
C O P Y
OF A
CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN
ALEX. MONRO, SEN. M. D.
PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY,
AND
MR WILLIAM WOOD, SURGEON.

1807.

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EXTRACT from Mr W. WOOD's unpublished Probationary Surgical Essay, referred to in the following Correspondence.

WHEN the whole cylinder of the intestine is in a gangrenous state, all the dead portion is to be removed; the intestine is to be returned into the abdomen, but its divided edges are to be retained near each other and the external wound, by ligatures passed through the mesentery and mouth of the sac. This is a practice which has in many cases proved successful.

Mr Cooper of London has recommended, that an attempt should be made to procure reunion of the divided edges of the intestine. The practice which he has recommended he was led to adopt, from the successful result of some very interesting experiments made on animals by Mr Thomson and himself *. “ The practice, therefore, (says Mr Cooper) which ought to be followed in an intestine divided by mortification, is to cut off its mortified extremities, and then to pass four stitches through them, one at the mesentery, and
“ the

* See Cooper on Hernia.

“ the three others at equal distances round the in-
“ testine. Then returning it to the mouth of the
“ hernial sac, which should be opened higher up
“ than usual, it must be there firmly confined, by a
“ ligature being passed through the mesentery, in
“ the manner already directed. If stools pass the
“ ligatures, and the patient goes on well, the liga-
“ tures may remain until they are thrown off by ul-
“ ceration ; but if there are no stools, and the pa-
“ tient suffers from a distended abdomen, three of
“ the stitches should be cut away, leaving that
“ which attaches the intestine to the hernial sac, as
“ well as that which joins its edges at the mesen-
“ tery. The fæces can then readily escape at the
“ external wound ; and as granulations arise and
“ the wound heals, the mouths of the divided in-
“ testine will become united, so that the fæces will
“ take their natural course *.”

* Cooper, p. 36.

C O P Y
OF A
CORRESPONDENCE,
&c.

Mr WOOD to Dr MONRO.

SIR, *Edinburgh, April 15. 1807.*

I HAVE just heard, that you, yesterday, made use of my name publicly in your class, accusing me of having acted unjustly towards you with regard to some point connected with the subject of Hernia. As nothing could be further from my intention than wilfully to detract from the merit of any individual, I take the liberty to request that you will inform me in writing, to what you alluded on that occasion.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) WILLIAM WOOD.

SIR,

Dr MONRO to Mr WOOD.

SIR, *Edinburgh, April 15. 1807.*

IN my lecture yesterday on Hernia, I described to the students a method by which, when an intestine has been divided transversely, or that a portion of it has been separated from the rest by gangrene, the superior portion of it may be drawn within the inferior, and re-united to it; and I explained this farther by a sketch, and said I had done so in every course of my lectures for upwards of forty years.

I told them likewise, that a Mr Thorburn, who had written, in short hand, notes from my lectures in the year 1770, of which many copies have been circulated, had not only taken down verbally what I had then said, but had drawn on the margin of his manuscript a rude sketch or copy of my method.

I mentioned to them farther, that, about that time, I made an experiment of my method on the Intestinum Ilium of a pig with complete success, and I demonstrated to them the re-united parts of the intestine preserved in spirits, of which a drawing and engraving in my possession were made by Mr Thomas Donaldson, who died twenty-five years ago.

I concluded with saying, that I was particular in mentioning the above circumstances, because young Mr W. Wood, in his Inaugural Dissertation, ascribed this improvement to another person who had assumed

ed it, although it *now* appears, that the whole of what is above stated was mentioned long before, and at the time both of them attended my courses of lectures.

I said not a syllable of your or the other person, whom I did not name, having *acted unjustly*, as I could not account for your or for his omission; and leave to you and to him to do that now, in any way you may think proper.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) ALEX. MONRO, *sen.*

Mr WOOD to Dr MONRO.

SIR, *Edinburgh, April 16. 1807.*

WHEN I first heard, from some of your pupils, that you had made use of my name in your class, I conceived, either that the account which they gave me of what you had said on that occasion must have been erroneous, or that you must have fallen into some unaccountable mistake with respect to the contents of my Inaugural Dissertation. Your letter of the 15th instant has removed all room for doubt as to the nature of the mistake. From that letter it appears, that you described to the students “ a method by which, when an intestine has been divided transversely, or that a portion of it has been
“ separated

“ separated from the rest by gangrene, the superior
 “ portion may be drawn within the inferior, and
 “ re-united to it;” and that you “ explained this
 “ farther by a sketch, and said you had done so in
 “ every course of your lectures for upwards of
 “ forty years.” The reason you gave for mention-
 ing these circumstances so particularly was, that I,
 in my Thesis, “ had ascribed this improvement to
 “ another person, who had assumed it,” although
 both I and that other person had attended your
 lectures at the time it was described by you.

If you will take the trouble of again perusing that
 part of my Essay in which the treatment of gangre-
 nous intestine is described, you will find, that, so far
 from having ascribed to any person the mode of
 procuring re-union of divided portions of intestine,
 “ by drawing the superior within the inferior,” *I*
have not, even in the slightest degree, alluded to that
method.

Who the person is to whom you allege I have
 ascribed it, it is impossible for me to conjecture. Mr
 Cooper is the only person to whom I have referred
 on that subject; and he is, as far as I know, the
 only person, besides yourself, who at present re-
 commends the application of ligatures to the gut,
 with a view to procure re-union of its divided edges.
 This, however, he does in a manner essentially dif-
 ferent from that recommended by you, which he,
 from experiments, regards as impracticable.

Though

Though it had completely escaped me at the time of writing my Thesis, that the method of passing the upper extremity of the gut within the under, and retaining it in that situation by ligature, was recommended by you, I was by no means ignorant of the practice, having seen in Heister's Institutions of Surgery, that it had been successfully employed, in a woman affected with Hernia, by *Ramdobrius*, previous to the year 1730, and knowing that various attempts have been made since that time to follow this practice, in the way of experiment, in the human subject, as well as in brute animals.

Among other reasons for omitting the mention of this practice, were it necessary to assign any, I might allege the very decided disapprobation it received a considerable time ago, in the Edinburgh Medical Essays, from your Father, whom I have always been taught to regard as the highest surgical authority this country has to boast of; and more lately from Mr Cooper, in his very valuable work on Hernia.

After this statement, I hope that you will be convinced, that the assertion you made in your class was founded in error; and I feel confident that you will do away publicly the unfavourable impression which that assertion was calculated to make on the minds of your pupils.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) WILLIAM WOOD.

M.

Mr WOOD to Dr MONRO.

SIR, *Edinburgh, April 21. 1807.*

I had hoped, that the statement contained in my letter to you of the 16th instant, would have induced you to have retracted the charge, which you publicly brought against me, of having attributed to another person the merit of an improvement which you seem to think due to yourself,—a charge which you must now be convinced *was altogether without foundation.*

It is therefore with no small degree of surprise I have been informed, by several very respectable students, that, instead of retracting this charge, as I had expected, in your lecture of yesterday, you endeavoured to convey to your pupils the idea of my having apologised to you for a culpable omission; and that you did this by reading a part, and a small part only, of a sentence in my letter, uncandidly omitting the connecting clauses, and by this omission giving to my letter the semblance of an apology, when in fact you know that it required one from you.

I have been distinctly informed, that the only words of my letter which you read were, “ it had completely escaped me at the time of writing my Thesis, that the method of passing the upper extremity of the gut within the under was recommended by you.”

After

After this second attempt to do me publicly an act of injustice, I beg leave to inform you, that unless I have immediate reason to believe, that the whole of the letter which I did myself the honour to address to you, will be fairly read to the gentlemen who attend your lectures, I shall feel myself under the disagreeable necessity of making the explanation which it contains as public as the charge you brought against me.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) WILLIAM WOOD.

Dr MONRO to Mr WOOD.

SIR, *Edinburgh, April 22. 1807.*

I received yesterday afternoon a third letter from you, which I suppose must have proceeded from your not having got an exact account of what I said on Tuesday in my lecture to the students.

I then told them, that, since my last lecture, you had sent me a letter, from which I would read to them the following paragraph :

“ It had completely escaped me at the time of
“ writing my Thesis, that the method of passing
“ the upper extremity of the gut within the under,
“ and

“ and retaining it in that situation by ligature, was
 “ recommended by you.”

I added, that I had no reason to doubt your veracity, especially as I had always entertained a good opinion of you; and that I was well pleased, on your account as well as my own, that my mention of your name had brought on a satisfactory explanation.

You now complain, that the paragraph I read gave to your letter the semblance of an apology; but surely no person who thinks could interpret it in that manner, as no *apology* can be necessary for a person's not mentioning what had escaped his memory. *An explanation* only was wanted; and this, by the paragraph I had read, was fully given by you, and freed you from all blame.

You said, in your Thesis, (page 51) “ That
 “ the method Mr Cooper recommended he was led
 “ to adopt from the successful result of some very
 “ interesting experiments made on animals by Mr
 “ Thomson and himself;” which certainly implied that the revival of the attempt of rejoining the divided parts of an intestine was to be ascribed by you to Mr Thomson, or to him and Mr Cooper: which was all I meant, or could be supposed to mean, as their particular manner of rejoining them was published, and was different from mine.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) ALEX. MONRO, *sen.*

Mr

Mr WOOD to Dr MONRO.

SIR,

Edinburgh, April 23. 1807.

IN obtruding myself again on your notice, I have no wish to diminish in any degree the satisfaction which the *explanation*, such as it really was, contained in my letter of the 16th, has given you; nor should I now have taken this liberty, had not your letter of yesterday appeared to me to require some animadversion. In answer to that part of your letter in which you say, “ *an explanation* only was wanted, “ and this, by the paragraph I had read, was fully “ given by you, and freed you from all blame;” I have to observe, that not being conscious of having incurred any blame by the omission of which you complained, I never meant to give you any thing which could be fairly construed into *explanation* or *apology*; and it was only by leaving out the most material parts of the sentence, of which you read a part, and a small part only, to your students, that it was possible for you to have extracted any such meaning from my letter. My statement was, “ *Though* “ it had completely escaped me at the time of writing my Thesis, that the method of passing the “ upper extremity of the gut within the under, and “ retaining it in that situation by ligature, was recommended by you, I was by no means ignorant “ of the practice, having seen in Heister’s Institutions

“ tions of Surgery, that it had been successfully
 “ employed in a woman affected with Hernia, by
 “ *Ramdobrius, previous to the year 1730*, and know-
 “ ing that various attempts have been made since
 “ that time to follow this practice, in the way of
 “ experiment, in the human subject, as well as in
 “ brute animals.” From this, for reasons best
 known to yourself, you read only, “ it had com-
 “ pletely escaped me at the time of writing my
 “ Thesis, that the method of passing the upper
 “ extremity of the gut within the under, and re-
 “ taining it in that situation by ligature, was re-
 “ commended by you ;” adding, “ I was well plea-
 “ sed on your account, as well as my own, that
 “ my mention of your name had brought on a satis-
 “ factory explanation.”

Mr Thomson, whose name you have introduced
 into this correspondence, and whom the greater part
 of your students understood to be the person to
 whom you alluded in speaking of my Thesis, in the
 two courses of his lectures which I have had the
 pleasure of attending, described at great length the
 different modes of stitching divided intestines, which
 had been recommended, from the time that Celsus
 first mentioned the practice to the present day. But
 in shewing the results of his experiments, which Mr
 Cooper has described, he took particular pains to cau-
 tion his students from inferring, because the practice
 of stitching intestines had often succeeded in brute
 animals,

animals, and in a few instances also in the human subject, that it was one which should be followed in the diseased state of the intestines usually accompanying strangulated hernia. This being the precise state of the fact, in so far as Mr Thomson can be supposed to be the person alluded to by you, I must leave it for Mr Cooper to justify himself from the charge (upon whom it now falls, if indeed it falls any where,) of having *assumed* an improvement, which, in mentioning it to your students, you endeavoured to make them believe you had originally suggested, though, in your last letter to me, you only claim the merit of having revived it; and to discuss with you the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the *Ramdohrian method* of stitching intestines, and that which he himself has proposed.

I have only to add, that I have sent the whole of this correspondence to the Press, that the gentlemen attending your Lectures may have an opportunity of judging with what degree of fairness, candour, or justice, you have twice publicly, in your Class, made mention of my name.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) WILLIAM WOOD.

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