

## **Letters from Dr. Baillie, with remarks / by John Robertson.**

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LETTERS

FROM

DR. BAILLIE,

WITH

REMARKS,

BY

JOHN ROBERTON.

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LONDON:

Printed for J. J. STOCKDALE, 41, Pall Mall.

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1817.



LETTERS

FROM

DR. BAILEY

WITH

REMARKS

BY

JOHN ROBERTSON

LONDON:

Printed by J. G. Broomfield, 11, Pall Mall.

1817.

## CORRESPONDENCE

WITH

D R. B A I L L I E,

&c. &c.

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“ Thus we are best of all led to  
“ Men’s principles by what they do.”

HUDIBRAS.

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IT is always a painful task, too painful to be rashly undertaken, to make public a private correspondence. Where, however, my professional and moral character, my interests, and my feelings are made the wanton sport of those who think themselves too firmly seated ever to be shaken, I am bound to wave all minor delicacies. Let those who are equally confident in their integrity, meet all and disclose all with similar promptitude. The following pages are in explanation of my own conduct; and explanation is always the surest defence, or the most certain condemnation. Those who would shrink from investigation, by pretences



of decorum and etiquette, are welcome to the inference which the world will naturally draw.

It is now well known that I had composed a medical work, which early and instructed habits of respect made me wish to dedicate to Dr. Baillie. Accordingly I wrote him the following letter :

SIR,

It will give me pleasure to have the honor of dedicating to you my publication, now in the press. The subject is the anatomy, physiology, pathology and treatment of diseases of the generative system. I have sent you a few sheets, of what has been printed, that you may judge of its general tendency.

I have the honor to be,

Your obedient humble servant,

JOHN ROBERTON.

*Edinburgh,*

*May, 1810.*

This letter, as I had no right to ask a vague or unlimited permission, pretty explicitly explained the objects of my work, which Dr. Baillie, of course, either knew, or ought to have known, would require a very explicit and unqualified discussion of subjects of the greatest delicacy. He knew also that such a discussion must necessarily impugn the doctrines of his relative and colleague, Sir Everard Home. Thus far, he anticipated rightly : but his answer will show that he also



anticipated something not quite so reasonable, that I should sacrifice my opinions and my principles, the cause of science, of truth and of humanity, to the honor of dedicating my work to him. His answer shall speak for itself.\*

*To Dr. Robertson.*

SIR,

I cannot avoid being gratified by the honor which you propose to confer upon me, in dedicating to me your valuable publication. I need hardly remind you that Mr. Home (now Sir Everard) is a relative of mine by marriage, and therefore I hope that no severity of expression will accompany any observations which you may chuse to make concerning his opinions.

I remain, Sir, your most

obedient humble Servant,

May 18, 1810,

M. BAILLIE.

*London.*

“No severity of expression!” I,—as a professional man, was to publish, and Dr. Baillie, as another professional man, was to sanction a work passing lightly and tenderly over the most dangerous errors! and, according to his creed, what my senior did not hesitate to sanction, his junior must not hesitate to publish! Dr. Baillie might thus wrap himself up in that secure professional repu-

\* Dr. Baillie's original letters are in my possession, which I shall show to any gentleman who may wish to see them.



tation, which had been bequeathed to him, while I who had a professional reputation to acquire, must at his nod, hazard all my fame and all my prospects ! truly this was the alliance of the giant and the dwarf, wherein the *great* doctor was to have all the advantage, and the *little* one all the injury !

“ No severity of expression ! ” — Who was to judge of the severity ? Dr. Baillie who *had* an interest, might prefer compliance to truth : I, who had *no* interest, might and did prefer truth to compliance ! neithersolicitation, interest, nor power should or could have swayed me, unless that which I have always felt, and which Dr. Baillie ought equally to have felt, the interest of science and of humanity.

Still, however, Dr. Baillie was as much entitled to fix the terms of his permission, as I was entitled to reject them. It might fairly be a matter of *stipulation* ; and if relationship to Dr. Baillie could consecrate error and make wrong right, or if he preferred the concealment of Sir E. Home's errors to the development of truth, I had no right to dispute his choice, either as a matter of taste or of conscience—*Nor did I*. As I declined the purchase, I did not solicit the bribe ! Dr. Baillie with all his power, and all his patronage, could not bid high enough for such a compromise, as my surrendering truth to Sir E. Home. This was my reply :



*To Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

As *severity of expression*, respecting the opinions of any one, is but a relative term, I feel myself a little at a loss precisely to know what you imply by that term in the letter with which you have honored me.

With regard to Mr. Home, or any other person, I assure you, Sir, that no expression shall be used but such as I do believe will admit of the most minute scrutiny. But yet no name whatever shall prevent my asserting what I judge right; and surely neither Mr. Home nor any other man, of true philanthropy, will object to the improvement of the healing art, however much it may tend to expose his errors.

Still, as my critical remarks, throughout the work, will be equally severe, and equally complimentary, wherever causes appear for this, in the works of any author whose name I may mention, I will thank you to let me know if, thus influenced, you object to my dedicating the book to you.

When I first proposed to dedicate this book to you, it did not occur to me that Sir Everard Home, whose opinions are freely discussed in the course of it, is your relative. But, when you permitted me to address it to you, you evinced your conviction, that, in such discussions, personal or private motives have not influenced my



conduct. It is not, indeed, the personal or private, but the published opinions alone, of authors, that I have examined. I know also that I am, in common with others, liable to similar treatment, and I am sure I shall feel no other emotion, in having my own errors pointed out, than that which will lead me to the correction of them on the first opportunity.

From Sir Everard's doctrines, being so closely allied to the subject of the present publication, an examination of his opinions was absolutely necessary to my plan. But I do assure you, that, although I have spoken of them perhaps with some severity, I feel the highest respect for the industry and scientific researches of that gentleman. His labours in Comparative Anatomy will at all times deservedly place him high in public estimation.

In dedicating this work to you, I cannot help remarking, that I am perhaps influenced by other sensations, and actuated by different feelings, from those usually felt on similar occasions. In the earlier periods of my life, I listened with the most lively interest to the tales of my native village, respecting the toils and difficulties, in the midst of which, and consequently in unnoticed obscurity, those celebrated men, Dr. William Hunter, Mr. John Hunter, and Dr. Cullen, struggled to arrive at that



celebrity which at last they attained; and I contemplated with delight their well-earned fame. Such reflections, even now, make me proud of having been brought up in the place which gave birth to such distinguished characters.

Permit me to add, that the gratifying reflection of your also being a native of that place, on which, from your justly acquired fame, you have been enabled, annually, to confer so many marks of your benevolence, gives me greater pleasure than I shall here attempt to describe.

Reflecting on you all, as models for the imitation of those who follow you in the same honorable career, I subscribe myself, with the greatest respect and esteem.

Dear Sir,

Your most obedient,

And very humble servant,

JOHN ROBERTON,

*Edinburgh,*

*June 1810.*

Still, however, Dr. Baillie wished the dedication, and still he wished me to decline an examination of Sir Everard's opinions. Calculating the exposure of this dear kinsman by his doctrines, rather than by my temper, he wrote me another letter, earnestly requesting my forbearance. He will rejoice to hear, that I have unluckily mislaid this letter, but I pledge my honor and every thing dear to



man, that it had this purport, and so soon as I am fortunate enough to lay my hands on it, (for I am sure it is somewhere among my papers) it shall be laid before the public. Perhaps Dr. Baillie has a copy—and, if he has, perhaps he will not wish to show it. Here, however, follows my reply, which, in its very outset, plainly appears to have been written in answer to some letter of Dr. Baillie's which had not been answered before.

*To Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

*June 1810.*

Perhaps, strictly speaking, any reply from me, after your last very polite and much esteemed letter, may be unnecessary; but, as I wish no misunderstanding to exist, respecting the principles upon which I proceed, in my criticisms on any work, I am induced again to trouble you.

I may mention that it has been, and I hope ever shall be, an invariable rule with me, entirely to separate the subject to be examined from *every other circumstance connected with its author*, unless such as are in some measure immediately involved by it. Personal and private affairs, of course, never came under this head.

With regard also to the degree of severity of expression employed in such tasks, I always conceive that it should be entirely regulated, first by the acknowledged eminence of the author, whose works are under examination, and next by the importance of the subject itself. For if the au-



thor has acquired a name in the world the public are partial to all he either does or says, while, in common with other less celebrated men, he is certainly apt to form erroneous opinions. That is my reason for being of opinion that the works of such men ought to be most carefully scrutinized.

When the subject too is not one of little importance, but one which interests the comforts if not even the lives of millions, it not only ought not for a moment to remain unexamined, in every point, but it also ought to be praised or exposed in language suited as nearly as possible to its importance. Thus subjects of such great public importance as those which I have attempted to examine, have been treated in language which seemed to *me* proportioned to that importance, as well as to the celebrity of the author himself.

But to lay these general matters aside, I may conclude by remarking that I always have acted, in my literary pursuits, with candour, and I trust with proper moderation. Although I am conscious that I may sometimes be severe it has alone been upon the principle I have stated above; and even, pure as that is in my own opinion, I have never engaged in such tasks without much uneasiness, and have never finished them without regret proportioned to the severity I had been compelled to use.

You probably may have some recollection of the retired situation in life, which my relations



chose, and consequently the little I had to expect from their exertions in putting me forward in the line of my profession. My sole dependence, therefore, rested on my own industry and unwearied attention to the cultivation of that profession, to which alone I had to depend for my future comforts in life. I soon was induced to pay some attention to points not much, indeed, in my opinion, not at all understood previous to my investigations. These, at length, naturally led me to a more extensive consideration of diseases of the generative system, and consequently to the works of those authors who were celebrated in that line. Mr. Home's, among others came in my way, and from the many imperfections which they seemed *to me* to contain, and from Mr. Home's celebrity, I deemed them a fair subject for critical examination. You are related to Mr. Home and I assure you, so far from my wishing to take any unfair advantage of his works, there are few men with whom I should wish to be on better terms than with him. I myself profess to be a liberal minded being, always ready to retract an error, when pointed out to me, without thinking the worse of my adviser, or blaming him for his having seen the right side of the question, when I myself only saw the wrong. I really wish the same sort of spirit were more universally diffused, and not, as is too commonly the case, in pointing out an error in any man's *public character*, have it supposed that you



allude to his *every private and most sacred transaction*.

If, however, you do not approve of these principles I must forego the pleasure of publicly addressing you at present, and chuse another opportunity, which I hope shall be soon.

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOHN ROBERTON.

Perhaps it was writing on the sands, to attempt any impression on my worthy correspondent, but the concluding paragraph destroyed his double hopes, of obtaining the dedication, and saving his kinsman. Natural vanity and natural affection had a sharp conflict. Vanity, however, got the better; and by the following letter Dr. Baillie accepted the dedication *at discretion*; and that too couched in language of increasing respect.

*To Dr. Robertson.*

DEAR SIR,

I thank you for your last obliging letter. I accept most willingly the honor which you intend me, and I am sure that your observations upon other authors will be made in the spirit of candor and liberality.—I wish you all success in your profession.

And remain, Dear Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

June 16, 1810,

M. BAILLIE.

London.



His recollection of this letter being now refreshed, Dr. Baillie has free licence to chuse between its unconditional acceptance of the dedication, and the indispensable conditions of his letter in the Medical Journal and in Bell's Messenger. If his conscience be of that neutralized sort, which can permit him to publish, at two different times, two diametrically opposite assertions, and wish to pawn each on the world as equally true, I may be very careless of the authority of his censure. Nay I am not quite sure that the foul word of Dr. Baillie will not be the fairest dealing he can show me. An honest man can always defend himself against slander: the praise of some men is not always so easily parried.

My volume was published, and my redoubtable patron was gratified with his dedication, until he perused the book—he then began to mistake severity of *fact* for “severity of *expression*,” and instead of directing his rancour at Sir Everard's erroneous opinions he chose to fling his venomd shafts at *me*. By this time he had sorely repented himself of the dedication, because he now found that the indulgence of his pride had scarcely compensated for its annoyance. What! a book dedicated to Dr. Baillie! exposing the erroneous doctrines of Sir Everard Home! and with his permission! nay even at his request!—There was no enduring it!—All the vengeance of the party was accordingly to be discharged upon the luckless author, who



having vended these accumulated abominations, must and SHALL be extinguished !

Alas ! had I followed the hue and cry of the day ; had I taken to *practicing physic as a trade* without troubling myself about *curing diseases* ; had I joined the mercenary coalition and enlisted under the banners of their leader, instead of investigating and advancing my profession, I should not at this day have been the object of Dr. Baillie's animosity, nor held forth, as the lawyers say, " to the example of all others offending against " his crown and dignity."

There are physicians, grave and ancient men, who keep their retainers on foot, to cry down every thing like critical investigation, scientific improvement, or simplicity and utility of practice. They can no more retrace their studies than they can recal their youth, and a competitor younger, more active, more industrious, or more penetrating throws them into all the rage of impotent terror. —Ignorance hath no appetite for knowledge :—its highest exertion is to suppress talent.

When my book was printed, I came to reside in London. The artillery was now drawn up against me, and the master gunner was ready with his match. I was simple enough to be vexed at this display of Dr. Baillie's hostility, having all my life devoted myself to the *science* of my profession, and left its *arts* to the Doctor and his



party. I have since been sufficiently taught, that an old Doctor can be very civil and very sly, that he can openly wish a man success, and, at the same moment, whisper him to the devil. Perhaps, however, while I remained in Edinburgh Dr. Baillie would have wished me well enough, because I was at a distance—perhaps it was only my journey southward that displeased him, being then too likely to interfere upon his more manageable friends. For sometime he felt I had spurned at his attempt to be his professional coadjutor and sycophant, and now he began to fear that I was not formed to be his professional dependent.

But how was I to be whipped out of London by these whippers-in? Dr. Baillie began the experiment by the following letter.

*From Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

I have learnt lately, *from good authority*, that you propose to publish either a part or one of my letters to you. This information surprised me very much, because it is most unusual for such a thing to be done, without the consent of the writer of the letter being first asked and obtained. I cannot however give my consent to this measure, because in my opinion there would be a great impropriety in it. I request therefore that you will not publish any letter or part of a letter from me to you, or if it be already printed, that you will be



so good as direct that part of your publication to be cancelled.

I remain, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

*Windsor,*

M. BAILLIE.

14 *October*, 1810.

I suspected something was on foot against me, nor indeed could I have readily been in ignorance of it; but I restrained myself sufficiently to make the following civil and forbearing reply.

*Answer to Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

Your letter of the 14th reached me within these few minutes and then only by accident. Be assured, Sir, I value too highly the honor of your correspondence and the candour and liberality of your communications, to take the very ungentlemanly liberty of which, by some strange misconception, I have been accused.

I have many apologies to make, for not having, till now, sent you a copy of my work, which though yet unpublished, has been laying ready for you nearly four months. The delay arose from the embarrassments of Sir Richard Phillips, the intended publisher, which led me to believe that a new title page would be necessary; and it was my wish not to send you an imperfect copy.

Perhaps your friend may be able to direct your attention to the passage alluded to in

your letter, which, I think, he has misunderstood.

May I beg the favor of you not unnecessarily to expose the work till it can be known when and how it may be published.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOHN ROBERTON.

To which the Doctor rejoined.

*From Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

I return you many thanks for the present of your work which you were so good as to send me some time ago, but which I only received here yesterday. I shall take an early opportunity of reading it, and shall be careful not to put it into the hands of any other person, till it is fairly published.

I remain, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

*Windsor Castle,*

M. BAILLIE.

*November 10th, 1810.*

So then—in 1810 he was to take an early opportunity of reading the book, which in 1816 he declared he had never read, even in the same breath while criticizing its contents!—And where, I should like to know, was the “good authority,” upon which he experimented against me an unfounded charge? I was not to be bribed into be-



coming one of his understrappers—I was not to be bullied into suppressing the exposure of inveterate or family errors ; and Dr. Baillie was as unpersuadable, not to acknowledge a wrong, as I was determined not to surrender a right. But thus it always is ! whiffling and intemperate anger baulks itself by its own confidence ; challenging the combat which it cannot maintain, and provoking the retort which it cannot oppose ! I however, felt that, like an awkward bear, I had overturned the hive, and my ears, of course, would be buzzed and stung ; but, when I have brushed away the drones, Dr. Baillie will forgive that confusion of genders, which takes a learned physician for an old woman, if I assure him how small my apprehension is of the *queen bee*.

It was soon found that this great Doctor and his small coadjutors had no chance against me in *open warfare*—my principles and my positions were impregnable. After 2000 copies of my work had been circulated they thought it the safest game to discredit me among my patients, the female ones especially : and this appeared still safer, as about two years ago, a strange fabrication (which, to their great grief I have assured them to be untrue) of my death, found its way into the public papers. They now most heroically stepped forward to attack me, for having done what they dared not attempt, and could not if they dared—for having in independent language and upon independent and



scientific principles, instructed my profession how to cure diseases.

Well—in 1816, after my professional principles were too firmly established to be shaken by all the weight of his antiquity, forth stands this mighty Bashaw—at full length, in the Weekly Messenger, and this was his worship's appearance :

GENTLEMEN,

A dedication to me being prefixed to Dr. Robertson's book, I feel it to be necessary, in justice to myself, to give the following public explanation of the circumstances.

About six years ago, Dr. Robertson wrote me from Scotland, requesting that I would permit him to dedicate a book to me which he was about to publish. In this book he was to examine some opinions of Sir Everard Home. I consented to accept of the dedication, provided these opinions were examined with liberality, more especially as Dr. Robertson was a native of that parish in which my father had been long established as the clergyman, and where I had spent most of my infant years. When this book was published, I looked into various parts of it, without reading it regularly, and I do not recollect to have seen in it indecency of language. A few days ago, a friend of mine shewed me the third edition of Dr. Robertson's book, in which were a good many passages of the most indecent nature. This struck me with astonishment and indignation. I shall



not express what I think of Dr. Robertson's conduct in prefixing my name to an obscene book, without my knowledge ; but, from the obscenity itself, *he has forfeited his rank and character in society.* I am anxious, however, to preserve mine, and therefore think it necessary to communicate, through your journal, that I did not know there was either a second or third edition of this book, till my friend shewed me the third edition ; and that *I even thought Dr. Robertson had been dead for the last two years.* I have now mentioned every thing which I know of this most disagreeable business, and I trust that, from the tenour of my public life, I shall not be readily suspected of encouraging so gross a violation of morality and decorum.

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

M. BAILLIE.

*Grosvenor-square,*

*May 14, 1816.*

On the falsity (for, after his former letter, &c. it is too glaring to be termed an absurdity) that he had never read the book, which he thus presumed to censure, I shall make no comment. Nay, I shall indulge this delicate doctor with a free choice for the date of his *lie*, in 1810, when he promised to read my work, or, in 1816, when he said he did not read it. When he shall have made his election, I shall know how to meet



the falsehood, and to correct it. Delicacy is a fine thing, to be sure, so fine in the opinion of some rather eminent persons, that veracity may now and then be sacrificed to its observance.

By this time the reader will see that my work was so heretical, and the sanction of Dr. Baillie's name was so important, that the whole world, professional and unprofessional, must hear his abjuration. Assuredly, this same vanity is a very troublesome passion! It excited Dr. Baillie to dictate the tenour of my book, and then to retract the dictation; to prescribe the conditions of his acceptance, and then to offer it unconditionally; to disclaim what I had solicited, and then to solicit what I had disclaimed. Not but that a little <sup>small</sup> rancour was mingled therewith. In his family zeal for Sir E. Home, whose doctrines he neither dared nor could vindicate, he caught at any pretence for revenging the family quarrel. There again was poor discretion outrun! Without investigating the foundation of my doctrines, they were assailed for their novelty; and without disproving the necessity of their language, they were censured for their immorality. Writing professionally, upon a professional subject, I was to be interdicted from the very nomenclature of my profession. Really, until Dr. Baillie's new delicate dictionary comes forth, all inquiry, all discussion, must be suspended.

It is, however, affecting more ignorance than



he actually possesses, to censure the language of my book. Even the commonest Encyclopædia, and similar works, which, by the bye, are designed for the school-room and the parlour-window, rather than for the professional library, might have satisfied Dr. Baillie that the work, of which he had begged the dedication, had indulged in no gratuitous indecorum. Nay, Sir Everard Home, whose publications prove that he *must* have dipped into other men's writings, might, in some of their family consultations, have convinced Dr. Baillie of this awkward fact. But it was a fine thing to crush investigation, and a finer still to crush a junior rival. Besides, Dr. Baillie had an opportunity of appearing in print, and of making the world believe he was a very decorous physician. Alas! Dr. Baillie must acquire a little more wisdom before he can give to error the grace of truth, or fasten on truth the blemish of error.

I was not slow in reply to Dr. Baillie—thereby satisfying him that I was not only alive two years ago, but, to his sorrow, alive when he ventured to print against me. The following was my reply. *This appeared in the Medical and Physical Journal on the 1st June, and in Bell's Messenger on the 16th, 1816.*

*To Dr. Baillie.*

SIR,

I must trouble you with this address, in



consequence of those remarks on my book which you have been induced to insert in the *Medical and Physical Journal*, and in Bell's Weekly Messenger of the 16th instant; and I am the more disposed to notice this manœuvre, as I strongly suspect that you have been made accessory to it, precisely at the moment when I was proceeding to punish a libeller, for those charges which he or his friends have prevailed on you, Sir, now to reiterate against me.

That amidst the hurry of your professional duties, this interested individual has artfully worked upon your credulity, to my disadvantage, and, by the exhibition of garbled extracts from my book, has prevailed on you to adopt the line of conduct you have now pursued, will not admit of a doubt. From the most cursory examination, if made with your own eyes, you would at once have seen that, in the work you so abuse, I have employed no NEW anatomical, physiological, or pathological expression, but have strictly confined myself to such terms as have been universally employed by every medical writer, from the days of Hippocrates to the present hour.

The memory, in common with our other mental faculties, is extremely apt to become blunted, and it is not impossible that yours, Sir, may have become impaired in its vigour. It is thus you may have forgotten the minute and invaluable descriptions, given in the celebrated works of



earlier writers, even of those parts and their operations to which you object.

Were I assured that it would not hurt your peculiarly delicate feelings, for, in that respect, your's seem to have arrived at the very utmost limits of morbid irritability, I could point out to you, in the works of poets, philosophers, and medical writers of the first eminence, and even in the sacred writings, passages which go far beyond mine in what you term obscenity. In the works of highly respectable medical writers, I can also point out to you all my anatomical and physiological descriptions, almost word for word, for I assure you it never was either my wish or my intention to make the profession believe I had, in these, invented any thing. Now that you have stepped forward as the guardian of professional purity, it is indispensable that you should be acquainted with existing professional facts, and with these I can furnish you whenever you command me. I need only bring to your recollection, among a host of others, the celebrated names of Morgagni, to whose works you are indebted for so great a part of your book on *Morbid Anatomy*, as well as those of Sommering, Sabatier, Bichat; and, though last, not least, Dr. Baillie himself! You must also be aware, that, in no course of anatomical, physiological, or obstetrical lectures, can any of the expressions I have used be possibly omitted. This every one knows, for these works



are in the hands of the public, and may be examined, and the lectures are every where open for the seekers of such information. You must also be well aware that I have introduced neither name nor operation, to which analogous ones are not to be found in Linnæus's arrangement of botanical plants, so often the study of the most chastely virtuous of the female sex.

From the specimen with which you have favoured the profession in the *Medical and Physical Journal*, and in the *Messenger*, I have no doubt, had you been as much Dr. Hunter's superior as you seem to consider yourself mine, the profession would never have been benefitted by the invaluable advantages which the obstetrical art has derived from the work of that illustrious author on the gravid uterus.

For similar reasons the world would have been deprived of the lucubrations of Sir Everard Home, on stricture in the urethra, rectum, &c. because many of his descriptions are the very quintessence of what you would term obscenity. And if you look into Mr. Abernethy's *Essay on Digestion*, &c. you will find abundant exercise for your supererogatory delicacy.

But it were endless to point out the many professional works, whose authors have administered to your irritable niceness with obscenities at least equal to mine; yet, if the diffusion of science be the object, equally indispensable,



We shall suppose the possibility of your existence, at the various periods, during which the healthy and morbid structure of certain parts of the human body were investigated and described by plates, demonstrations, &c.; most certainly had you been the presiding judge over such meritorious exertions, the medical world must have been left in the grossest ignorance, and have sacrificed, to your delicacy, its most useful acquirements. But, thank God! we have almost always had men of liberal and enlightened minds to superintend and direct these useful pursuits. When Hippocrates was entreated by the mob (who seem to have had about as delicate an abomination to the extension of knowledge as Dr. Baillie) to cure Democritus of madness, he found him in the *obscene* occupation of dissecting, to discover the seat of the bile, and he most *indelicately* left him to the pursuit of such useful *obscenity*, and pronounced him the wisest man in Abdera!—I, Sir, do not pretend to be a Democritus, would I could pronounce Dr. Baillie an Hippocrates!

Whatever is new in my work is the correction of errors of former authors, such as those of Sir Everard Home, Abernethy, and other great names; the introduction of new and important medicines into practice, and the successful treatment of several most distressing diseases, which our profession had hitherto deemed incurable. It is an incontrovertible truth, that those of our



profession who follow the beaten track are allowed to glide smoothly and uninterrupted along—no one opposes them, because they, with the most perfect good nature, follow all which has been either said or done, whether that be inefficient, erroneous, or even hurtful. Different is the fate of him who ventures to deviate from such a beaten path, which I have most decidedly done, both in reasoning and in practice. His every endeavour to lessen human misery, either subjects him to the secret and calumnious whisperings of his professional brethren, or raises a nest of hornets about his ears; and there are always plenty, who stand high in the profession, at once ready and willing to lend their influence to oppose that success which would necessarily be the result of toilsome industry. How, after these my earnest endeavours to improve medical reasoning and practice, you could be prevailed on to direct your severity against my literary and professional labours, *solely directed for the use and altogether for the perusal of the medical profession*, and, in the most unprovoked manner, suffer yourself to be put forward to accuse me of employing obscene expressions, I am at a loss to conceive.

I shall leave to your cooler reflection maturely to weigh your motives, and the incalculable injury you have intended me, and I shall be greatly mistaken if you then can lay your hand on your heart and say you have done me justice.



Fortunately for me, Sir, and most unfortunately for you, it is acknowledged, by universal consent that the greater part of a physician's professional duties are really what you would term obscenities. We cannot discharge these duties with any sort of advantage to the public, without being daily compelled to make statements, to put questions, to perform duties, which are to him inevitable, but which you, Sir, would deem the very highest obscenity. How you, therefore, can, with a shadow of consistency, set your face against the detail of professional facts, in books, in order that at least our younger professional brethren may be instructed in the secrets of their art, I dare say you will unfold to us.

By this attempt to injure one, who never either did or desired to do so to you, you have exhibited an evident and unequivocal wish to make me appear to the greatest possible disadvantage; but my friends assure me they feel no inclination to be biassed even by Dr. Baillie's unsupported assertion. He must be an abler disputant than I have ever yet met with in life (not even excepting Dr. Baillie), who can successfully contradict demonstrable facts. From the Editor of a certain Weekly Paper, and his attorney, such an attack, though as unjust as untrue, was not altogether surprising; but I was, indeed, amazed to find Dr. Baillie in such company. Even allowing you



the full force of your intention, you have not ventured to object to any one of my practical doctrines; and even now I call on you either to do so, or to vindicate the conspicuously erroneous opinions of Sir Everard Home, or of any of the other authors on whom I have animadverted, with a single view to the benefit of mankind. If, *on any one pretence*, you decline this objection to my doctrines, or vindication of them, I must conclude you incapable of either, and, if you attempt to support them by argument, I pledge myself to prove you wrong.

I most unhesitatingly assert that this attempt to injure me will remain a blot on the page of your reputation, which neither the ingenuity nor the exertion of Dr. Baillie, nor the Editor of the Weekly paper alluded to, can ever obliterate. In the most favourable view it is an attempt, assisted by a man standing high in the profession, and perverting the public confidence vested in him, to suppress useful investigation, and impede the progress of incontrovertible truth.

Thus, Sir, to warrant your erroneous and anti-professional remarks, every law respecting animal life, either in health or disease, must stop, and every inquiry which has the alleviation of human misery for its object, must suffer neither further examination nor improvement.

Had you now addressed me privately, as it oc-



curs to me you once had the kindness to do, when in one of the letters with which, if I mistake not, you honoured me, you, if I remember rightly, apprized me that insinuations had been made to you directly intended to injure me;—had you done this, I am sure I could now have satisfied you as fully as I then did, that it was no honourable, nor even honest informant, who sought to prejudice you against me, on grounds not less false and unjustifiable than those which you have now, Sir, unhappily adopted. What I allude to, you doubtless recollect, and I believe I addressed you by letter on the subject. Your perusal of the book must have fully satisfied you how far you were misinformed, when you were told I intended to publish one of your private letters; for were I even one of those very cautious people who preserve the letters they receive, I should not deem myself warranted to publish them on slight occasions.\*

Thus, Sir, after more than twenty of the most valuable years of my life have been consumed, in attempts to render the subjects in that book more scientific and more practically useful, I have during a great part of that time, been the mark of a set of interested conspirators, who never dared shew themselves openly, but, like assassins,

\* The letters, here alluded to, are those in the previous pages, which have been most fortunately preserved.



struck behind another's shield at my moral and professional reputation; and who systematically, unceasingly, and unrelentingly, have harassed and persecuted me, without allowing me any sort of opportunity of stepping forward in vindication of my rights and my character. But, Sir, the time is perhaps at no great distance, when your deliberate reflection will regret this easy compliance with my enemies. At some fortunate moment the hurry of professional duty may abate, and you may condescend to examine my anatomical, physiological and pathological labours: not, as in the present instance, by garbled extracts, from which no man can judge aright, but by the consistency and the practical utility of the whole. You most willingly accepted of the dedication, and that too after I had decidedly refused to comply with your wishes to be silent respecting the doctrines and practices of Sir Everard Home; nay, even after I had informed you that I, at last, proposed to present it to some one else, you desired me to dedicate it to you, unconditionally.

Possessing, perhaps, less vanity than falls to the common lot of man, I do not calculate on posterity's taking much trouble either about me or my exertions. If, however (for human proceedings are greatly influenced by accident), after times shall devote any attention to these proceedings a more awful period approaches. The machina-



tions of my enemies, the slanders of a Journalist, my own labours, and even the lucubrations of Dr. Baillie must find their level: when party feuds have ceased, and malignant spirits have slept—when journal interests and personal animosities have alike expired—when posterity shall judge on our characters by the result of our principles, and neither name nor rank shall weigh in the balance,—full fair, and final justice will be done upon us all. It will then be decided, which among us has contributed to the alleviation of human misery; our opinions will be tried by their truth, our services by their utility, and, our reputation by our services. In the humble hope of such a tribunal I console myself, even in Dr. Baillie's censure: it supports me against newspaper malice, and professional jealousy.

I shall close this extremely painful task by intreating you not to misconceive me. You may know, Sir, I am not altogether independent of the world: the severity of your attack on me presupposes this knowledge; but you must not carry it farther in the supposition that I am not independent of *you*. Your acceptance of my volume, with its heaviest faults upon its page, was the only favour that I ever asked or expected from you. The possession of conscious truth, the acquirement of new facts in the course of long study, exempt me from the solicitation of Dr. Baillie's



kindness, to any greater extent, at least, than the common duties of life. I disregard the intrigues of my adversaries, and I scarcely request him to forbear assisting them; though I might reasonably expect that a man, established in his profession, would not close against me the avenue through which he so successfully passed, and that he would tolerate the honest endeavours of one wishing to arrive at such eminence as his industry may entitle him.

I shall now take leave of you, after recommending to your attention the following impressive words:—"Go not forth *hastily* to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame."

I have the honour to be,

Your most obedient servant,

JOHN ROBERTON.

7, *Cleveland Court*,  
*St. James's-Place*, June 18.

This speaks for itself, and requires no comment. Dr. Baillie also thought that it required no answer. Fully contented with having made the charge, he would not condescend to its proof: accounting perhaps *his* diction a sufficient substitute for authenticity and veracity.

But, as I had taken a strong fancy to extracting an answer out of the doctor, no matter of what sort, I wrote him as follows.



## SECOND LETTER TO DR. BAILLIE.

*"I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban."*

SIR,

From the time which has elapsed, since you drove me to the necessity of publicly addressing you, the world will decide on the *dignity* of your silence, in thus shrinking from the contest you have excited. It is for others to determine whether such conduct was induced only by your consciousness of a total inability, either to object to my doctrines or to defend your own. Your unprovoked, but I trust, abortive attack, on my professional and literary acquirements, will stand as a sufficient proof of your science, your justice, your modesty and your veracity. Possibly however, you are prepared to be informed that he who is influenced by unworthy purposes, can degrade only himself, and that the humiliation he designs for his adversary ends in his own abasement.

In forcing me into contention, where you have not ventured to meet me, you doubtless calculated that your professional influence (ability you perhaps will chuse to call it) might effect my utter annihilation—that one frown from your tremendous countenance—one corrugation of your magisterial brow, would make me wither before it like animal life before the sweeping *Simoom* of the desert! Had you dreamt that I should dare to defend myself, you would have paused a little



before you roused me ; but you expected no opposition, and thought you could, silently overwhelm my little caravan *in the dry dust of your sterility !* It might have been prudent in you, therefore, first to enquire whether your antagonist was likely to be quite so easy a conquest. It required no extraordinary wisdom ; even your relative Sir Everard Home could have recommended you to *thank God and sit quiet !*—you might have been reminded, that your whole proceedings, *in the AMAZING rapid performance of your professional engagements*, rendered it at once highly expedient for yourself, and charitable to a confiding public, to remember that the *less said about them the better*—that men who have stood extremely high in professional *name*, have become giddy from their elevation, and have, at length, found themselves not so comfortable as if they had “ thanked God and set quiet.”

My practical investigations, Sir, are, in a great measure peculiar to myself, and were the result of many years attentive observation, but in the *rapid career*, which precludes the possibility of tracing improvements in the healing art, you have not had time to observe that they are conducted in a manner and by language strictly suited to their nature.

I was aware of the notoriously lamentable fact that to depart from the beaten, and too often at best useless path of medical practice, was sure to



produce professional animosities. I was, therefore, cautious in making my statements, yet firm in their support, and of this Sir Everard Home can bear evidence! So satisfied am I that I thus again openly call on you, or him, or any of your medical dependents, to attempt the refutation of any practical doctrine in the book which you have presumed to stigmatize. The libellous abuse of my work, or rather of its author (doubtless by friends of your own) may very probably become the subject of legal investigation, and if objections be urged, *now* is the time, and not during the necessarily rapid discussion inseparable from a court of law—almost as rapid, sir, as your own professional movements! If my practical doctrines possess merit to support themselves, which they have hitherto done to the satisfaction of the unprejudiced, let them, *in that case only*, be considered as the best service I can offer the suffering part of human nature. While both the originality and the utility of these doctrines are estimated by the liberal, the disinterested and the wise, I shall consider myself fortunate in being honored by such a tribunal, but where influence, rendered profligate by success, attempts to tyrannize over industry, from such a tribunal, “good Lord deliver us.”

Except, Sir, for this or similar transactions, directed against one who has independence enough to avow that he values plain matter of fact far



above the falsehoods of any man, you might have contrived to journey into your tomb, and at the same time, leave the world to eulogize your departure. Thank God it is a Briton's indefeasible privilege to be allowed to expose the artifices, and pursue, into merited contempt, all who degrade themselves by adopting the pitiful stratagems which you have levelled at me.

Believe me, however, that in no other discussion or controversy, have I ever experienced such heart-felt sorrow. The time appears but as yesterday when you stood at the highest pinnacle of my unsuspecting opinion. From my childhood, the virtues of your father, which I hoped to find in the inheritance of his son, taught me to regard your very name with veneration. To be forced to a trial of strength—to be dragged into a contest, with the son of such a worthy man, under whatever circumstances, or from whatever motives, he may have become my enemy, renders even a complete triumph over him more painful than a defeat from another antagonist.

Men, like your worthy father, of upright mind have ever been gratified with lessening the difficulties of those struggling to ascend the slippery steep of fame, and these commendable duties he often labored to impress upon his son. God knows how sincerely I hoped that his instruction might not be sown among *thorns* and *thistles* but on profitable ground! For the sake of those now no



more, I would have forgone many and higher advantages to find Dr. Baillie the inheritor of his father's worth—and, in this hope, till I was fatally deceived, I have looked from amidst many dispiriting and comfortless scenes—I did hope that, from your professional situation, you might have extended some small portion of your aid “to lead me from the miry path and thorny way.” Alas I hoped in vain. Instead of thus employing yourself, in laying up stores of mental comfort, for times of peaceful retirement and satisfactory retrospection—to find that your wishes, for my success in life, existed *only while I lived in Edinburgh*, but that ever since I resided in London, now nearly seven years, you had, without one provocation, singled me out, as the victim of your vengeance, and were busily exerting your professional influence to render my humble endeavors, to improve an imperfect profession, even worse than contemptible—to find that, from your father's house, so much vindictive but deliberate deception could emanate, has made me almost doubt the purity of human principles.

There are few who do not, at some period of their lives, feel the visitations of that internal monitor conscience, which often speaks awful truths to the heart of him who has indulged in secret malignity. When stretched on the couch, from which you are no more to rise, reflexion will have its fullest scope. Then a man recalls, with



impartiality, his various connections in and duties to the world. The good man feels serenity, confidence and hope—he looks back with no emotion which can disturb his repose, and forward with contented resignation. How different is the last hour of the unjust ! his every reflexion is a rankling dagger in his bosom—he looks back on duties omitted—on power misapplied, if not even exerted to oppress those he thought beneath him, and trembles to finish an hypocritical life, on which self interest can no longer dawn, and which no consolation can illumine. Which state I should prefer is easily said—which Dr. Baillie may meet were not so delicate to mention !

For the present, sir, I shall leave you to your own reflexions—they *must* bring admonition—they *may* induce reformation. Let me hope that they will spare you the visitation of a third letter.

From your humble servant,

JOHN ROBERTON.

7, *Cleveland-Court,*  
*St. James's-Place.*

N.B.—A few days since I found, among my papers, all the correspondence I had with you in 1810, which, with that of a recent date, I shall immediately send to press.

My bookseller has intimated to me that the third edition of my book is nearly exhausted, and it is my intention not only to insert the whole of this correspondence, in the fourth edition, which



will be speedily published, but also in a separate pamphlet.

Thus, sir, you may not require to live very long to feel that it is desirable a man of questionable moral principles should be possessed of a good memory. The public exhibition of the above correspondence, with occasional remarks, will show that both your principles and memory, if ever they were good, have now sunk into decay and consequent degradation.

When this part of your history has been favored with due reflexion, and public animadversion, I may possibly continue to refresh your memory, as well as that of some of your colleagues, on other subjects of a somewhat similar nature.

J. R.

Still silent ! Martinus Scriblerus' experiment on the dead ass (pardon the comparison) was not more hopeless than mine upon the living Doctor. After so many years of study my antagonist had not acquired the common science of life. The sage, whose very relationship confers irresistible authority, was yet to learn that, imprudent as it might be to begin a false step, it might be still more imprudent not to go on. Candour retracts an error—courage continues it. Dr. Baillie was not generous enough for the one, nor daring enough for the other. He did, therefore, precisely what alike endangered his credit and his safety. *He stopt*



*short in his career*, without honesty to go back or spirit to go forward—and there he sticks to this moment.

Had I any personal malice against Dr. Baillie I should have advised him into just such a sticking place ; and there to be admired by all those who might feel that way inclined. Alas ! where were his young retainers—that this friendless old gentleman had neither junior nor relative to keep him out of mischief ? But *I* was to be destroyed at all events — no matter how they sacrificed Dr. Baillie :—*the system* was to be kept up—no matter how its master was to be discredited.

What this *system* is I was about to explain :—but a French physician, De La Mettrie, has done it so much better, that I willingly give way to his definition. It is entirely *secundum artem* :—without the least morsel of indelicacy.

“ Kill your patient,” says he, “ by an exact conformity to the established rules, and you will be allowed to have done your best ; you will live with credit and satisfaction, an orthodox practitioner, and a good man.” In another instance—“ Save,” says he, “ a sick man’s life, by listening to the voice of reason, and departing a little from the beaten path, and you will draw down on your devoted head, the abuse and resentment of every little whipster in physic, and every old woman in the parish ; you will be thought a dangerous man, and not improbably be prosecuted for malpractice.”



Of this “malpractice,” which has so fearfully excited the resentment of Dr. Baillie and his followers, I have not escaped either the offence or the punishment. It does not suit my hand to gather smooth stones from the brook. My daily habits and writings, and words and actions, are not an iota more calculated, than in this little tract, to conciliate those among my brethren, who regard the profit of our profession rather than its utility. Human life—that important and serious charge! is in the trust of the physician. It ought not to be hazarded for the views of interest or for the tenaciousness of custom. In every profession, but especially in ours, *rules* are valuable only as they are safe, and with the enlargement of science, the extension of principle, and the progress of discovery, they must find their confirmation or their abolition.

In philosophy, *error* only injures learning—in mechanics, it only frustrates labour—in law, it only unsettles property; but in medicine, it destroys *life*. In all other instances, error may be either revoked or atoned: in this only it is irretrievable.

Feeling this awful responsibility of our profession, I have studiously examined the principle of all its rules and all its systems, and have as studiously deviated from *all* that were originally wrong or subsequently corrupted. In this deviation, it ever was, and ever will be utterly indif-



ferent to me, who those men were, or what they were, who followed them, or by whom they were followed; whether eminent or obscure, whether basking in the sun-shine of prosperity and ease, or toiling under the lash of profligate and unprincipled oppression.—In such a cause, even DR. BAILLIE is disarmed of his terrors!

Ignorance, it has been said, delights in darkness and loves mystery, but the duty of him, who deserves the name of physician, is *to tell what he knows, and do all he can to better the condition of human life*; and, as I studiously shun every complex statement, and other refuges of ignorance; as I neither form a philosophy of my own, to suit my own particular ideas, nor dream about that which experience has proved correct, I sincerely hope that such a character cannot, in justice, be applied to me. Let me not be accused in thus assuming the merit of long and painful study, in claiming to myself the reward of my own industry; the reward of a life not yet worn to the dregs, but the youth and maturity of which have been turned aside from all the pleasures of convivial society, and the usual relaxations and enjoyments of the world, to unbroken investigation, reflexion and seclusion. I have learned neither courtesy nor compliment, and, *until I begin to fear, I shall not begin to flatter*. Not even Dr. Baillie can possibly obtain from me the forbearance which would induce me to forego the duties of humanity, or the in-



terests of man—not even Dr. Baillie can induce me to accompany him in useless forms, unmeaning jargon, and circuitous rules. I endeavoured to frame for myself, or rather renovated and simplified certain departments of medical practice, and the whole merit and success of such proceedings, rests in their simplicity. Some of the doctor's yelpers will call this *chance*, but let them be instructed that it is the upward pursuit of unerring, consistent nature, toward that infinite perfection which reason may investigate, but which greater powers than *theirs*, cannot thoroughly comprehend. They may be ordered to call it enthusiasm—perhaps empiricism, but their employer *knows* that it is neither.



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