

# THE KINGSTON HOSPITAL.

Believing that the following letter discloses facts with which it is proper that a humane and a Christian public should be acquainted, a number of gentlemen have obtained a copy of it for publication.

It cannot be thought that Parliament intends that the large sums annually voted to the various Hospitals of the Province, are for the encouragement of Medical Charlatany and Surgical Mountebankery. If intelligent, educated, experienced, skilful and honest Physicians and Surgeons cannot be obtained for the poor, it is better that they should have none at all. Far more charitable would it be to let them sink gradually and calmly into their graves, impressed with the idea that the particular ill to which their flesh has become heir is incurable, and thus give them time to prepare to meet their Maker, than that they should be suddenly and violently torn from this fleeting world, whilst hoping for life in it, and thus be less calculated for entering into that better World, in which life is eternal.

There is one fact not mentioned by Dr. Stewart, in his letter to the Governors, which it is important should be known, and that is that a number of persons, not connected with the Medical Profession, were invited to gratify their idle curiosity by gazing at the poor woman as she was being ripped up. Was there no individual of common decency present to suggest the expulsion of such persons?

## TO THE GOVERNORS OF THE KINGSTON HOSPITAL.

GENTLEMEN.—

On Monday morning, the 7th, I received, through the Post Office, the following letter:—

“Kingston, Nov. 5th, 1864.

SIR,—A poor woman was brutally treated to-day at the Hospital—she was in fact slaughtered. You, as a Governor of the Hospital and a Coroner, should be informed of the matter. The Butcher opened the abdomen to remove an ovarian tumor. After digging at a portion of it, he abandoned his victim to her fate. She was healthy, but cannot survive the brutal treatment she suffered.

A STUDENT.”

The letter being anonymous, and containing such words as “slaughtered,” “butcher” and “brutal,” my first impulse was to tear it up. Upon reflecting, however, I decided that it was my duty to overlook both the want of the real name of the author and his objectionable language, and to institute an enquiry into the truth or falsity of his statements. Accordingly, I placed the anonymous epistle in the hands of another Coroner, Mr. Shaw, as well as into those of another Governor, Mr. Fraser. What these two gentlemen have done in the matter it will be for them to say.

With reference to my own subsequent action, I went to the Hospital, and there found, in that part of the building called “Watkins' Wing,” a woman lying dead, having the appearance of being healthy immediately previous to death, and of being between 25 and 30 years of age. On her abdomen there was a cut, extending from two inches above the Umbilicus, or navel, to the bone at the lower part of that region, called the Pubis, or share-bone. From nearly the middle of this cut another extended on one side to the prominence of the Ilium, or haunch-bone. This latter cut I then presumed, and have since learned, was made after death. Proceeding in my enquiry, I ascertained that the woman had been operated on the previous Saturday, between three and four in the afternoon, by Dr. Horatio Yates, and that she was a corpse between six and seven of the same afternoon. The operation, as I am informed, was for the extirpation of an Ovarian Cyst, an operation which within the last four years has been performed by some eminent Surgeons with success, and recommended by them for performance by other Surgeons; whilst it has been denounced by other equally eminent men as not to be performed under almost any circumstances. On cutting into the poor woman's Abdomen, however, it was discovered that the disease sought for had never

existed, but that she had been suffering from an affection of the Uterus, or womb. Connected with this organ there was found what is called a Fibrous Tumor. Instead of letting this tumor alone, as ought to have been done after discovering the mistake, a portion of it was cut and torn off, in doing which a slice was taken from the womb, and the bladder ruptured, thus causing the poor woman's sudden deprivation of life. These, gentlemen, are the painful facts of the case, which, should Dr. Yates attempt to deny, I shall meet him, before you, to prove.

The world-renowned Surgeon, Lister, had an unrequitable aversion to Ovariologists, and was accustomed to denounce them as “Belly-rippers,” prefixing to the word “belly-ripping” an adjective beginning with a B, and affixing a noun also beginning with a B, the coarseness of which prevents its being written. If that great Surgeon expressed himself as I have mentioned, towards educated and experienced Surgeons, who committed no mistakes, either in diagnosing or in operating, what would have been his denunciation of the “belly-ripping” of the Kingston Hospital, which, for ignorance in diagnosis, and ignorance and recklessness in the operation, is, I hesitate not to say, unsurpassed, if it ever has been equalled, in the annals of Surgical Butchery? It becomes you then to consider well the tragedy that has been enacted under your auspices.

In being appointed Governors, you have placed yourselves under a certain moral and a certain legal responsibility: the moral responsibility of doing unto the poor as you would the poor should do unto you; and the legal responsibility that if you do not so act you are amenable to the laws of the country. Which of you, I would ask, would desire to see your wife or your daughter, your sister or other dear relative, treated as this poor woman was treated?

During my late visit to Europe, I enjoyed the privilege not only of meeting and conversing with men eminent in this particular branch of Surgery, but the still greater privilege of witnessing the operation of Ovariotomy successfully performed, of examining cases both before and after operation, and of judging of those in which an operation was deemed inadvisable. My attention has, moreover, been particularly directed to the literature of the subject. No operation more requires all the best qualities of the Surgeon, and to skill must be added experience. As to experience, what knowledge can Dr. Yates possibly have beyond that of any single one of the thousand medical practitioners of the Province? Has he ever seen a case of ovarian disease, or witnessed the operation, or conversed with those who have? And, as to skill, his mistake of imagining that the bladder was an ovarian cyst—as one must conclude he did by his tearing at it until it was ruptured—shows clearly that his anatomical knowledge was altogether insufficient for the exigency of the occasion; nay, indeed, that he does not know as much of the anatomy of the parts on which he was operating, as I was in the habit of knocking into the very thickest of the crania of the first year's students of the now crumbling Medical Department of Queen's College. Truly may it be said, that where the wise and the brave conscientiously hesitate to tread, the more ignorant and cowardly, uninfluenced by the higher sentiments, will recklessly rush in.

I have been told by John Blair, the brother of the woman, that his sister was induced to undergo the operation by Dr. Yates telling her that four of every five of patients operated on, for her disease, recovered. With some knowledge of Ovariotomy, and a full appreciation of the Surgical qualifications of Dr. Yates, it is my bounden duty to inform you, that, in my opinion, the proportion of deaths from the operation, in his hands, is almost certain to be twelve out of every dozen operated on.

In conclusion, let me venture to hope, that, guided by an enlightened philanthropy, you will endeavor to have the facts of this letter made public: so that, holding them out as lights, in the path of humanity, they may so shine, that the ignorance and recklessness they expose shall be neither repeated nor imitated.

Your obed't servant,  
JOHN STEWART.

Kingston, Nov. 11th, 1864.