

A special report of the General Committee of the London Infirmary for Curing Diseases of the Eye : in which certain pretensions of Sir William Adams, advanced in the official papers published by order of the hon. directors of Greenwich Hospital, lately submitted to a medical committee, appointed by government, and affecting the rights of the Infirmary, and the merits of the late John Cunningham Saunders, Esq. its founder and surgeon, are examined and disproved by the correspondence of Mr. Saunders, and other documents.

Contributors

London Infirmary for Curing Diseases of the Eye.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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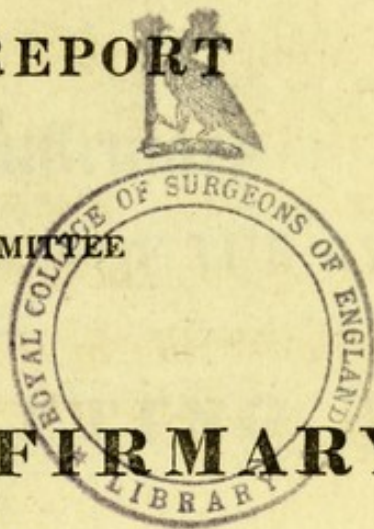


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A
SPECIAL REPORT
OF THE
GENERAL COMMITTEE
OF THE
LONDON INFIRMARY
FOR CURING
DISEASES OF THE EYE;



IN WHICH CERTAIN PRETENSIONS OF SIR WILLIAM ADAMS, ADVANCED IN
THE OFFICIAL PAPERS PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE HON.
DIRECTORS OF GREENWICH HOSPITAL, LATELY SUBMITTED
TO A MEDICAL COMMITTEE, APPOINTED BY GOVERN-
MENT, AND AFFECTING THE RIGHTS OF

THE INFIRMARY,

AND THE MERITS OF THE LATE

JOHN CUNNINGHAM SAUNDERS, Esq.

ITS FOUNDER AND SURGEON;

ARE EXAMINED AND DISPROVED BY THE CORRESPONDENCE OF MR.
SAUNDERS, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS.



C London:

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE,
BY LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1815.

SPECIAL REPORT

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London Infirmary
FOR CURING DISEASES OF THE EYE.

AT A MEETING
OF THE
General Committee of this Charity,
HELD AT THE INFIRMARY,
ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1814,

PRESENT

Sir CHARLES PRICE, Bart. PRESIDENT, in the Chair ;

JOHN ANSLEY, Esq. Ald.
HARRY SEDGWICK, Esq.
SOLOMON HOUGHAM, Esq.
MICHAEL BLAND, Esq.
JOHN BAINBRIDGE, Esq.
JOHN HODGKINSON, Esq.
JOHN TWEMLOW, Esq.
T. D. CROSKEY, Esq.
RALPH PRICE, Esq.
WILLIAM BRYDON, Esq.
JOHN SMITH, Esq.
WILLIAM CRAWLEY, Esq.
RICHARD WACE, Esq.

Rev. SAMUEL CROWTHER,
H. KENSINGTON, Esq.
JOHN CAZENOVE, Esq.
S. S. HUNT, Esq.
GEORGE CLARK, Esq.
THOMAS CHURCHYARD, Esq.
D. D. DAVIS, M. D.
ROBERT GOOCH, M. D.
J. R. FARRE, M. D.
BENJAMIN TRAVERS, Esq.
WILLIAM LAWRENCE, Esq.
RICHARD BATTLE, Esq.

A RESOLUTION of a Sub-Committee, dated the 21st of December, 1814, appointing the Medical Officers of this Infirmary a Committee to examine, and to report to this General

Committee, the evidence which supports the rights of this Infirmary, and the merits of the late JOHN CUNNINGHAM SAUNDERS, Esq. its Founder and Surgeon, in respect to the treatment of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, against certain claims of Sir WILLIAM ADAMS, brought forward under the sanction of the Honourable Directors of Greenwich Hospital, and submitted to the examination of a Medical Committee,* appointed by Government, having been read and confirmed; the following Report of the Medical Officers, on the matters referred to their examination, was read by the President, and deliberately considered.

* This Committee was composed of the Gentlemen, whose names are subjoined.

Sir HENRY HALFORD, Bart. M. D. F. R. S. *Physician in Ordinary to the King, and to the Prince Regent.*

MATTHEW BAILLIE, M. D. F. R. S. *Physician extraordinary to the King.*

Sir EVERARD HOME, Bart. F. R. S. *Sergeant Surgeon to the King.*

HENRY CLINE, Esq. F. R. S.

ASTLEY COOPER, Esq. F. R. S.

JOHN ABERNETHY, Esq. F. R. S.

REPORT
OF THE
Committee of Medical Directors
OF THE
LONDON INFIRMARY

FOR CURING DISEASES OF THE EYE,

ON THE EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO THEIR EXAMINATION RESPECTING
CERTAIN CLAIMS OF SIR WILLIAM ADAMS TO NEW MODES OF TREATMENT
BY OPERATION FOR THE CURE OF THE EGYPTIAN OPHTHALMIA.



A PUBLICATION entitled “An Abridgment of the 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*,” being first examined by your Committee, no professional information respecting Mr. Adams’s

mode of curing the *Egyptian Ophthalmia* appeared in these official papers, notwithstanding the declaration set forth in the title-page, and the *direct claim of discovery*, contained in the following paragraphs, at pages 4 and 5:

“ 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 have been discharged the service, blind of the Ophthalmia, might be again rendered fit for duty, or be made useful members of Society.*

(Signed) “ R. ROBERTSON, Physician.

“ B. M'LAUGHLIN, Surgeon.

“ M. S. KENT, Apothecary.”

These paragraphs form part of a Report of the Medical Officers of Greenwich Hospital, dated, Royal Infirmary, Dec. 27, 1813, and addressed to John Dyer, Esq. Secretary, for the information of the Directors.

Certain letters, annexed in an appendix to this Report, and numbered II. III. and IV. being a correspondence between Mr. Adams and his preceptor the late Mr. Saunders, on this subject, and intrusted to the care of Mr. Battley, by the Rev. O. S. Saunders, for the express purpose of supporting the posthumous character of his brother, were next examined by your Committee.

From the contents of these letters, it is certain, that Sir William Adams was *not* the discoverer of a method of curing by an operation, &c. that form of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, of which it was officially declared to the Hon. Directors of Greenwich Hospital, by their Medical Officers, that he was the discoverer. They regret to add, that, although this statement (doubtless received as true by those medical gentlemen) has been published by order of the Honourable Board, and has been most industriously circulated amongst the public; yet it has not, within their knowledge, been *publicly* contradicted and corrected by Sir William Adams.

A letter, officially addressed by Sir William

Adams to Dr. Farre, one of the Medical Directors of this Infirmary, purporting to be a reply to a letter from Mr. Battley, one of the private friends of Mr. Saunders, was laid before your Committee. The letter of Mr. Battley was essentially an appeal to the Profession, supporting the claims of the late Mr. Saunders to the cure of a certain state of the conjunctiva, in the chronic, or last stage of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, against similar claims advanced by Sir William Adams, and deemed by Government so important, as to require the appointment of a Board of Physicians and Surgeons of the first eminence, for their investigation.

Your Committee of Medical Officers are anxious to present every part of this communication which bears on the question, because, in the opinion of Sir William Adams, it sets forth his claims in their just light. They except, however, a printed statement, which was enclosed with the written communication, dated from St. Pancras Workhouse, 22d of August, 1814, and signed by the Chairman and five Members of the House Committee:---1st. Because an eminent oculist is introduced in the most indecorous manner by name, and the result of his practice most painfully contrasted with that of Sir William Adams, without the respective states of the

cases, or the means of cure employed, being reported, so as to enable the medical public to form an equitable opinion. 2dly. Because his written communication virtually contains what is asserted in that printed statement, in the following sentence :---“ Had he, (Mr. Battley,) or you, Sir, inquired of Mr. Cooper, Mr. Abernethy, or any of the gentlemen of the Committee appointed to inquire into my claims to a *new* and successful mode of treating the Ophthalmia in *all* its stages and varieties, you would have learned, that I have brought before the notice of the Commander in Chief, my recent discovery of a mode of putting an *immediate stop* to that disease at its first commencement.”

The Ophthalmia, called Egyptian, being an acute inflammation of the conjunctiva, may be immediately stopped by such means as are employed to arrest other inflammations. Medical men are already acquainted with several modes of accomplishing this object ; even with that particular mode, which Sir William Adams employs, and represents as his own discovery ; viz. the administration of emetics. The use of emetics in inflammation is an old practice, respecting the propriety of which, in the general treatment of these affections, the opinions of professional men, are, and will probably continue to be divided ; but even with

regard to the particular application of this treatment, the colleague of Mr. Saunders must recall Sir William's recollection to his days of instruction at the London Infirmary for Curing Diseases of the Eye, when he was there taught the curative powers of emetics, in the acute forms of Ophthalmia. Amongst the formulæ kept at that Infirmary, none was more constantly used by Mr. Saunders, at the commencement of acute Ophthalmia, whether of the external or internal tunics of the eye, than a simple solution of tartar emetic, so administered as either to nauseate, or to produce full vomiting. His correct reasoning on the latter effect of this remedy will be found in his Essay on Inflammation of the Iris, which was first published in the Medical and Physical Journal, in the year 1806.

That your Medical Committee might not shew themselves inattentive to the reference of Sir William Adams to any Member of the Committee appointed by Government, to inquire into *his claims* to a *new* and successful mode of treating the Ophthalmia in *all* its stages and varieties, one of your medical officers made a personal inquiry of Mr. Abernethy, and received his permission to state, "that the object of the Committee was to observe and report on Sir William Adams's treatment of certain patients in the *chronic, or last stage* of

the Egyptian Ophthalmia." Thus then it appears, that the object of that distinguished Committee was not to inquire into a new and successful mode of treating the Ophthalmia in *all* its stages, as Sir William Adams asserted; but that it was confined to that *last* stage of it, for which the official papers of Greenwich Hospital unjustly gave him the honour of discovering the cure.

But further, in examining the words in which Sir William Adams has thought proper officially to lay his claims, we observe, that the Committee are appointed by Government, according to his assertion, to inquire into a *new* and successful mode of treating the Ophthalmia in *all* its stages and varieties. The construction and obvious meaning of this sentence must have led us to suppose, that he persevered in declaring himself the discoverer of the method of restoring sight, by removing a certain state of the conjunctiva produced by the Egyptian Ophthalmia, if the document (No. VI. in the Appendix) had not also accompanied the other statement. By this official paper, which seems to have been presented to Sir David Dundas, the late Commander in Chief, immediately after the death of Mr. Saunders, (being dated March 1st, 1810) Mr. Adams assigns the discovery to Mr. Saunders. Taking it for grant-

ed, that this letter, addressed to the late Commander in Chief, was actually sent to him, we are the more astonished at the statement, so evidently referring to the same condition of the eye, which nearly four years afterwards, in the official papers published by order of the Directors of Greenwich Hospital, assigned all the merit of discovery to Mr. William Adams.

Finally, he refers to his acknowledgment of the discoveries of Mr. Saunders, in his letter published in the first Annual Report of the West of England Eye Infirmary; *copies of which*, he observes, *were officially sent to the Committee of the London Eye Infirmary.*--- Amongst the papers of the Infirmary, that report was preserved; and, in the printed letter annexed to it, dated Exeter, the 1st of Nov. 1809, signed, William Adams, your Committee read the following words---“*The discovery of a successful mode of treating those most inveterate and distressing consequences, produced by the Egyptian Ophthalmia, has farther been the result of his (Mr. Saunders's) scientific and unwearied investigations.*” We must leave it to Sir William Adams to explain the palpable contradiction of letting this discovery appear in the Report of the West of England Eye Infirmary, in 1809, as Mr. Saunders's, and in the Official Greenwich Papers, in 1814, as that of

Mr. William Adams, with the pointed remark of its being a great *national desideratum* !

We are not less surprised that Sir William Adams, whose principal motive, according to his own statement, was “ the communication of highly useful information,” (see document, No. VI.) so important as to constitute, in the opinion of the Greenwich Medical Officers, “ a great national desideratum,” should not, even to this day, have adopted the ordinary, simple, but effectual way of promulgating information, by laying it before the public, through the medium of the press ; when we find him prepared to impart his knowledge to Government, for a pecuniary recompense, in 1809 ; urging it on the attention of the Commander in Chief, in 1810 ; and since communicating it to different persons in high official situations.

Abandoning all claims to discovery, we find Mr. Adams, in the document No. VI. addressed to the late Commander in Chief, making his stand, on the plea of improvement. The words, “ IMPROVED BY MYSELF,” are twice underlined in the manuscript. On referring to the letter in the appendix, No. III. it will be seen, that Mr. Saunders denied the improvement which Mr. Adams claimed. Your Medical Officers find nothing in this alledged improvement, but a slight variation in the mode

of carrying into effect the principle of treatment pointed out by Mr. Saunders.

If Sir William Adams could have entered into the simple principle upon which Mr. Saunders's plan was founded, he would have spared his patients the unnecessary, and, to say the least of them, the severe experiments of destroying the thickened lining of the eyelids, by the undiluted caustic, or the actual cautery!! The operation, as simple as the principle on which it rests, may be performed by any army surgeon, who has had the education which should entitle him to fill that honourable situation.

And here your Medical Officers must be allowed to express their high respect for the honourable feelings, and perfect approbation of the professional conduct of Mr. Saunders, in the transactions which they have just reviewed. Possessing, through the public confidence in his character and talents, an unrivalled field of observation, it was his first object to convert this to the public benefit, by adding to the stock of professional knowledge; and he trusted for his recompense to that rank in public opinion which is the just reward of such exertions. The temptation of private emolument was in vain held out to him. His unalterable purpose was to communicate his knowledge to the profession, as soon as he deemed it suf-

ficiently matured by experience, to be worthy of their acceptance. The proposal of selling to the public the improvements, which their liberal patronage had enabled him to make, was therefore rejected by him with a degree of indignation, which must endear his memory in the estimation of all honourable minds.

Before your Medical Officers conclude their Report, they must be allowed to notice another act of injustice to the late Mr. Saunders, in the official papers under consideration. In a letter relating to the cataract, signed William Adams, addressed to the Honourable the Directors of Greenwich Hospital, the operation of his instructor and his patron is thus unfairly and indelicately contrasted with his own:---“ 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. I perfected the cure by a *single* operation on each eye. His modes of operation I have long since found it necessary wholly to abandon.”

Your Committee think it necessary to observe, that the disease admits of but *three* operations, essentially or in principle, different

from each other:---1st. the couching or depression of the cataract below the visual axis; 2ndly. the extraction of the cataract; 3dly. the permanent opening of the capsule, and the separation of the texture of the cataract into fragments, which admit of solution in the humour to which they are exposed, so as in time entirely to disappear. The principle upon which each operation is founded is *uniform, and does not admit of variation*; so that a variation in the method of executing it, cannot be admitted to constitute a different operation.

Whatever modification, therefore, of this practice Sir William Adams can adopt, will not authorise him to term it "a new and different system of operation;" or to say, when speaking of what he terms the "*absorbent practice*," that he has long since found it necessary "*wholly to abandon* Mr. Saunders's operation." His claim of *discovery* for such modifications as he appears to have introduced into the treatment of the chronic Egyptian Ophthalmia, and of soft cataract, argues, in the judgment of the Committee, an incapacity to comprehend the principles of science, upon which these operations were suggested; it having been generally remarked, that minds ill adapted to the comprehension of principles, are prone to discoveries of this sort.

Your Committee take this opportunity to remark, that *to Mr. Saunders is exclusively due* the application of the third operation, or that by solution, to the cataracts of persons born blind, even in the earliest stage of infancy ; in the opinion of your Committee, *one of the most valuable and splendid discoveries of modern surgery.* He first *systematically* applied the same principle to the treatment of cataract in the adult, in its different forms ; but the lamented arrest of his career by death, rendered the result of his experience on this subject incomplete. His successor felt it to be no less a grateful tribute of respect to the professional character of Mr. Saunders, than a duty imposed upon him, in the situation to which he was appointed, to prosecute the opportunities, which the death of Mr. Saunders had placed in his hands, of ascertaining the applicability of the operation by solution to the cataract of the adult subject. The results of his experience confirmed those of Mr. Saunders, as stated by the editor of his work, in the Essay on Congenital Cataract, and were communicated to the profession in the 4th volume of the Medico-Chirurgical Transactions. By these, it appeared, that the operation by solution was exclusively applicable to the congenital, and soft or flocculent species of cataract.

During this investigation of the fitness of

Mr. Saunders's operation for hard cataracts, Edward Turner, the pensioner above referred to, applied with cataracts of this description. Upon him, as it appears from the journals of the Infirmary, Mr. Saunders's operation was performed *seven*, and not, as is stated, "*thirteen times*;" experience having amply proved, that the repetition of the operation, gently performed, is a less evil than the employment of violence; that, in fact, the perfection of the result depends on *not doing too much*. Turner was interrupted in the progress of his cure at the Infirmary, at a period of it, when it was evident that the next operation would be the last. His detention was enforced by the order which placed him, in common with the other pensioners, under the care of Mr. Adams.

Your Committee refrain from animadverting on the breach of courtesy in this case, which usually does, and always should, prevail among members of a liberal profession, and prohibits, with all the force of a legal restriction, one practitioner from interfering with the practice of another. But they request a moment's attention to the logical conclusion of Mr. Adams. "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." That is, because his operation, performed *after seven others*, restored sight, it would have been equally effectual had it *alone* been performed. But it is important to observe, that these operations, conducted according to the improved method of Mr. Saunders, were so entirely uninjurious to the organ, that the man was restored to perfect vision ; an eulogy not appropriate to all cases, in which *fewer* operations are performed.

Mr. Saunders at the earliest period of his practice, completed the cure of cataract by *one* or *two* operations ; with this fact, Sir William Adams is well acquainted, for he was a witness of it whilst he was a pupil of Mr. Saunders. We refer to those published in his posthumous work. Smith, (Case IV) although his cataracts were *hard*, was completely cured in the right eye by *one* operation, in the left by *three*, in the space of four months. Clements, (Case V.) was perfectly restored to sight by *two* operations in six weeks---her vision being useful in three. His needle being large, and used with freedom, he had to combat very severe inflammation as a frequent consequence of this active operation. Gentle in his manner,

and patient in his observation of nature, he was soon induced to do less at once, but to repeat his operation more frequently, nay, he thought it no wrong to leave his patient in darkness for a longer period, so that he preserved the organ in a more perfect condition. But whilst Mr. Saunders reduced the cutting edge of his instrument, Mr. Adams increased it; whilst the former inflicted less violence on the eye, the latter inflicted more, and, performing the same thing in a ruder way, was led to suppose that he had discovered something new.

From the facts contained in the preceding report, your Medical Officers consider themselves authorised to draw the following conclusions :---

1st. That the peculiar change of the conjunctiva, produced by the purulent or Egyptian Ophthalmia, and causing the blindness, which so frequently attends the chronic stage of that disorder, was discovered by the late Mr. J. C. Saunders, the founder of this Infirmary, who practised a surgical operation, and employed other means for its removal, and was thus enabled to restore to sight many persons, whose cases had been previously considered desperate : consequently, that the Medical Officers of Greenwich Hospital, by asserting in the official papers published by order of the

Directors, that the honour of the discovery and treatment above mentioned belong to Mr. now Sir William Adams, have been led (no doubt unintentionally) to circulate a statement completely unfounded, and tending to deprive Mr. Saunders of the merit exclusively due to him.

2ndly. That Sir William Adams, then a gratuitous pupil of Mr. Saunders, learned from him the facts above mentioned concerning the Egyptian Ophthalmia; and that he has only made the unimportant alteration of removing the diseased growth by means of a different instrument.

3dly. That it was the common practice of Mr. Saunders to employ emetics in the early stage of every variety of acute Ophthalmia; the claim therefore of Sir William Adams to originality, rests on no better ground in this, than in the former case.

4thly. That the treatment of the chronic stage of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, is simple in its principle, and easy in execution; so that any surgeon, who has received an ordinary education in the treatment of diseases of the eye, may be considered as competent to understand and manage the complaint, when its nature has been explained.

5thly. That the applicability of the operation by solution to the cataract of infants was first

discovered by Mr. Saunders, and first *systematically* extended by him to the cataract of the adult.

6thly. That the principle does not admit of variation, and that the mode of carrying it into effect by one or two operations, with the view of curing the disease in the shortest period possible, was fully tried and deliberately rejected by Mr. Saunders, because it endangered vision, by inflicting too much violence on the organ.

7thly. That the operation of Mr. Saunders puts the cataract in a condition to be absorbed with the least possible violence to the eye, and succeeds in restoring perfect vision in every variety of the soft cataract; but that as Mr. Saunders himself anticipated, it has been proved by further trial to be less perfectly adapted to the varieties of hard cataract than the operation of extraction.

8thly. That the modification of Mr. Saunders's operation, practised by Sir William Adams, also puts the cataract in a condition to be absorbed; but, by inflicting greater violence on the eye, exposes the patient to the risk of an acute inflammation, imminently hazarding the safety of the organ.

JOHN RICHARD FARRE, M. D.
BENJAMIN TRAVERS, } Surgeons.
WILLIAM LAWRENCE, }

Appendix.

NOTE OF THE COMMITTEE OF MEDICAL DIRECTORS OF
THE LONDON INFIRMARY TO MR. BATTLEY, RESPECTING
THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MR. SAUNDERS AND
MR. ADAMS; AND HIS ANSWER THERETO.

*London Infirmary, Charterhouse Square,
December 22, 1814.*

DEAR SIR,

HAVING been desired by the Sub-Committee of the London Infirmary, to examine the evidence of the claims of the late Mr. SAUNDERS to the discovery of certain points concerning the treatment of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, and to report thereon to the General Committee; we request that you will furnish us with any papers of Mr. SAUNDERS in your possession, that may assist in throwing light on the subject.

We remain,

Dear Sir,

Your obedient Servants,

I. R. FARRE,

B. TRAVERS,

W. LAWRENCE,

Richard Battley, Esq.

FROM MR. BATTLE, IN REPLY.

London, Fore Street, Dec. 23, 1814.

GENTLEMEN,

I HEREWITH return you, agreeably to your request of the 22nd, four letters, which I have selected from the papers left me by the Rev. O. S. SAUNDERS, brother to the late Mr. I. C. SAUNDERS, which I think applicable to the subject of your inquiry.

I likewise send you the Rev. Mr. SAUNDERS's letter, authorizing the publication of these documents.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient Servant,

RICHARD BATTLE.

*To the Committee of Medical Directors
of the London Infirmary for curing
Diseases of the Eye.*

P. S. I also enclose you official papers from Sir WILLIAM ADAMS relating to the business.

(No. I.)

FROM THE REV. O. S. SAUNDERS TO MR. BATTLE.

Barnstaple, Dec. 15, 1814.

DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED this morning your clear statement in opposition to the claims of Sir WILLIAM ADAMS, and I answer your communication by return of post. I

highly approve of the plan which you have adopted in the defence of your late friend's professional character and honor---and as the brother of the deceased J. C. SAUNDERS, I give you my sincere thanks for this disinterested act of friendship; I shall abstain from expressing my sentiments on the conduct of Sir WILLIAM ADAMS. I again give you in writing my free permission to publish the correspondence intrusted to your care, and you may shew and use this letter in any manner you may think proper. With best respects to yourself, Doctor FARRE, and many others,

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours most sincerely,

To Richard Battley, Esq.

O. S. SAUNDERS.

(No. II.)

FROM MR. ADAMS TO MR. SAUNDERS.

Exeter, May 25, 1809.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN consequence of my success on some Egyptian soldiers with the granulated lids, but more especially one man, who was first discharged from his regiment and afterwards from the Chelsea depot; my zealous friend, Mr. RUSSELL, stated the facts to General THEWLES, the Commander of the District, who thought it of the utmost importance and appointed a time to inspect this man, intimating he should be prepared with a statement of the treatment &c. before he came under

my care; which he (General THEWLES) this day has, with several other field officers, very attentively considered; he said by no means should time be lost to make it known to the Adjutant General, which he would officially communicate, who, he had no doubt, would from humanity alone, as well as from the great good that might be derived to the forces, pay every attention the subject merited.---He thought it would be necessary for me to write him a letter to be forwarded to Government, stating what were my views in bringing it to light.---I explained to him verbally you were the original person that had observed the nature of the disease, and had in some instances treated it successfully, but since I came to Exeter, I had tried various methods to destroy the disease, by using the pure caustic, actual cautery, &c. none of which answered my wishes, until I hit on the expedient I followed in the three last cases, the whole of which have succeeded most perfectly. I told him I should have recommended to Lord GRAVES, had not the mishap occurred to Lord PAGER, that he should place himself under your care, understanding his was of the same kind. Feeling how much I am indebted and obliged to you for what I know, I leave the business wholly to you; write to me and say how I am to act, in whose name it is to be brought forward, and in what manner, &c. I am in the greatest haste going into the country to dine with JOHNSON, who is well, and desires kindest remembrance to you and Mrs. SAUNDERS, in which I most cordially join.

Yours faithfully,

J. C. Saunders, Esq.

W. ADAMS.

P. S. I see I forgot to state that I take a very sharp knife, and shave off the granulations down home to the tarsus---encourage bleeding---antiphlogistic plan most rigidly---and using the strongest astringents when the wounds have healed ; I tried the solution of caustic and scissars in several cases at first, but did not succeed. You must write to me by return of post, as General THEWLES will call next Thursday.

(No. III.)

FROM MR. SAUNDERS TO MR. ADAMS IN REPLY TO
THE LAST.

London, Ely Place, May 1809.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WHEN my inclination to serve you induced me to lay open to you a scene for observation, which it was in my power to have kept private, and also to make you acquainted with such observations as accrued to me, and the means which I pursued in singular instances, I certainly confided in your honour, not to anticipate me in the communication of such practice. Nay more, I unquestionably thought, that you would have observed a line of conduct that should

* This letter is printed from a copy of the original, preserved in the hand writing of Mr. SAUNDERS. The date is not affixed, but the Post-Office mark on the original of No. II. being May the 29th, this reply to it must have been dated on the 29th, or 30th of May, 1809, because No. IV. the answer to No. III. is dated, Exeter, June the 1st, 1809.

have insured me from any hasty or premature developement of my notions.

The disease alluded to, I first pointed out to your notice in the example of Mr. FIDKINS. I explained the nature of it. I cured him, and also a great number of other patients, by the method which I pursued.

The management of this state of the eye makes a very important part of the work which I am about to publish, and I leave it to you to decide how far you can, consistently with the confidential state in which my friendship placed you, suffer such a practice to be published, under any form or modification whatever. Your views can only be the enhancement of your own professional character, whilst mine you neglect, even when your notions originated from the observation made on the case of Mr. FIDKINS. I have not failed in any instance where my practice has been fairly tried. I certainly do not think the commutation of the knife for scissars, or the change of one powerful astringent for another, sufficient to justify the anticipation of my communication. I trust to your sense of the advantages which you have received at my hands, to the acknowledgments which you have so often made for my friendship, that your conduct on this occasion will be such as an honourable man ought to adopt. In expectation of your immediate reply,

I remain,


Yours faithfully,

William Adams, Esq.

J. C. SAUNDERS.

(No. IV.)

FROM MR. ADAMS TO MR. SAUNDERS.


Exeter, June 1st, 1809.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE haste with which I wrote you last, did not give me time to half explain myself, as JOHNSON was with me waiting to accompany me into the country to dine.

I *most solemnly pledge my honour* I never had an idea of what I proposed to you until it was suggested, and I may add, *enforced* on me by my zealous and good friend Mr. RUSSELL, who would not be satisfied with being told it was *your* invention, and not mine, that led to the happy issue. He spoke of it to General THEWLES, unknown to me, who still further encouraged me by saying I might give you all the honor and credit of the invention; but that I, as having the opportunity of bringing it before Government, would be entitled to some pecuniary recompence, with the distribution of which we might agree between ourselves. I stated to him simple facts---You first observed the disease in a Gentleman who had been constantly under surgical treatment for upwards of two years, during which time he had been under the care of *all* the eminent Oculists and Surgeons in London, none of whom did him the least service; that you still attended him when I left London to reside in the country, and I had since learnt he was completely cured. Shortly after I began to,

practice, I had some cases of a similar kind that applied to me, on whom I tried (then to me) the novel practice, but without success: as the excessive pain attending it, prevented my gaining my patient's consent to a repetition, which was necessary to produce the desired effect. This induced me to try other means more powerful, which might answer by the first attempt. The pure caustic was tried, but it produced an ulcer of the cornea that in some measure impeded vision, the actual cautery was not more successful; but at last I hit on my present expedient, which had afforded me perfect success in every instance I have had recourse to it, and which I thought it always would with a hundred parts less pain than unavoidably attended the other modes of treatment. He saw the cases I had succeeded with---and advised me to take down the particulars of one, on the patient's affidavit, which he said he would forward to Government, if you and myself could agree about it. I consulted both Mr. RUSSELL and JOHNSON, who know exactly how we stand, and I acted by their advice, indeed the latter read the letter I sent you; but as you wish me not to do any thing in the business, I am sure I would not, if it were to gain a fortune, act contrary to what is proper and liberal. My idea was, and which I mentioned to JOHNSON, to have given you the credit of the invention; and if any donation resulted, which General THEWLES did not doubt but would follow if the plan was approved of, to have divided it with you. I meant to have referred any inquiries to you, which of course would have given the discovery completely to you. I declare most solemnly, I never had an idea of assuming to myself any further credit than having improved the method

of treating the disease. Another circumstance your letter brought me acquainted with, of which I was before ignorant, namely, your being about to publish on that subject. I understood, the book that was to appear, related to the cure of cataracts; JOHNSON has since told me you always meant to include the treatment of this disease. What I meant by asking whether it should appear in your name or mine, was--- whether you had any strong cases to recommend the practice; or whether you could bring it before the Commander in Chief officially. No case can be stronger than one of mine the General saw, as he had been inspected by at least thirty of the Staff Surgeons, and I believe even the Surgeon General, none of whom had the least idea of the complaint. Do not therefore publish your book, without first making it known to Government, as they have issued the strictest orders to burn *every thing* belonging to an infected patient; so very particular are they become. General THEWLES over and over assured me any improvement of practice would be instantly attended to, and the inventor liberally rewarded, if the plan was to prove extensively useful. He thought it likely Government would establish Hospitals, and call in all the pensioners to be examined, and attended by us. Do not therefore, miss the opportunity so good as the present; I will act for you as for myself, and will get him to forward any proposition you would wish me, and entirely keep myself in the back ground. If my plan, on trial, should be found useful, do with it what you please, and consider it your own. I again declare sacredly, I should ever think myself an ungrateful scoundrel, as well as dis-

honourable, had I behaved otherwise than I have,
namely: "asking you and being guided by your wishes."

I remain, Dear Sir,

Very sincerely,

Your sincere Friend,

J. C. Saunders, Esq.

WILLIAM ADAMS.

(No. V.)

FROM THE LATE MR. JOHNSON, SURGEON OF EXETER,
A FRIEND OF MR. ADAMS, TO MR. SAUNDERS.

244, *High-street, Exeter,*

June 4th, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

I REGRET to find that our friend Mr. ADAMS feels somewhat uneasy, owing to a late correspondence which he has had with you, relative to the Egyptian Ophthalmia. Lest you might be led to view his conduct in any other than its true light, he has desired me to write you a statement of the circumstances connected with this affair, so far as they fall under my cognizance: and this I am the better qualified to do, as he made me a principal party in his counsels.

It was not many days after my arrival in Exeter, that Mr. ADAMS operated upon a case of Egyptian Ophthalmia, in presence of Mr. RUSSELL and some other friends, at the Infirmary. He likewise mentioned the successful result of some other cases, which he had previously treated in the same manner.

Reflecting upon what passed in this conversation,

and considering of how much importance it would be that a successful mode of treating this complaint were made generally public, Mr. RUSSELL suggested the idea of making a formal communication to Government of the result of Mr. ADAMS's practice. Mr. ADAMS observed, however, that as the whole merit of first observing and treating the disease successfully belonged to you, he could have nothing like a claim to originality. At the same time, such a favourable representation of these successful cases had been given by Mr. RUSSELL to General THULES, as induced him to call at the Infirmary, and to offer to forward any communication or proposal which Mr. ADAMS might think proper to make to the Commander in Chief. This gave Mr. ADAMS an opportunity of explaining to General THULES the relation in which he stood towards you: and it was under these circumstances that Mr. ADAMS wrote to ask your advice as to the line of conduct which it would be proper to adopt. I know that his letter upon this occasion was written in great haste, which might possibly prevent him from explaining his views so fully as he ought to have done. If any farther steps had been taken, his express intention was to give you the whole merit of the discovery, but to have participated with you in a share of the profits which he thought likely to arise from it. The project is now, however, totally given up; and Mr. ADAMS only seems to regret, that the intemperate zeal of some of his friends should in any way have rendered him obnoxious to your displeasure. I cannot suppose that it was ever his intention to take any unfair advantage of you; for I have repeatedly heard him acknowledge, that

every thing of which he can now boast was originally derived from your friendly instruction.

Mr. ADAMS has had an interview with General THULES this morning, and mentioned to him the general tendency of your letter, with his determination to put a stop to all further proceedings. The General is still, however, of opinion, that it might be very much to YOUR advantage to bring forward the result of your own practice, in the way above alluded to; and he again repeated his offer to give you, as a friend of Mr. ADAMS, every assistance in his power. He seems to think that this could not in any degree lessen the value of your intended publication; besides, should you feel inclined to propose any thing like a depot for soldiers affected with this disease, Mr. ADAMS is of opinion, that you might make it a source of considerable emolument as well as reputation. Of the propriety of any such measure, you must, however, be the best qualified to judge for yourself.

Mr. ADAMS seems to feel very sensibly that he has been wanting in delicacy towards you on this late occasion; and this has, in the present instance, induced me to become his apologist. I hope he will never again put himself in a situation to require one.

Yours most sincerely,

C. T. JOHNSON.

J. C. Saunders, Esq.

(No. VI.)

FROM MR. ADAMS TO SIR DAVID DUNDAS, THE LATE
COMMANDER IN CHIEF, ENCLOSED IN THE LETTER
ADDRESSED OFFICIALLY BY SIR W. ADAMS TO DR.
FARRE.

March 1, 1810.

SIR,

AFTER the most attentive perusal of the Report the Adjutant-General did me the honour to enclose, I beg leave to observe, that the particular form of the Ophthalmia, to which, from its very destructive nature, I am anxious to call your attention, is not therein even alluded to. It is an effect very generally produced when the disease is not cured during its acute stage, and which a very large proportion of those men dismissed the service labour under. Within these few months from *fifteen* to *twenty* of such persons I have perfectly cured, by pursuing a mode of operation *first suggested by my late friend and preceptor, Mr. SAUNDERS, and since IMPROVED BY MYSELF*, without meeting with a single instance of failure. I have taken the liberty of enclosing the particulars of one of three very bad cases of this kind, which were drawn up by the patient himself, at the suggestion of General THEWLES, Colonel HEAD, of the 13th light dragoons, and several other officers of that regiment, who inspected him and his fellow-sufferers at the West of England Eye Infirmary, at Exeter, an institution of which I have the sole surgical management. These gentlemen considered a knowledge of the practice would be of such great importance and benefit to the service, that they repeatedly urged me to allow Ge-

neral THEWLES (the then Commander of the District) to forward the enclosed case, with other proofs of my success, in an official form to you. This, however, peculiar circumstances induced me then to decline.

In thus voluntarily coming forward, I must beg to state, that the only motives by which I am actuated, are, in the first place, a desire of communicating highly useful information, and, *secondly, an earnest wish to benefit the widow of my much esteemed friend.* In these I hope to succeed, should I be granted the opportunity of proving the utility of *his discovery*, of which I am the only one of his pupils who can speak from practical experience.

During the interview with which the Adjutant-General (General CALVERT) honoured me two days since, I proposed to him, that a certain number of men, afflicted with this stage of the Ophthalmia, at the York Hospital, whose names are noted to be dismissed, should be sent down to Exeter, in order that I might have the opportunity of demonstrating, beyond the possibility of doubt, the validity of my pretensions. This he was pleased highly to approve; but I have since learnt, from the Assistant-Surgeon of that establishment, that most of the Ophthalmia patients in that hospital have been discharged as incurable. It has recently happened, that, from the 9th light dragoons, now quartered at Exeter, *ten men* (comrades of Frost, whose memorial I herewith send) have been discharged, as no longer fit for service, in the same state of disease as that which he laboured under when he first applied to me; *eight* of whom, I am fully convinced, admit of being cured by the same means as were employed upon him. I therefore, Sir, venture to

assert, with great confidence, if all the Ophthalmia pensioners in the kingdom were called in, and those selected for treatment who admit of being cured, that an immense expense would be saved to the Government which is now paid to them in pensions; besides restoring to the service a very considerable number of ready disciplined soldiers; a measure which humanity as well as policy seem strongly to recommend.

I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

W. ADAMS.

To Sir DAVID DUNDAS, (*late*
Commander in Chief.)

The Committee, having heard and considered the preceding Report and Appendix, resolved unanimously on the following Statement, and passed the subjoined Resolutions.

STATEMENT.

THE Governors of this Infirmary have established and supported it at a considerable expense, for the great and important objects of serving the public, and promoting medical science.

The immense number of objects, whom it preserves or restores from the most destitute of all conditions---blindness, the important practical observations which have resulted from the opportunities which these means have afforded, and will hereafter call forth from their medical officers, the many similar institutions to which it has given rise, and the numerous pupils who receive instruction within its walls, constitute the strength of its character; and form but a fair return of reputation for the talent, the time, and the capital which have been expended upon it.

On this character of the Infirmary, the Ge-

neral Committee have always founded their pretensions to the support of the public, and have long since intimated the expediency of making a very considerable enlargement of its establishment for in-patients. To carry this plan into effect, they have recently opened a fund for procuring a freehold building, suited to the extensive scale on which this Charity will be hereafter conducted. Their intention as a public body being only that of increasing a public benefit to the full extent of which it admits, an application to Government to aid this important design, has been for some time contemplated.

The ready attention of His Royal Highness the Duke of York, the Commander in Chief, to certain claims of curing the Egyptian Ophthalmia, advanced by Sir William Adams, and the appointment of some of the most distinguished members of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, to ascertain by direct observation, the practicability of curing certain men, rendered unserviceable by this disease, are proofs of the great solicitude of His Royal Highness, and of His Majesty's Government, to promote the happiness, and to secure the usefulness of the soldier.

These unfounded claims of Sir William Adams to the discovery or improvement of a me-

thod of curing the Egyptian Ophthalmia, of which, it has been shewn that he was neither the discoverer nor the improver, infringe the rights of this Infirmary, at which he was merely a student, and the merits of the late Mr. Saunders, under whom he was only a gratuitous pupil.

The General Committee is forcibly struck with the early developement of a plan, which may be traced through all the papers, official and unofficial, viz. in addition to an expected donation, proved by No. IV. in the appendix, an intended proposition to Government to establish Hospitals, and to call in all the pensioners to be examined and attended by the party interested. This purpose, (for private emolument, so honourably rejected by their Surgeon, the late Mr. Saunders) produces an unchanging language through the documents IV. V. VI. and the paragraphs at pages 4 and 5, of the Greenwich official papers.

The successful treatment of the acute and chronic stages of the Egyptian Ophthalmia at this Infirmary, at which Sir William Adams was taught the method, which he has submitted to the scrutiny of the Medical Committee appointed by Government, forms an essential part of the claims to public favour, on which the Governors of this invaluable Charity rest their pretensions.

Amongst the numerous patients suffering under the acute and chronic forms of the Egyptian Ophthalmia, who have been cured at this Infirmary since its establishment, a considerable proportion have belonged to the important naval and military classes of British subjects.

This Infirmary, manifesting its importance by the increase of its out-patients, in the space of ten years, from 600 to nearly 4000 annually, would, *on the enlarged establishment proposed*, for which a fund has already been opened by private benevolence, be capable of accommodating Government as an Ophthalmic Hospital, to a considerable extent, *even with in-patients*, not for any private emolument, but as a just return for any adequate contribution from the national purse, to the fund above-mentioned. The importance of such a measure will at once be obvious, when it is stated, that the Infirmary is attended by numerous pupils, many of whom are either in his Majesty's service, or are educating for it.

This proposition, *on the plan of an equivalent*, is not suggested as a bar to any personal donation, which the generosity of Government might bestow on the relict of the late John Cunningham Saunders, Esq. the founder of this Infirmary, and the discoverer of the practice.

RESOLUTIONS.

RESOLVED,

That the evidence now presented to the Committee, together with the Report of the Medical Officers, and the statement of the General Committee, be forthwith printed and published.

That a copy of this Special Report be transmitted to His ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF YORK, *Commander in Chief*.

That a deputation be appointed to wait on His ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF YORK, from the General Committee; who will have the honour to lay before His ROYAL HIGHNESS the Reports of this Infirmary, from its commencement---to set forth the services which it has already rendered to the community, *and to His Majesty's service in*

particular---and further, to shew its increasing capacities for both these important ends.

That copies of this Special Report be also transmitted to His Majesty's Ministers; and that the deputation be requested to present a memorial to them, respecting the nature and services of this Infirmary.

That the thanks of the General Committee be given to RICHARD BATTLE, Esq. for his spirited conduct in asserting those claims which the Committee publicly maintains.

That the thanks of this Meeting be given to the Medical Directors of the Infirmary, for the accuracy with which they have examined the documents submitted to their inspection, and for the candour and impartiality of their Report.

Mr. Alderman ANSLEY being called to the Chair, after the President had withdrawn from it,---

IT WAS RESOLVED,

That the thanks of the General Committee be given to Sir CHARLES PRICE, Bart. for

the important services which he has so repeatedly rendered to this Charity, as its President; and especially for his particular attention to the business of this day.

By Order of the General Committee,
RICHARD BATTLE.

40, Charterhouse Square.
December 28, 1814.

FINIS.

