

Assertion versus argument : a few letters to an anti-vivisectionist / by Samuel Wilks.

Contributors

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ASSERTION *versus* ARGUMENT.

A FEW LETTERS

TO AN ANTI-VIVISECTIONIST.

BY

SAMUEL WILKS, M.D., F.R.S.

LONDON:

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ASSERTION *versus* ARGUMENT.

72, GROSVENOR STREET, W.,

December 3, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Thanks for your pamphlet,* which I shall read with attention.

I don't think the result of my conclusion is of much importance. If men like Owen and others have been pursuing one mode of thought all their lives, the refutation of a particular instance cannot change them.

I have always thought myself that one subject which Owen refers to—mutilation—is one of the most awful pieces of cruelty to which man has subjected animals. Infinitely more horrible than anything which physiologists have done. I have seen letters from ladies calling down vengeance from heaven upon the College of Surgeons. It strikes me if God Almighty's wrath should ever be incurred for cruelty, it will be for depriving animals of one of the highest gifts conferred upon living things. People look with no eye of pity on

* *Hunter and the Stag*, accompanied by the following note:—

December 3, 1881.

SIR,—I have read with much interest your article in the current *Nineteenth Century*, and especially your appeal to any Anti-Vivisectionist who may be "open to conviction." To that appeal I respond cheerfully. Only I must be convinced by argument and proof not by mere assertion and calling of hard names. As a commencement let me ask from you a refutation, public or private, of the enclosed reply to Professor Owen's story of the "Stag." The only answer Professor Owen himself is able to furnish you will have seen in the article preceding your own. And that 'consisting simply of a pure and simple false statement as to the argument put forward' has failed of convincing me. You, I doubt not, will answer my argument instead of mis-stating it, and I trust I need not assure you that your answer will in such case receive the fullest and most respectful consideration from

Your obedient Servant,

herds of mutilated oxen or flocks of sheep. It made me shudder the other day when I heard a farmer say he was going to "doctor" fifty young horses. As I suppose you are fond of animals, I send a pamphlet in return.

Yours faithfully,

SAMUEL WILKS.

The reply to the above cannot be found, but it was to the effect that Dr. Wilks's argument seemed to introduce a psychological element which in the case of an animal was somewhat out of place and that the deprivation of a pleasure of any possibility of enjoying which the loser could never have an idea, was not quite the same as the actual infliction of cruel suffering. Further, that the writer was not concerned in any such practices himself and would be happy to subscribe to any society Dr. Wilks might start to suppress them. But that what he now asked for was a reply to his refutation of Professor Owen's story about Hunter's operation.

72, GROSVENOR STREET, W.,

December 7, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Thanks for letter and enclosures. I wish some large and rational scheme could be proposed for the protection of animals. No men would be more ready to support it than scientists and doctors. I see every morning in Bond Street cages crowded with quails and larks for the gourmand, plover's eggs, &c., at the fishmongers, live lobsters crowded together in a basket, and writhing under a slow death with their dried up gills. I never hear a cry of pity from the most tender-hearted lady.

But when presiding at my section at the late Congress, it was proposed to inoculate two white mice with a needle, we found it could not be done, no one was licensed. Such a prohibition is utterly ridiculous and can have but one signification—a hatred of science.

But the subject is beyond discussion. It must be fought out. I apprehend the difference of thought between the scientific man and his opponent is as great as between Whig and Tory, Roman Catholic or Protestant, and the strife will always go on.

Yours very truly,

SAMUEL WILKS.

December 8, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Forgive me, but if “the subject is beyond discussion” what becomes of the “Anti-Vivisectionists still open to argument” to whom you appealed in your article and of whom I am one? The two arguments you have already advanced I have no difficulty at all in meeting. That relating to the horse I had the pleasure of answering yesterday. That advanced in yours of this morning is equally simple of reply. It is not *ad rem*. That a Bond Street fishmonger is cruel to lobsters and plover’s eggs is no reason why a Grosvenor Street scientist should be allowed to be cruel to dogs and monkeys. The proposition has no common ground. If you use the argument personally it does not apply. I never hurt a live lobster or a plover’s egg in my life. If you use it officially I reply simply “one thing at a time.” I do not complain of you for attending to a case of measles when there are scarlet fever and small-pox and half-a-score other sore distempers lying doctorless around. And in the lobster and plover egg case there is no such deficiency. They have a big society of their own with nearly £20,000 a year, only the big society is afraid of losing the subscriptions of its medical supporters if it meddles with Professor Ferrier—I beg pardon, Professor Yeo. Again for your “argument” that objection to Vivisection can only come from “hatred to science” there is a still simpler reply in the precisely similar argument that support of Vivisection can only come from love of cruelty. But it is a line of argument for which I have no great value myself. In *Hunter and the Stag* I offer you one of a very different kind. The argument of

one who objects to Vivisection not because he hates science but because he respects it, and does not care to see it degraded and hampered by a false and foolish "survival" of barbarism. Show me that I am wrong there and you will shake my position on that side terribly. I am looking with some interest for your reply.

Faithfully yours,

72, GROSVENOR STREET, W.,

December 9, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—I understand you to say that Anel had already tied the artery in aneurism and that Hunter merely followed in his footsteps. Owen, it seems, does not deny that Anel used a ligature, but that it was by a perfectly independent observation and experiment that Hunter was led to the improved method. I should have thought that Owen with Hunter's preparation before him, and Mr. Clift's accurate knowledge of Hunter's proceedings would be very likely to know the truth of the matter.

As regards the general question—the discussion of details cannot alter the fact—that we English people allow any amount of cruelty, pain, injury, and mutilation to be inflicted on animals,* but we bring all the power of the law to bear upon those few persons who should be guilty of any of these things for the sake of obtaining knowledge.

This is the gist of all the speeches and is contained in the Act.

Is it likely that scientific men will sit quiet and bear that injustice?

* This is so curiously the reverse of "the fact," as to be really worthy of notice. "We English people" have been for a good many years now laboriously striving to put down cruelty of all kinds. Some kinds of cruelty have still escaped. But the only form of it actually *allowed* by the law is the scientific cruelty of Vivisection. And it is Dr. Wilks and his friends who are indignant at the comparative smallness of the exception made in their favour and clamour for unlimited license to inflict what torments they please.

If exactly the same operation which is now done for killing an animal were performed for the sake of obtaining knowledge the law would interfere. It is science, and not cruelty which is attacked.

Yours very truly,
S. WILKS.

December 9, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Only one word, for your letter of this morning fairly takes away my breath. Is it really, after reading my pamphlet* “with attention” that you came to the conclusion therein stated about it?

Yours very truly,

December 14, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Might I ask for just one word of reply—a mere “yes” or “no”—to my inquiry of the 9th inst., whether it was

* The argument of *Hunter and the Stag* may be briefly stated as follows:—

A.—*Historical.*

1. The “Stag” story is, on Professor Owen’s own showing, mere “third-hand hearsay,” more than a century old.
2. Hunter has himself left a published account of his invention in which he ascribes it to a wholly different origin.

B.—*Scientific.*

1. The question of the “collateral circulation” simply affects the treatment by ligature without amputation.
2. Aneurism had been treated by simple ligature from the time of Coëlus.

Therefore—

- a. Hunter’s discovery did not consist in the treatment by simple ligature.
- b. The motion of the collateral circulation had no bearing on Hunter’s “innovation.”
3. That innovation, as plainly stated by Hunter himself, consisted in removing the ligature from an unsound to a sound part of the artery.
4. The arteries of a vivisected animal are all sound.

Conclusion.

Hunter’s discovery as a matter of history had not and as a matter of fact could not have any foundation in vivisection. It was “a brilliant innovation—all the more brilliant in that it was the result of legitimate argument and logical deduction.”

after studying *Hunter and the Stag*, which you will remember you kindly promised to read "with attention" that you came to the conclusion mentioned in your note of that date? I would not trouble you, but so many of our people are, like myself, quite "open to argument," and will be much interested in the correspondence.

Faithfully yours,

72, GROSVENOR STREET,

December 16, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—I thought I conveyed correctly the general tenour of the question between you and Owen.

The latter stated that Hunter was led to his operation of ligature of the femoral artery by the experiments and methods he describes.

You deny this and say that the ligature had already been used by Anel and others before Hunter's time.

I understand that Owen again does not deny what Anel did, but his results were so unsatisfactory that the operation was altogether in abeyance until Hunter by independent research and experiment introduced the new method.

The question seems to be one of history, but as I before said, I should now again say, that if there be any one living who is like to know the truth of the matter it is Owen.

Yours very truly,

SAMUEL WILKS.

December 16, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Thanks for your note; which however—you will forgive my saying—does by no means convey or make any approach to conveying "the general tenour of the question" between Professor Owen and myself. This, coupled with the further fact that you make no reply to my question as to whether you have read the pamphlet in which my argument is contained confirms my impression that you have not yet been able to do so; but have taken my position from

Professor Owen's own astounding mis-statement of it. I hope however you will be able soon to find time to go into the question for yourself as I should much like for once to see my argument fairly met. The contention that Professor Owen is likely to know most about it is, I need hardly point out, not exactly in the nature of an "argument."

Faithfully yours,

It occurs to me that *Hunter and the Stag* may possibly have been mislaid. So I send you another copy.

72, GROSVENOR STREET,
December 17, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—When you sent me your pamphlet I read it straight through and came to the conclusion which I still hold to, that there is a question of an historical nature between you and Owen.

Of course you wish me to say that you have proved your position, but I cannot do this in the face of what you yourself say or imply—that Hunter had learned all about collateral circulation whilst Anel knew nothing of it—but I need not enter into particulars. The object of your pamphlet is to show that Owen is in error in stating that Hunter was led to his superior operation by original observation and experiment, but that he merely developed a practice already in use.

If Owen denies this, surely the question is one of fact and history.

Yours very truly,
SAMUEL WILKS.

December 19, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—You say I myself "say or imply that Hunter had learned all about the collateral circulation whilst Anel knew nothing of it." Was it the following passage, from p. 14, which gave you that view of my argument. "Anel," I there say, "knew to a line the region nourished by the channel

he was about to cut off. He knew just as precisely the result which must inevitably follow were there no other channel at hand by which that nourishment could be supplied. And if, knowing both, he nevertheless proceeded with his operation just as boldly as those who had performed it in blissful ignorance of both those vital facts the inference is surely tolerably clear that he *had also a third compensatory knowledge, the knowledge of those collateral channels by which the interrupted circulation might as a question of theory and would as a matter of fact be supplied.*" If this has really led you to think that Anel knew nothing of the collateral circulation we shall have I fear to go back rather far into first principles in search of a common standpoint of interpretation.

Meanwhile let me assure you that it is far from my wish that you should say I have proved my position—unless you can first see it. And of this I have now no anticipation. But I do want you to meet my arguments with some sort of counter-argument; not with the mere assumption that they mean precisely the reverse of what they say—which is really hardly polite—or with the blank *ipse dixit* of Professor Owen.

Remember, you appealed to "an Anti-Vivisectionist open to argument." I am that Anti-Vivisectionist. But then it must be argument.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) _____

72, GROSVENOR STREET,

December 21, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—I did not intend to write again, as I have nothing further to add, but as there seems to have been a misunderstanding about my expression, I should like further to explain my meaning, which was this: Hunter had a true and correct knowledge of collateral circulation as shown by his writings. There is no evidence that Anel had any such knowledge, that is, accurate and scientific. When therefore you "*infer*" it, I intended to say that you yourself implied

that you had no proof. I have no time to take up the question historically which is the only method, and read again the life of Hunter, but I remember sufficiently that Palmer entirely disposes of the French claims to the improved method of treatment of aneurism. The profession has been hitherto content with Palmer's argument. If you have any fresh facts to advance, of course they will be listened to, but I am not aware that you have adduced anything fresh on behalf of Anel.

Yours very truly, SAMUEL WILKS.

December 23, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—I am of course happy to accept your explanation; though I must confess I do so purely "on faith." For how it can be made to tally either with my words or your own, altogether passes my understanding. Of course too if you have not time to argue out the question I should be the last to urge you into doing so. Only please do not hereafter speak of us Anti-Vivisectionists as people who won't listen to argument. Because I think you will now see that that hardly meets the facts of the case. I give up with the less reluctance the hope I had entertained of for once getting a vivisectionist to meet me on the ground of fair discussion from a distressing sense of the very little progress we have as yet made. Your very last words are that you are "not aware that [I] have adduced anything fresh on behalf of Anel." My *dear* Sir! My whole argument is *dead against Anel*.

Yours very truly, ———

Envoi.

So ends Dr. Wilks's "argument."

He tells us in the *Nineteenth Century* that he does not doubt our "sanity, modesty, or good faith;" we only he thinks "lack a sense of the ludicrous."

If he could only follow this correspondence on its rounds!

