

[Letters concerning the cases of Christina Cameron and David Hutcheon being considered by the House Committee of the Royal Infirmary].

Contributors

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Royal Infirmary (Montrose, Scotland). House Committee.

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Montrose, July 2d, 1852.

SIR,

I beg to forward you the enclosed copy of the respective statements made by Dr. Johnston and myself to the Special Committee of Inquiry appointed, at my request, to investigate the cases of Christina Cameron and David Hutcheon.

The Special Committee having declined to pass any opinion on the Medical or Surgical treatment of these cases, about which so many unfair and injurious reports have been circulated, I felt that, however painful it might be to me, I had no other resource left than to appeal to the Profession at large. Copies of the enclosed Paper I accordingly sent to Professors Syme, Lizars, and Simpson, of Edinburgh, whose eminent position I need not allude to, and therefore, without any comment, I refer you to their answers, which are annexed, as an evidence of the light in which my conduct throughout this unpleasant affair is viewed by those in the profession most capable of judging.

And remain,

SIR,

Your most obedt. Servant,

T. C. MORISON.

[Turn over.]

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Copy LETTERS from JAMES SYME, Esq., Professor of Clinical Surgery, University of Edin..

JOHN LIZARS, Esq., late Professor of Surgery in the Roy. Coll. of Surgeons, Edin.,
and Dr. SIMPSON, Professor of Midwifery, University of Edin.

Edinburgh, 26th June, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—Having read the papers which you left with me to-day, I feel no hesitation in saying that, in accordance with the established rules of Surgery, the case of the boy should not have been regarded as *hopeless* or *incurable*; and that, if the urethra was in the impervious state Dr. Johnston describes, the operation you performed was the proper mode of affording relief.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yrs. very truly,

JAMES SYME.

T. C. MORISON, Esq.

MR. MORISON, one of the Surgeons of the Royal Infirmary of Montrose, having submitted to me the printed statement of the case of David Hutcheon, described in pages 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 of the printed document, and having asked my opinion of the operation performed by him on the patient Hutcheon, I have no hesitation in stating, that I consider the operation performed by Mr Morison *not only justified but demanded* by the circumstances of the case.

The grounds on which I think this operation, termed "*La Boutonnière*," should be performed are described by me, in my System of Practical Surgery, 2d edition, p. 417; in my Preface to the 2d Edition of my Practical Observations on the Treatment of Stricture of the Urethra and Fistula in Perineo, pages 12 and 17. In the text, at page 22, and at page 36, a case is described, illustrating the state of the diseased parts requiring the operation.

If Mr. Morison perseveres in inserting an ordinary-sized silver catheter, for an hour once a week, he is certain to heal the urinary fistula in the perineum, and accomplish a cure.

JOHN LIZARS,

Late Professor of Surgery to the Royal College of Surgeons, and Senior Operating
Surgeon to the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh, 15, South Charlotte Street,
26th June, 1852.

To MR. MORISON,

DEAR SIR,—I have looked over the printed documents which you left with me, regarding the case of Christina Cameron.

Let me merely state that the evidence which you adduce in justification of your views and treatment of the case appears to me, and I believe must appear to every medical man, most complete and satisfactory.

It is impossible that any such groundless and discreditable calumny, as that which you have been painfully subjected to, can do you any harm whatever with any man, or set of men, whose good opinion is really worth possessing. Rest assured the injury will be ultimately found to fall, not upon you, but upon those who have acted so unprofessionally towards you in this matter.

In reply to your direct question, as to who would have attended such a case when labour came on, if it had happened in our Edinburgh Infirmary? let me add that certainly not one of the Infirmary Surgeons or Physicians here would, under these circumstances, have waited on the woman in her accouchement.

Believe me, with much respect,

Very faithfully yours,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, 29th June, 1852.

ROYAL LUNATIC ASYLUM, Montrose.

SIR,—I beg leave to forward you a copy of a letter to the Chairman of the General Board of Managers, with the accompanying correspondence, which will be laid before the Meeting on Tuesday next, the 1st of June, and with which I think it necessary you should be acquainted.

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient servant,

T. C. MORISON.

May 27, 1852.

ROYAL LUNATIC ASYLUM, Montrose.

To the Chairman of the
General Board of Managers.

SIR,—Reports of a nature very injurious to my professional reputation having been current in Montrose within the last few days relative to my treatment of a patient in the Infirmary who has recently died in childbed, I beg to forward to you the accompanying Statement of the case, with copies of Correspondence between Mr. Millar, Mr. James Smith, R.N., Dr. Johnston, and myself; and have to request that the whole be laid before the Board, and a Committee of Inquiry appointed to investigate the matter.

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient servant,

T. C. MORISON.

May 26, 1852.

STATEMENT OF CASE.

CHRISTINA CAMERON, age stated to be twenty-five, apparently older, unmarried, admitted from the country on the 30th of April, 1852; seen by me on the 1st of May, when I examined her case, and found the usual symptoms of Chronic Inflammation of the liver accompanied by general dropsy (ascites and anasæca). The symptoms of inflammation to which I have referred were—great pain over the region of the liver, increased on pressure; pain extending up to the right shoulder; the liver itself being distinctly felt enlarged and hardened beneath the lower edge of the ribs; cough and slight difficulty of breathing; rapid, hard pulse; tongue dry, and of a brown colour, and thickly furred; constant nausea, and loss of appetite, with occasional vomiting.

The history she gave of her case prior to admission was, that she had lately travelled from Ross-shire, across the hills, in search of employment, and had been exposed to severe cold and wet—a likely cause to produce affections of the liver. Whilst upon her journey southwards she first experienced pain in her right side. For some time before her admission this pain had been very severe, in consequence of which she was largely bled from the arm by a surgeon in the country, to her immediate, though temporary, relief. By his advice, also, she came into the Infirmary.

Amongst other questions put to her was, whether the menstrual discharge was *regular* or not—to this she replied in the affirmative, and that she had been so *only three weeks* previously.

A day or two afterwards, my suspicions were aroused, and on making a closer examination, I became convinced, despite her assertions to the contrary, that she was decidedly pregnant. Acting on this conviction, I directly charged her with the fact,

although she, as is usual in such cases, denied, and persisted in her denial, until within a few hours of her delivery. Of course my treatment after this was based upon the carefully formed opinion that she was suffering under dropsy from disease of the liver, combined with pregnancy. Appended to this statement you will find the prescriptions, copied from the Infirmary book, employed by me.

On the morning of the 14th she was seized with the pains of labour. I gave directions to the nurse to get a midwife to attend her, and to let me know if any difficulty should occur. At 6 o'clock in the morning, after a speedy and safe delivery, she gave birth to a seven months' child. When visited by me in the forenoon, the mother and child appeared to be progressing favourably.

On the afternoon of Saturday the 15th, the child died; the mother, however, continued apparently to improve till Sunday afternoon, the 16th (the pain in the side, though not removed, being better; the dropsy, ascitic and anasarcaous, still remaining), when symptoms of Peritonitis made their appearance. She died on Monday the 17th, at half-past six in the evening.

(Signed) T. C. MORISON.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. SMITH.

Montrose, May 20, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—Having just heard that you have been making remarks about a patient of mine in the Royal Infirmary, named Cameron, who has died in childbed, to the effect that I had completely mistaken the nature of the case, and that, not being aware of her pregnancy, was erroneously treating her for dropsy, I now beg to ask you if this be the case—if so, your own sense of justice will no doubt point out the necessity of at once naming your authority for such statements.

I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

T. C. MORISON.

J. Smith, Esq., R.N.

Mr. SMITH to Mr. MORISON.

Montrose, 20th May, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—In reply to yours just received, I beg to acquaint you that I was informed by Dr. Johnston that a patient of yours in the Infirmary, entered in the books as a case of dropsy, had been delivered of a child.

I am, yours truly,

JAMES SMITH.

T. C. Morison, Esq.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. SMITH.

Montrose, May 20, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—I am favoured with your note of this date. In the letter I sent you this morning, I stated that I had been given to understand that you accused me of *mistaking the nature* of the case, *not being aware* of the fact of pregnancy, and *erroneously* treating it as one of dropsy. You have avoided referring to these points. I must therefore again trouble you to say whether Dr. Johnston's information extended that length.

Yours truly,

T. C. MORISON.

J. Smith, Esq., R.N.

Mr. SMITH to Mr. MORISON.

Montrose, 21st May, 1852.

SIR,—The words underlined in your last are not mine, and I have already given my authority for what I *did* say.

I am, your obed. servant,

JAMES SMITH.

T. C. Morison, Esq.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. SMITH.

Montrose, May 21st, 1852.

SIR,—I have shown both your letters to my authority for the offensive expressions used by you in reference to Cameron's case, and he most distinctly asserts that such as I alleged, or other words of a precisely similar nature, *were* those used by you on the occasion referred to. Under these circumstances, therefore, I assume the matter, as told to me, to be substantially correct, and that the particulars, as stated by yourself during the conversation, *were* reported by Dr. Johnston. Upon these premises I shall act, unless I hear from you to the contrary.

Yours obediently,

T. C. MORISON.

J. Smith, Esq., R.N.

Mr. MORISON to Dr. JOHNSTON.

Montrose, May 22d, 1852.

SIR,—Having traced a slanderous report current in the town to you, to the effect that a woman named Cameron, who lately died in childbed in the Infirmary, had been improperly treated by me, and that, being ignorant of her pregnancy, I had *erroneously* treated her for dropsy, I have to request an immediate answer stating whether this be true, and your authority, if any, for these assertions.

Your obedient servant,

T. C. MORISON.

Dr. Johnston.

Dr. JOHNSTON to Mr. MORISON.

Montrose, May 24th, 1852.

11 o'clock A.M.

SIR,—I have this moment received your note dated the 22d of May, stating that you have traced a slanderous report current in the town to me, to the effect that a woman named Cameron, who lately died in childbed in the Infirmary, had been improperly treated by you, and that, being ignorant of her pregnancy, you had *erroneously* treated her for dropsy. I distinctly deny* having originated the report to which you allude, and I also deny that I stated that you treated the case *erroneously*. I did state to Dr. James Smith that a patient of yours, whose case you had recorded in the Infirmary register as one of dropsy, had given birth to a child, and died four days after. I also told Dr. Smith the nature of the treatment to which the patient had been subjected, and stated* that I conceived that you had made a mistake either in the diagnosis or in the treatment of Cameron's case. My authority for making these statements is your own entry in the Infirmary Register, and your own statement to the Infirmary Committee last Monday. While I still adhere to the correctness of the statement I made to Dr. Smith, I shall be glad to retract what I have said when you give me sufficient reason for doing so.

Your obt. servt.,

DAVID JOHNSTON.

T. C. Morison, Esq.

[* Dr. Johnston first denies and then admits the accusation I bring against him.—T. C. M.]

Mr. MORISON to Mr. MILLAR.

Montrose, May 19th, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—I have been informed by several persons to-day that you have been spreading a report about a patient of mine in the Royal Infirmary, named Cameron, who has died in childbed, to the effect that I had completely mistaken the nature of the case, and that, not being aware of her pregnancy, was *erroneously* treating her for dropsy. I am not usually in the habit of noticing scandalous reports, and would not have done so now, were I not aware that the public must necessarily attach importance to such a statement, coming, as it does, from the Chairman of the Infirmary Committee. I doubt not, however, that your own sense of what is due to my position in that Institution will at once point out to you the propriety of naming your authority for such statements.

I am, Dear Sir, yours truly,

T. C. MORISON.

Rob. Millar, Esq., Montrose.

Mr. MILLAR to Mr. MORISON.

DEAR SIR,—I have received your note of this date. I have no hesitation in stating that, having been officially informed that a patient under your charge was delivered of a child, I looked into the Infirmary Register, and there found that the patient was entered in your own handwriting as labouring under dropsy.

I am, Dear Sir, yours truly,

ROB. MILLAR.

Montrose, 20th May, 1852.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. MILLAR.

Montrose, May 21st, 1852.

DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of your note of yesterday, and am somewhat surprised at its contents. I charged you with circulating a report to the effect that "I had *mistaken* the nature of Cameron's case—*was not aware* of her pregnancy—and was *erroneously* treating her for dropsy." As you give no denial to this charge, and as you appear studiously to avoid replying to the latter part of my letter, in which I ask you to name your authority for these statements, I presume you must either have mistaken its purport, or that you are yourself the author of this slanderous report. Waiting your reply,

I am, yours truly,

T. C. MORISON.

Rob. Millar, Esq.

Mr. MILLAR to Mr. MORISON.

SIR,—I have received your note of this date. You do not, I observe, offer to question the statements contained in my note of yesterday, which I consider a sufficient justification of any remark I have made about the recent Infirmary case. I have

neither made nor spread "scandalous reports" (I think it almost unnecessary to say) about you, nor stated anything in conversation regarding your treatment of your patient who died in childbed (I cannot recall the expressions I may have used) inconsistent with the fact that she was treated by you for dropsy.

I am, Sir, yours truly,

ROB. MILLAR.

Montrose, 21st May, 1852.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. MILLAR.

Montrose, May 22, 1852.

SIR,—In your last note of yesterday you state that "you have a sufficient justification for any remark you have made about the recent Infirmary case," adding, however, "you cannot recal the expressions you may have used." I have twice taxed you with stating—1st, "That I was not aware of the woman's pregnancy;" and 2d, "That I was erroneously treating her for dropsy." Neither of these statements do you deem it necessary to deny or explain. I therefore assume them to have been amongst those "you cannot recal."

It is only because you hold the office of Chairman of the Infirmary Committee that I now consider it necessary to address you in defence of my professional reputation, and beg most distinctly to state that I not only *was* aware of the woman's pregnancy, but challenged her with the fact shortly after her admission. That she had, to the best of my judgment, disease of the liver, accompanied by general dropsy, I also assert, and my whole treatment was in accordance with this view. That it was "erroneous," I leave to you to prove—you who appear to be so well qualified to decide on nice points in medical diagnosis.

As this probably will be the last communication on the subject with which I shall trouble you, I take leave to add that I shall, in my own justification, publish the correspondence, or make such other use of it as I may think proper.

Yours obediently,

T. C. MORISON.

Rob. Millar, Esq.

Mr. MILLAR to Mr. MORISON.

Montrose, May 25, 1852.

SIR,—Your note, dated the 22d inst., only reached me yesterday afternoon. You must be aware, from what passed at the meeting of the Infirmary Committee yesterday, that my remarks had more especial reference to your want of due attention to your patient who died in childbed last week.

I leave to others to decide on your medical treatment of the case; but I consider myself quite competent, and also my duty, to judge if proper care and attention is paid by the medical attendants to the patients in the Infirmary.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ROB. MILLAR.

Mr. MORISON to Mr. MILLAR.

Montrose, May 26, 1852.

SIR,—My letter of the 22d was the last I thought to have written to you about the late Infirmary case. The unworthy and shuffling way (so characteristic I believe) in which you now shift your ground of attack to a presumed want of attention on my part, has induced me to change my resolution—want either of "care" or "attention" to my patient I simply deny and defy you to prove.

You allude to the meeting of the Infirmary Committee—the *taste* and "*good feeling*"! which prompted you to show such part of the correspondence as suited you to the Committee, and endeavour to implicate them in remarks which refer to yourself alone, as well as the *propriety* and *impartiality* with which you acted as Chairman, accuser, and accused, is also, I believe, exceedingly characteristic.

With you, however, I have at last done, since it is my intention to bring the whole matter before the General Board of Governors, and demand that a full inquiry be made into all the reports and charges that have been circulated against me by you and others like you.

Your obdnt. servant,

T. C. MORISON.

Rob. Millar, Esq.