Mr. Adams has done on several of the Pensioners, that the Optic Nerve, although so much diseased as to have deterred a former Practitioner from operating, yet, by the removal of the Cataracts, and subjecting the Eyes to a particular plan of discipline, their functions have been sufficiently recovered to afford useful, and sometimes almost perfect, vision. An instance of the latter is shewn in the case of Hartgill, blind for nearly twenty years, as supposed, by all the highest authorities in London, from Gutta Serena, for which disease he had been treated. Bray's and Wilkins's perfect restoration to sight are little less extraordinary, from the great age of the former, and the latter having had an artificial Pupil formed after a complete obliteration of that aperture,



by an unsuccessful operation of extracting the Cataract, performed seven years since.

These, together with the other cases included in the two last divisions of the Report No. 2, prove that a very large proportion of Persons unhappily afflicted with Blindness, and hitherto considered incurable, are now susceptible of relief from the new and improved operations, and the after-management of the Eyes, practised by Mr. Adams.

In addition to the gratifying contents of the second Report, we think it our duty to state, for the information of the Board, that Mr. Adams has discovered a mode of curing the Egyptian Ophthalmia, which has been successfully practised upon several of the Pensioners, some of whom had been blind for three or four years, and given up as incurable by the most eminent Oculists then in London. The communication that this destructive and hitherto intractable Disease admits of cure we conceive will be gladly received by the Board, and the promulgation by Mr. Adams of this important discovery be considered as a great *national desideratum*.

By the adoption of his practice we are of opinion, from what we have seen of its effects, that a very large proportion of the Seamen and Soldiers, who

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now request your attention to the comparative results of the different operations (the *new* and *old*), as specified in the official Reports of the Physician, Surgeon, and Apothecary to your Institution; which, with the personal examination you intend this day to make of the two sets of Patients, must necessarily establish, beyond all doubt, the decided superiority of my modes of operating, over that which had been previously practised on the Pensioners.

And here I beg leave to repeat the observation I made at my first interview with your Honourable Board, that it is the *operation*, and not the *operator*, which I deprecate. Were he to adopt my operations, or were I to follow his, the results of the two modes of practice would probably be nearly the same as they are now found to be; nor shall I hesitate to add my firm belief, that superior manual dexterity is not to be found in this kingdom, than is possessed by the operator whose efforts have proved so unavailing, in the many instances submitted to your consideration. It is, I conceive, the want of a personal experience of the superior efficacy of my practice, which prevents his adopting it with the same promptitude, as another Oculist of long-established celebrity has done, since he saw me operate; who, before that period, was distinguished by his practice, as well as writings, as one of the warmest advocates of the operation of Extraction.



It may be proper to inform your Honourable Board that I have not confined myself to any individual operation in the treatment of the Pensioners blind of Cataract intrusted to my care. My instruments and modes of operating have varied as the nature of the case required. Where the consistence of the Cataract has admitted of an immediate and complete division, I have placed the separated portions in a situation which ensured their absorption in five or six weeks. In these cases, the general success of the operation exceeds all credibility with those who have been in the habit of witnessing the results of other modes of practice. Of upwards of *Eighty Persons* born blind of Cataracts, upon whom I have performed this operation, I have not lost an Eye. In three instances alone, in which I was prevented from repeating the Operation, it did not produce the anticipated benefit; and I should consider myself unfortunate were I at any time to be less successful in an equal number of persons who became blind from Cataracts after birth, provided they admitted of being treated in the manner already described, and the health of the Patients was in a state favourable for the operation. Hence arises a very important question: To what period of life does this particular practice apply? To which I have a ready answer; That I have *never failed* in being enabled to effect this necessary division in persons under *forty years* of age; very rarely in those between *forty* and *fifty*, and have frequently suc-



ceeded in persons in the most advanced periods of life.

Where the Cataract is too hard and solid to admit of this immediate division, I do not attempt, as was my former practice, to effect its absorption by a frequent repetition of the operation; but I at once extract it. This, however, is accomplished by a process *totally different* from that I have felt it a duty to deprecate; a process which I must claim to be novel, and which happily attains the highly important desiderata which had been hitherto considered *unattainable*, while it obviates the many causes of failure which rendered the usual mode of Extraction so generally unsuccessful. From the principle upon which it is founded, and the favourable results of its termination during the last two years that I have extensively practised it, I feel myself warranted in asserting that it possesses the utmost degree of excellence which it is *possible* for Extraction to arrive at, and that its general success will prove nearly as great as the Operation for the removal of the soft Cataract. To deter other persons from claiming it as their invention, or anticipating me in its communication to the public (as was the case with my Instruments and operation for the cure of the *soft Cataract*, and my successful revival of an obsolete Operation for *Artificial Pupil*), I have requested Mr. M'Laughlin to record on the Hospital Books, the different stages of this operation, as he



has seen me perform it on several of the Pensioners.

In many cases an artificial Pupil has been made, as well as the cure effected of the Cataract, with which the disease of Obliterated Pupil was complicated. Again, where the Pupil, though not obliterated, was much contracted from Adherent Cataract, a different operation was practised. In other instances I have removed Secondary or Membranous Cataracts, which had come on after the usual mode of Extraction had been to all appearance perfectly accomplished.

I have also in my treatment of the Pensioners ascertained a fact of very great practical importance, which will in a great degree explain the general bad success of the Operation of Extraction, as it is usually performed; namely, that the Vitreous Humour was in a state of dissolution nearly in one half of the Eyes on which I operated. This is a diseased change which can rarely be perceived before the performance of the operation, and which authors agree must occasion a total destruction of the Eye, whensoever the Cataract is extracted in the usual manner. In these cases I performed an operation of a different kind from any of the former.

The happy result which has attended such a combination of practice, (by which peculiar and ap-



propriate Instruments and Modes of Operation have been adapted to each variety of the disease) proves that those who pursue one beaten track, in all cases, must necessarily fail in a very large proportion of them ; and still further accounts for the bad success formerly attending the Operation of Extraction on the Pensioners.

I trust that it will not be considered as irrelevant to the subject of the present communication to inform you, that there are different modes of effecting the cure of Cataract by the *Absorbent Practice*. My friend and preceptor, the late Mr. Saunders, pursued a system different from that which I have so warmly supported in this Letter. The operation which he preferred had been performed *thirteen times* during six months on one of the Pensioners (Edward Turner) without a removal of the disease. On one of my private patients the same operation had been performed *seventeen* times prior to my having been consulted, *ten* times on one Eye, and *seven* on the other, in the course of as many months, and with no better success. In both instances I perfected the cure by a single operation on each Eye ; so that, if these patients had originally been treated according to my mode of practice, *one*, or, at most, *two* Operations, would have effected the complete removal of the Cataracts in the space of five or six weeks. This difference in the two modes of operating, it is of great importance to myself distinctly to spe-



cify, otherwise, from its being generally known that I was the sole confidential Pupil and Assistant of the late Mr. Saunders in his operations for Cataract, among those who are now pursuing the profession of an Oculist, it might be considered by many, who have not seen my Work on Diseases of the Eye, that I still, as in the commencement of my practice, follow his modes of operation, whereas I have long since found it necessary wholly to abandon them.

I must now, my Lords and Gentlemen, beg leave to apologize for occupying so much of your time and attention; but I trust that you will attribute the length of my present communication to an anxious desire to give you some explanation of the nature of those Operations, by which I have been enabled so successfully to fulfil your wishes in the treatment of the Pensioners.

While I offer my most grateful acknowledgments for the politeness and condescension, with which, collectively and individually, you have been pleased to receive my communications, and to acquiesce in those arrangements which I presumed to recommend for the better trial of the important experiment just decided,—permit me also to express my warmest obligations to the Medical Officers of your Institution, for their liberal and zealous co-operation. In an especial manner it



becomes me to mention the humane and able assistance afforded by Mr. M'Laughlin, to which may be attributed much of the successful issue of my experiments.

I have the honour to remain,

With the highest respect,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

WILLIAM ADAMS.

*To the Hon.*

*The Directors of Greenwich Hospital.*

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*At a Meeting of the Directors of Greenwich Hospital, at that Place, on Monday, the 10th of January, 1814;*

PRESENT,

CAPTAIN BROWELL, *Lieutenant-Governor.*

LORD AUCKLAND,  
Reverend Mr. COOKE,

|| Mr. YENN,  
|| Dr. ROBERTSON;

THE Board resumed the consideration of the Letter of the 27th of last month, from the Physician, Surgeon, and Apothecary, and of the Report which accompanied it, detailing the effect of the operations performed by Mr. Adams on several of the Pensioners afflicted with Cataracts, and other Diseases of the Eyes; and the Physician being at the Board, Mr. Adams, and also the



Apothecary and Surgeon's two Assistants (the Surgeon being absent by indisposition), were called in; and the Board, with a view of ascertaining the comparative success of the different modes of Practice, in Cases of Cataract and closed Pupil, proceeded to examine the Pensioners on whom operations had been performed by other Oculists of undoubted character and eminence in their Practice. It appeared that many of these Pensioners had irrecoverably lost their sight, the Eye being in several instances entirely sunk; and that, except in one instance, they had not experienced the desired relief.

The Pensioners who had been under the care of Mr. Adams were next examined and interrogated, and their respective Cases were compared with the Report enclosed in the above-mentioned Letter from the Physician, Surgeon, and Apothecary; and the Board were much gratified by so many instances of the great success which had attended the operations of Mr. Adams. The effect of those operations appeared to be accurately detailed in the Report in question.

Mr. Adams then laid before the Board a Letter of this date, stating at considerable length his modes of Practice; and he also personally explained the nature and effects of the several operations performed by him for Cataract, and in forming an Artificial Pupil. In the result the



Board expressed to Mr. Adams their entire satisfaction, and requested he would select such other of the blind Pensioners belonging to the Hospital whose Cases may be treated with any prospect of success; and that he would perform such operations on them as in his judgment may be calculated to afford relief; and, then, together with the Medical Officers, he withdrew.

It being evidently desirable that publicity should be given to the success which has attended Mr. Adams's operations in restoring to sight so many Pensioners of the Hospital;—

ORDERED,

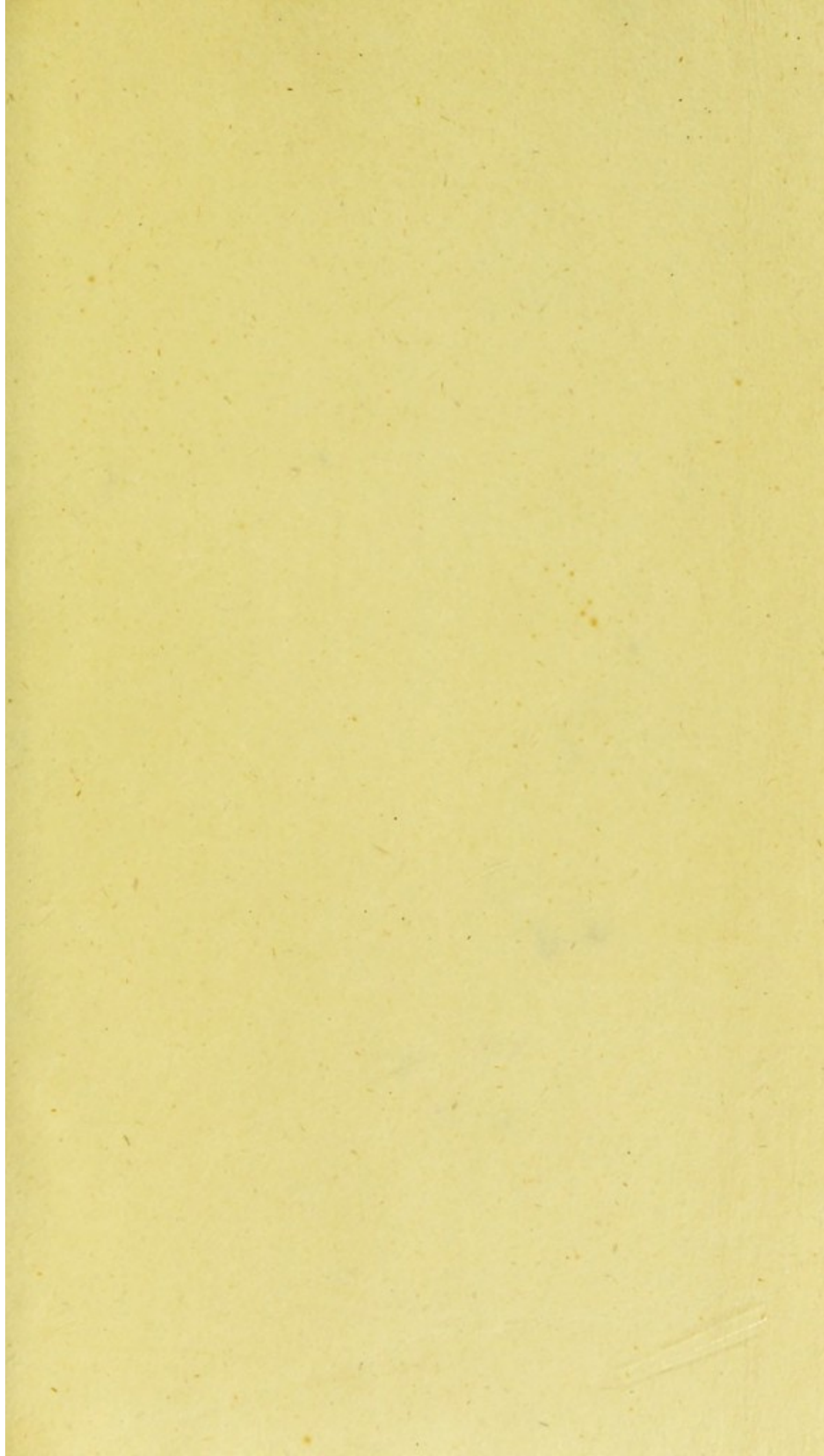
That the Letter and the Report above mentioned from the Medical Officers of the Hospital, together with Mr. Adams's Letter of this date, the Surgeon's two Letters of the 26th of May and 28th of August last, and the proceedings of the Board relative to this subject, be forthwith printed and published.



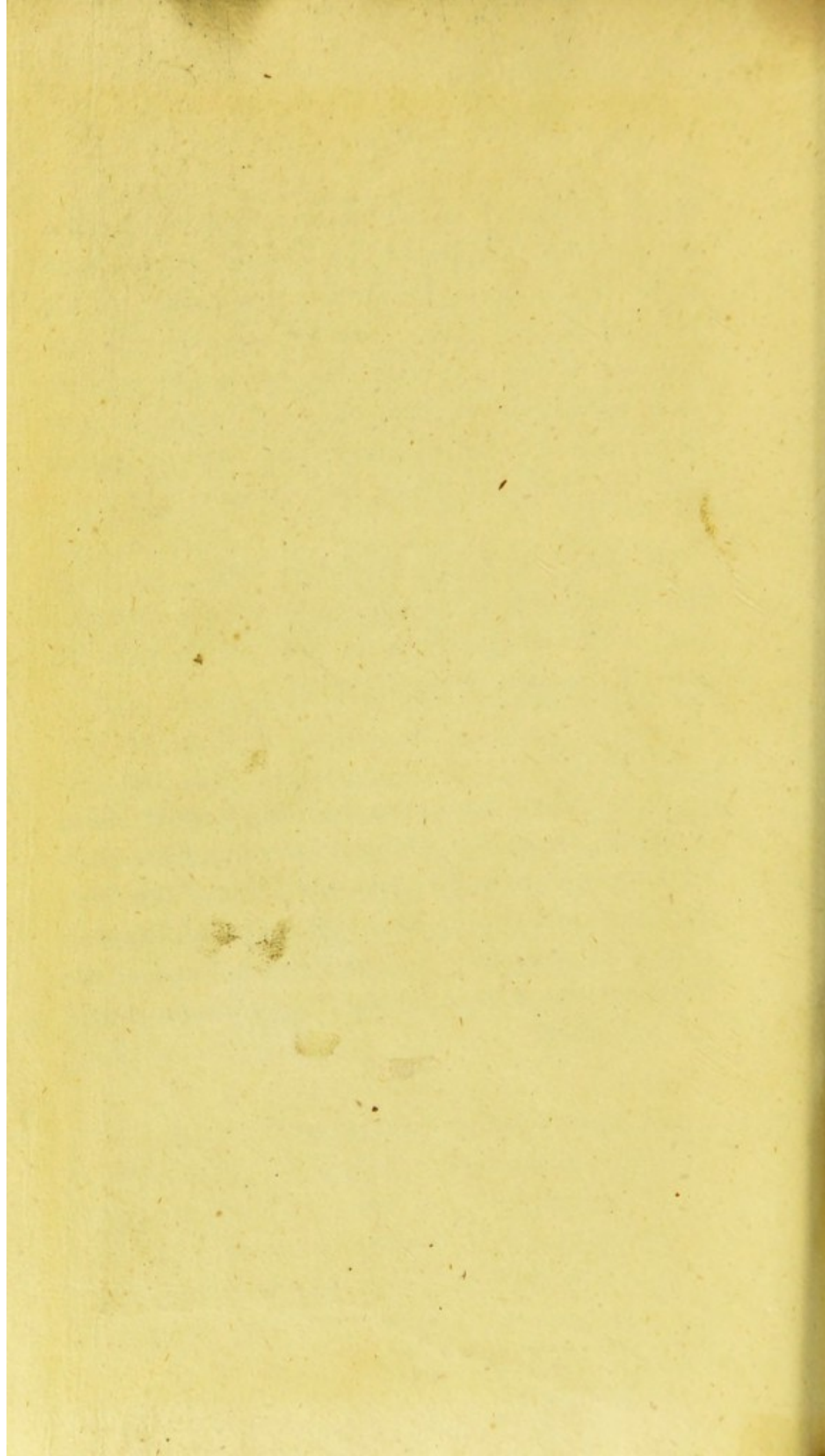
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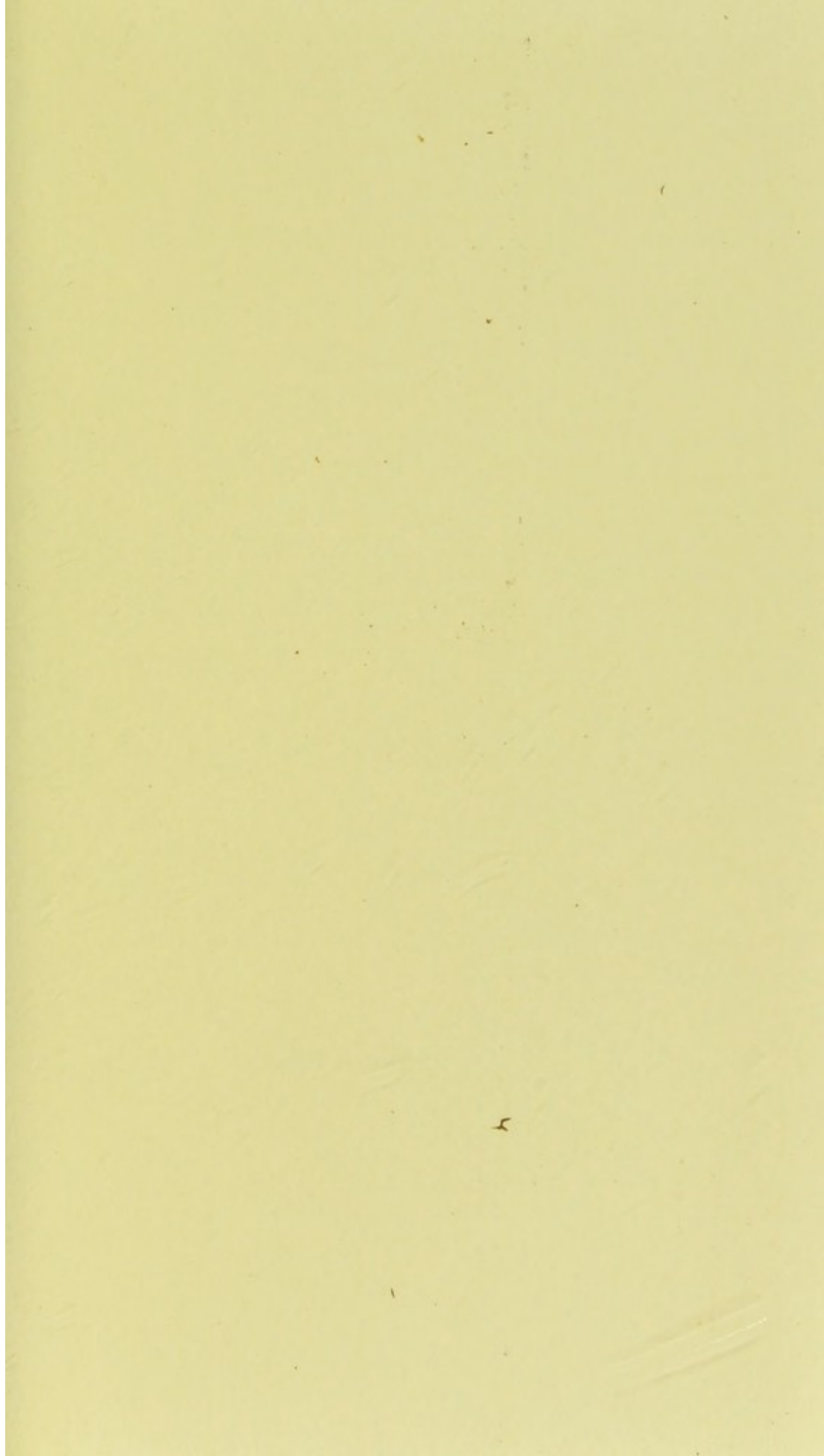
Ordered, That the Letter and the Report above mentioned from the Medical Officers of the Hospital together with Mr. Adams's Letter of this date, the Surgeon's two Letters of the 29th of May and 29th of August last, and the proceedings of the board relative to this subject, be forthwith printed and published.



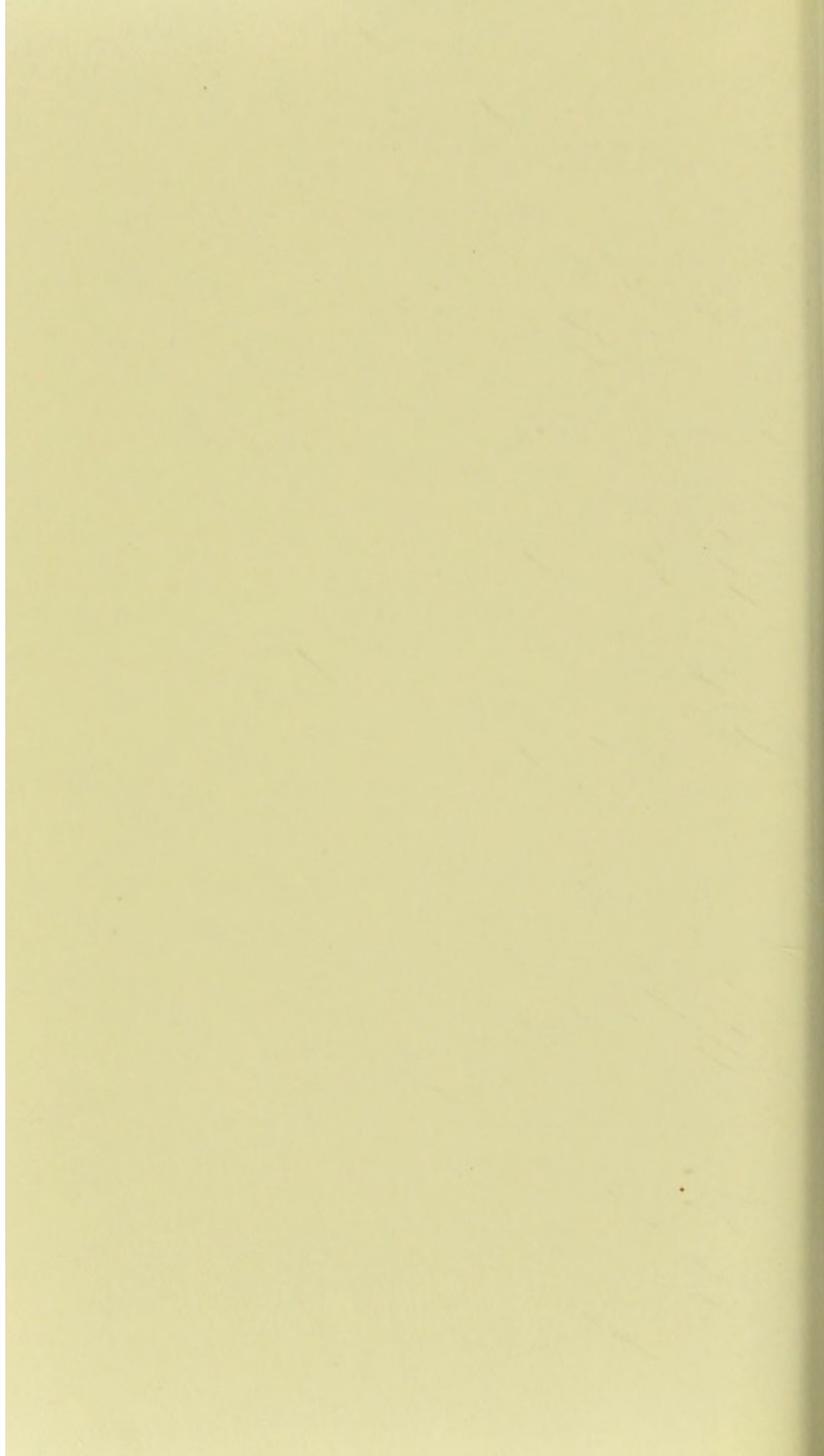














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