

**A letter to Mr. Clare, surgeon, on his new and easy method of introducing mercury into the system through the orifices of the absorbent vessels on the inside of the mouth / [William Turnbull].**

### **Contributors**

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Clare.

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A  
L E T T E R

T O

M R. C L A R E, S U R G E O N,

O N H I S

N E W and E A S Y M E T H O D

O F

Introducing M E R C U R Y into the S Y S T E M,  
through the O R I F I C E S of the A B S O R B E N T  
V E S S E L S, on the I N S I D E of the M O U T H:

A N D

Recommending it to the C O N S I D E R A T I O N of the  
W O R L D in general, and the N A V Y in particular.

By W M. T U R N B U L L,

L A T E S U R G E O N O F H I S M A J E S T Y ' S R O Y A L N A V Y.

T O W H I C H A R E A D D E D

R E M A R K S on the same S U B J E C T,

By W M. T U R N B U L L, M. D.

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L O N D O N;

M D C C L X X X I I I.

LETTER  
TO  
MR. CLARENCE BURGON,  
OF HIS  
NEW EASY METHOD  
OF  
TEACHING  
THE  
ART  
OF  
WRITING  
BY  
W. M. TURNBULL,  
M.D.  
LONDON

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TO  
MR. CLARE, SURGEON,  
CHANCERY-LANE.

S I R,

I communicate to You with that degree of pleasure and satisfaction which is easier to be conceived than expressed by generous and liberal-minded men, (whose grand object is Philanthropy,) a very obstinate Syphilitic case, which occurred to me in my practice at the time I was surgeon of his *Majesty's ship, Heart of Oak*. This case had resisted a thorough mercurial course, as recommended by Sir William Fordyce, and other men of eminence, and yielded at last to the elegant and agreeable mode discovered and recommended

by you in your late ingenious publication, which merits a candid reception from the public. This is due to every individual, who, like yourself, communicates his knowledge for the good of mankind.

Mr. *Bird*, at present surgeon to the gallant Lord Hood, was the first who advised me to make trial of your new method of applying mercury, having often tried it himself with the greatest success. I confess that at first thought it staggered me, but having seen and proved its good effects, I am now as much an advocate for it, as I was before doubtful of its efficacy. After I had perused with attention and maturely considered your Treatise on the subject, I was struck with the pertinence of your remarks and ingenuity of argument, being consistent with reason and founded on anatomical facts; at the same time I have been often a witness to the fallacy of *the Alterative Plan*, with the disagreeable and dreadful consequences arising from mercurial friction on the extremities. I have known on *ship board*, and on shore likewise, but more particularly in the former, dangerous fevers and fatal diarrhæas supervene from that manner of applying the mercury;—I am now  
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confining myself entirely to sea practice; and you will anticipate me in remarking, that the venereal disease constitutes a great part of it.—My objection to the Mercurial unguentous Frictions at sea must appear clear and obvious to every practitioner on that element, and is plainly this: The unavoidable exposure to the external air for the space of half an hour, while the process of rubbing in the ointment is performing in the Cockpit, the place allotted for the surgeons to examine the sick and wounded. The result of such treatment is an obstructed perspiration, which too frequently terminates in a dangerous febrile affection, and that of the putrid kind, and we are all sensible how fatally that disease ends on ship board, by perhaps being communicated to half the crew. Advocates and sticklers for this method of using mercury, have not, or will not attend to the above interesting particulars: they contend, that the mercurial ointment does not affect the alimentary canal, so as to excite them to evacuate their contents, and that it is easier conveyed into the circulation, than when taken into the stomach in form of boluses, mixtures, &c. that it sooner gets into the sanguiferous system, than when

taken in by the mouth. Be it so, yet experience assures us, that it often does affect the stomach, and will be as readily absorbed and carried into that useful organ in the animal œconomy, as the application of a *saturnine preparation* to an inflamed leg, which caused violent cholics, and other dyspeptic symptoms. A case of this kind lately occurred to a friend of mine, a very eminent practitioner in surgery in this metropolis; and therefore to reason from analogy and upon the same principle, mercury rubbed on the extremities I have often seen occasion very violent diarrhæas, which greatly reduce the patient.

I am sure I have said no more than what is just and founded on facts, and facts are stubborn things; but men of a certain description, biassed by particular methods or systems, too frequently prevent the advancement, and improvement of medical knowledge, and by establishing the whims, errors, and opinions of their respective Teachers, rather than advancing any new opinion to the improvement of their profession, go on in the old beaten track.— I know no character so truly despicable, or that deserves the reproach and indignation of society more, than the man who despises  
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the knowledge of rules of sciences in the practice of a liberal art, when the most invaluable and precious of all human blessings, health and its attendant comforts, are at stake.—Let us, as men professing a liberal science, shake off prejudice, and conscientiously and judiciously adopt that mode which is consistent with reason, and crowned with success.— I am convinced that the majority of the Naval Surgeons, candidly speaking, will strengthen these my just assertions, and conclude with me in observing, that your mode of using mercury is the *most agreeable, the most safe, and the most efficacious* of any practised since this direful malady made its appearance in Europe, which is now near three centuries ago. Happy will it be for mankind when generally adopted, and I hope soon to see it rise superior to the mean attacks of illiberal-minded men, who can bestow no praise but on themselves. If in these few and incorrect remarks I contribute in the least degree to make it more extensively embraced, I shall think it one of the happiest periods of my life: for nothing rejoices me more than to see men of merit meet with their desert. I shall select one of several successful cases.



A young gentleman, a midshipman, aged twenty years, came on board the *Heart of Oak* on September the 20th, 1781. His symptoms were as follows, a violent head-ach, nocturnal pains in his bones, a large foul undigested ulcer in his left tonsil, a large chancre on the preputium, a heat in his urethra attended with a great scalding when he made water, but notwithstanding all these terrible appearances he was able to go about. Upon my requesting to be informed of every thing relative to the rise and progress of the disease; he told me that it was contracted at Portsmouth about four months previous to his being ordered on board the *Heart of Oak*. It first appeared with a very troublesome irritation in the urinary passage, which seized him about four days after this impure connection, and for some days encreased notwithstanding his immediate application to the surgeon of the ship he was then on board of, being a guardship at Spithead. He gave him, as he said, almond emulsions, with nitre, salts and manna, and ordered him to dilute freely with barley water, linseed tea, and other such *demulcents*. Venæsection was not omitted. In the course of ten days, mercurial ointment was used very liberally on his thighs,

for

for at least a month, with brisk purges at intervals—The running, he said, was very plentiful for the space of five or six weeks, and at the end of that period, he was thought to be cured; however, a few weeks after, his health was gradually on the decline, with a diminution of appetite, strength, and spirits; his sleep was interrupted by pains in his limbs, and nothing more was administered to him until he came on board our ship.—I thought the above was a proper case to give your mode a thorough trial, and the result was as follows.

I directed him to rub two grains of calomel on the inside of his mouth twice in the day, and at the expiration of ten days, his mouth became tender and his breath affected: when that event took place, the chancre and ulcer in his tonsil put on a kind and healing appearance, granulated well, and were entirely healed in the space of five weeks after adhering to this treatment.—As for his other symptoms, the headache, nocturnal pains, &c. at the termination of seven weeks they were perfectly cured. I have one remark to make, that during this mercurial course, I kept up a constant soreness in his mouth, but took  
care

care to avoid a spitting: this was accomplished by desisting from rubbing when the foreness ran too high. It was surprizing, that from the first fortnight after he had used the calomel, he recovered his appetite and spirits, gathered strength daily, and became fat upon it.--I am afraid, Sir, I have encroached too much on your patience, but believe me I feel a sensible pleasure in the relation of these facts. This one of the many cases in which I have had an opportunity of proving its superior efficacy, alone is a sufficient incitement to prefer it above all other methods. That it may be attended with a constant uniform course of success, is the sincere wish of, Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

Wellclose Square,

Jan. 15, 1783.

WM. TURNBULL.

## P O S T C R I P T.

**A** Lieutenant in the Navy, in the month of November, 1781, had contracted the Lues Venerea, for which he had been bled freely, had taken strong mercurial purges, and had been ordered to abstain from all strong liquors. By means of this severe treatment, and the disorder together, he was become greatly emaciated, in which state he applied to me; and by the use of your method, and a more  
free

free regimen, he soon recovered his health. When I proposed his rubbing a little powder on his lips, he seemed much prejudiced against it, and turned it into ridicule, saying, "What can that do?" but on my explaining the nature and operation of the process, he consented to make a trial of it, and afterwards thanked me very kindly for my great attention and care of him.

I have been assured by several persons, that they have repeatedly cured themselves by following the directions given in your book, which in all probability will cause your method to be brought into general use, a circumstance most devoutly to be wished for the good of mankind.

I may probably communicate to you, another time, the whole of this case, with some others, in which I have experienced its happy effects.

To sum up in few words the merits of your practice, I am convinced that many lives, which are destroyed by consumptions arising from a violent course of mercury, might have been preserved unhurt, by adopting your mild and salutary process.

WM. TURNBULL.

A Letter from WM. TURNBULL, M. D.  
to Mr. CLARE, Surgeon.

DEAR SIR,

ON reading your late publication, with regard to the application of mercury, to the inside of the mouth, &c. with more advantage than from any other mode offered to the public, I was so pleased with the simplicity and neatness of the method, that I was determined to adopt it the first opportunity. I shall not trouble you with a narrative of particular cases, of which you have had many from different correspondents; I can, however, from several instances

stances assure you, that I have seen more speedy and salutary effects from your method, than from any other yet held forth to the public. With regard to the doctrine of absorption, I do not suppose any person acquainted with the animal system, and the history of physic, will refuse their assent to it. And this being taken for granted, wherever the friction can be moderately used *to the thin cuticular inner surfaces* of the body, every person conversant with the subject, must rationally conclude, that *there* it will prove most effectual. Much might be said in support of your hypothesis, but after what those ingenious Gentlemen, Doctor Hunter and Mr. Cruikshank, have advanced in support of the doctrine of absorption, and in commendation of your discovery, it would be superfluous to urge any thing more upon the subject.--- Give me leave only to say, that I do not think there has been a greater discovery since SYDENHAM's time, except the modern treatment of inflammatory fevers, especially that of inoculation, in which improvement the candid Baron Dimsdale claims the greatest merit from the publick. No person of liberal sentiments will condemn your's or any other new method, until they make a fair trial thereof, especially as you have advanced nothing inconsistent with, or contradictory to the present practice, in the treatment of the Venereal Disease.---The exposing persons to the cold air, and indulging them in the free use of cold water for their drink, even in the natural small-pox, had far greater difficulties to struggle with, than the practice you have recommended.

If any thing that I have said in consequence of your liberal and ingenious publication can afford you any satisfaction, I will occasionally communicate to you in future whatever may fall under my observation.

And am, DEAR SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

Wellclose-Square,

Jan. 25, 1783.

WM. TURNBULL, M. D.