

A letter to Sir Astley Paston Cooper, bart. F.R.S.

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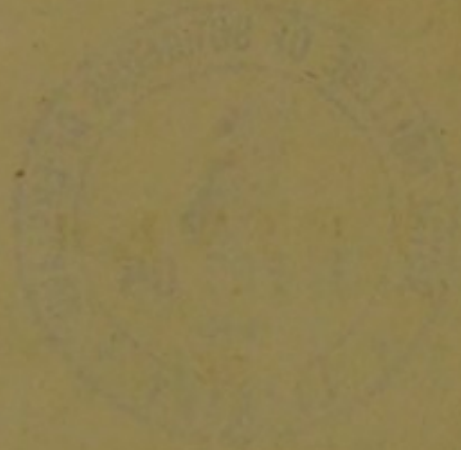
LETTER

TO

SIR ASTLEY PASTON COOPER, BART. F.R.S.

Mayo.

PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY AND COMPANY, BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.



LONDON:

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PRINTED BY THOMAS DAVISON, WHITEFRIARS.

A
LETTER

TO



SIR ASTLEY PASTON COOPER, BART. F. R. S.

SIR,

THE high estimation in which you are publicly held as an Anatomist and as a Surgeon, induces me to address to you the following Statement, which I am compelled to lay before the Members of the Medical Profession.

I am well aware how uninteresting the disputes of individuals are to a numerous body of men, yet I shall confidently hope

for attention, in a case, where I am forced by the outrage of another to solicit it.

In my *Physiological Inquiries*, I was led to some conclusions, which are so much at variance with a Theory proposed by Mr. C. Bell of Great Windmill-street, as to involve, supposing that they are correct, the destruction of the Theory alluded to. As is customary, and conducive to the improvement of science, I stated my differences with Mr. Bell in a book which I have recently published* ; and I confidently leave it to the reader to determine, whether, if my remarks be correct, the criticism can be deemed severe.

I expected that Mr. Bell would perhaps meet me with a contradiction of some of the assertions which I had made, when, to my surprise, a third person, Mr. Shaw,

* *Anatomical and Physiological Commentaries.*

likewise of Great Windmill-street, interfered, and commenced an attack upon my moral character in the following observations :

“ A statement of Mr. Bell’s discoveries is now, indeed, in some degree necessary, as those who are unacquainted with the immense variety of subjects involved in the Inquiry may perhaps be swayed by some insidious attacks, which have been lately made upon it, and particularly by one, who, it will scarcely be believed, was for some years under Mr. Bell’s roof. Though I am personally interested in the question, in consequence of the part I have taken in the performance of the experiments, by which the views deduced by Mr. Bell from Comparative Anatomy were substantiated, still it is with much unwillingness that I take notice of a late pamphlet : for when engaged in a delightful inquiry, it is most

unpleasant to be involved in a dispute with one, whose object seems rather to be an attempt to detract from the merit of his late master, than a wish to promote the interests of science."

It is true that the preceding statement may be viewed as purely ludicrous; yet I cannot think, that it is just by society to allow a writer to be shielded by his weakness from the consequences of attacking the moral character of his opponents: it is from such, indeed, alone, that similar outrages are to be expected. I felt it therefore my duty to write the following letter to Mr. Shaw, which, with his answer, and my reply, complete our correspondence.

TO JOHN SHAW, ESQ.

Sir,

WHEN I met you last night, I had not had the pleasure of reading your remarks in the London Medical and Physical Journal, Vol. 48. No. 4. p. 351.

Upon any scientific question the public I take to be the proper arbiter, and I would not intrude upon your privacy, in order to expose to you the unfairness of a literary criticism.

But you have ventured a step beyond this, and have imputed to me, in the composition of a book which I have recently published, unworthy motives. I felt it necessary to proceed with great delicacy in undeceiving Mr. Bell upon this point,

when in a recent correspondence, which you have probably seen, he made it a matter of accusation against me : but you, sir, do not stand in the same relation to me, and I may be allowed to speak to you more explicitly. What I have to observe to you is, that in composing my book I was not actuated by the motive of detracting from Mr. Bell's reputation, and that consequently any assertion that I was so actuated is a violation of truth.

I am, Sir,

your obedient servant,

HERBERT MAYO.

Sunday,

October 6, 1822.

TO HERBERT MAYO, ESQ.

Sir,

I HAVE just received your note, which was left at my house this evening.

It would give me much pleasure to be convinced that my conception of your motives was founded in error; but in truth, with your real motives I have nothing to do, only with the impression actually made by your publication, and of this your readers must be allowed to judge. I wrote what I considered the circumstances called for; and as I was not actuated by any wish to hurt your feelings, but merely by a desire to repel the attack you made, as it was calculated to raise a prejudice and wrong opinion in the public mind. If any mutual acquaintance, who knows all that has oc-

curred since you first proposed to lecture on anatomy, will say that I was not justified in the view which I have taken in my communication to the Medical and Physical Journal, while I must continue to strive against the influence of your work, I shall be happy and ready to say that I have misconceived your motives.

I am, sir,

your obedient servant,

JOHN SHAW.

Sunday evening, Half-past Nine,

October 6, 1822.

TO JOHN SHAW, ESQ.

Sir,

I AM perfectly satisfied with the explanation, which you have given, that you had in truth nothing to do with my

real motives. If this affair is ended, allow me to advise you for the future to confine your criticisms to literary points, as you will take notice that I had done. The world will always suppose you beat in an argument, when you digress from it, in order to attack the personal character of your opponent; and you will in each case lay yourself open to the kind of note, which I had the honour to send to you yesterday evening. Whether I hear from you again or not upon this subject, I shall hold myself at liberty to give any degree of publicity to our correspondence.

I am, sir,

your obedient servant,

HERBERT MAYO.

Monday morning, Half-past Ten,

October 7th, 1822.

I believe, sir, that in immediately stating to Mr. Shaw, that his assertions (it is clear, I presume, that I equally meant and mean his insinuations) respecting the nature of my motives, were unequivocally false, I adopted the most temperate of the very few measures, which were appropriate to the case. Mr. Shaw, in reply to me, admitted, that though he made the insinuation above alluded to, he had nothing to do with my real motives : it follows, I presume, logically, that he was studious only to give such a colouring to my motives, as would best suit his fancied interest, by prejudicing physiological readers against my remarks. It remains for me to make public my full and complete disavowal of the act attributed to me, of composing a work, or any part of one, with the motive of detracting from the reputation of another ; and to protest against the new method introduced by Mr. Shaw, of answering scientific criticism by personal abuse.

This, sir, is my only object in thus troubling you. I had no wish to expose to the pitying gaze of the public the writhings of a distressed physiologist; I have no wish to analyze Mr. Shaw's little treasure, if he has one, as he insinuates, of petty grievances; I do not even feel for him indignant contempt;—but I turn from him with pleasure, to look round at the numerous respected members of that Profession, which no one has contributed to raise higher in the consideration of society than Yourself.

I have the honour to be,
with great respect, sir,
your obedient humble servant,
HERBERT MAYO.

18, Berwick-street, Golden-square,
Tuesday evening, October 8th, 1822.

