

## OBSTETRIC QUACKERY IN EDINBURGH.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—The members of the Town Council of Edinburgh are the patrons of the University. Most of them are known to be conscientious men, and keenly alive to all that can affect the honour and the usefulness of the institution over which they preside. It appears extraordinary that they should have remained so long unacquainted with the leprosy which has infected some of the professors; or that they should not have summarily driven these persons from the chairs they were polluting, when the fact was discovered. The blame does not, however, rest so much upon the patrons as upon those medical professors of the University, who, after years of silent connivance at the abuses which they know to exist, have now stepped out to denounce them, after they had been denounced so loudly in *THE LANCET*. The Town Council could not have thought that homœopathy and mesmerism were such dangerous errors, and so much to be condemned, when they publicly saw Dr. Simpson, the President of the College of Physicians and professor of midwifery, meeting the homœopathic professor in consultation, and throwing open his house for mesmeric *soirées*. The Town Council must have felt bewildered, and greatly at a loss how to proceed, when they saw Professors Simpson and Syme privately countenancing quackery, and then publicly denouncing it. But for this inconsistent conduct, on the part of the President of the College of Physicians more especially, it is impossible to believe that the rampant quackery in the University and among the population of Edinburgh could ever have reached the present disgraceful position.

But it is not homœopathy and mesmerism only which Dr. Simpson has fostered, it is to him that we chiefly owe the infinitely more dangerous and disgusting quackery in midwifery, which rages like a pestilence in London, and in every town and village throughout the empire, and in some of our most distant colonies. On the present occasion, it may be sufficient to enumerate the proceedings to which I allude:—To Dr. Simpson we owe the invention of the dangerous weapon called the uterine-sound or poker; pessaries which have justly been designated infernal and impaling uterine machines, to cure retroversions which never existed; instruments for pumping the uterus, to excite menstruation; and the proposal to rub its inner surface with lunar caustic, for the same purpose. To him we owe the hysterotome, for slitting open the os uteri, to cure sterility; and to his efforts, more than any other individual, we are indebted for the profligate use of the speculum which has prevailed, and the practice of destroying the os and cervix uteri with caustic potash. To Dr. Simpson we owe the attempt to revive the brutal practice of turning in cases of distortion of the pelvis; of attempting to substitute the Caesarian operation for the induction of premature labour, as witnessed by the whole world in the famous Cupar case. To him we owe the attempt to subvert the established practice in placental presentation, by extraordinary statistic tables; and lastly, we owe to the genius of the Professor of Midwifery in the University of Edinburgh, the baby-sucker! Are these specimens of what the *Edinburgh Monthly Journal* for this month calls "the simple treatment taught and practised in Edinburgh, and which, if adopted in London, would reduce many practitioners from comfort to starvation"? We may well excuse the members of the Town Council, if they are not so dexterous in *Harlequinade* as the University professor.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ISAAC IRONS, M.D.

Sept. 1851.

## DR. SIMPSON'S REPLY TO "ISAAC IRONS."

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—For some time I was at a loss to determine whether it was not my duty to repel, by very different measures from the present, the attack in THE LANCET of September 20th, published under the assumed name of "Isaac Irons." Among the circumstances which have principally decided me to follow the present simpler method, is the unanimous conviction which all my medical friends who have either written or spoken to me on the subject have expressed on one point; viz. that there is in the medical profession only ONE individual who does use, on professional subjects, language so indiscreet as that of the well-known writer in question; and that, after all, this individual was scarcely legally responsible for his own outbreaks of violence.

The circumstance of my being President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, is a matter which seems particularly to annoy "Irons;" for he alludes to it more than once in his letter, and in one point of view it is in itself the best answer to his intemperate insinuations. The election to the Presidentship of the College of Physicians is in the hands of the Resident Fellows, or, in other words, in the hands of those who are living and practising as medical men in Edinburgh, and who consequently know me and all my professional doings and conduct, infinitely better than any one residing at a distance, like "Irons." And "Irons" may rest fully assured that had I ever been guilty in the slightest degree of any impropriety, moral or professional, such as he seems anxious to impute to me, I should never have been elevated to the Presidentship of the College of Physicians; an honour which I confess I greatly value, not only because it is the highest honour to which a Scottish physician can possibly aspire, but also because I was elected to it (and I believe elected unanimously) by the free votes of my fellow practitioners; and that too at an age when the office has been conferred upon few.

On various professional points "Irons" and I have the misfortune to disagree. Whether he or I be right I most willingly leave to time and experience (the only true tests) to determine; and of their ultimate verdict I have no fear. But certainly any existing diversity as to this or that method of practice, is no reason whatever why one man should attempt to brand another who chances to disagree with him with the imputation of quackery. I have never, on any occasion, made a secret of any point or peculiarity in my practice. It has been open and patent to the study and criticism of all. I have always taught every part and item of it to my pupils, and, as many foreign and British physicians can testify, I have always gladly shown it, and its full results to my professional brethren. Of course I am not foolish enough to imagine that my brethren of the medical profession will, without due consideration and experience, adopt any practical doctrines in uterine pathology that I or any one else may please to propose. Any difference, however, in opinion and practice may assuredly be stated, and, if necessary, discussed between professional men in the language of gentlemen. But on this, as on other occasions, "Irons" strangely seems to suppose that the medical profession of England are weak-minded enough to mistake mere personal abuse and scurrility for argument, while he evidently forgets that it is, on the contrary, generally acknowledged that such weapons are seldom or never used, except in cases where all proper and legitimate arguments are actually wanting.

In more than one point "Irons" passes even these bounds, and recklessly imputes to me opinions which I at least never held. Take one for an example: he charges me with an attempt "to substitute the Cæsarian section for the induction of premature labour." I never held or dreamed of such a doctrine;



and I am sorry I can only designate this allegation as a deliberate untruth. Further, I would beg him to remember that the mere repetition of an untruth cannot (as he seems to fancy) betimes convert it into a truth.

I shall neither weary you nor myself by refuting, as I intended, some of "Irons'" other studied misrepresentations and mis-statements. Let me only revert to one more. Among other matters of blame, "Irons" states, that to me, "more than any other individual, we are indebted for the profligate use of the speculum," and for "pessaries which have justly been designated infernal and impaling uterine machines." The first of these accusations I utterly and indignantly deny. The essays that have appeared upon uterine disease, in the pages of *THE LANCET*, have, I know, done more than any other English writings to spread the use of the speculum in Britain; and neither in *THE LANCET*, nor elsewhere, have I, at least, ever written in its favour. In fact, I have always held and taught, that by the advocates of the speculum, greatly too much was expected from its employment; and that it was often had recourse to in cases and diseases in which it was entirely uncalled-for, because it was entirely useless. Among the various patients whom I have at the present moment here under my charge from London, five out of the number are, or were, the subjects of aggravated retroversion. In all of these cases the speculum had been employed in London—in three, properly, because there were, in them, inflammatory lesions to treat; but in the other two, improperly, as I conceive, because the instrument was unnecessary as a means of diagnosis. One of these last two patients was a patient of "Irons" himself. For some weeks during the last autumn she wore an "infernal and impaling" intra-uterine pessary, with complete relief to the symptoms under which she had been suffering for years. After the instrument was for some time finally withdrawn, she for the first time told me that she had previously consulted "Irons," who informed her, as I had done, that her disease was retroversion; that he recommended her to use a pessary, but advised the pessary to be withdrawn and re-introduced once or twice daily; that (though he has declaimed so much against the speculum, and though the speculum was assuredly not required in this, a mere instance of uncomplicated retroversion) he insisted upon employing it; that when she objected to its use, he and a medical friend who was with him argued that it was required "a thousand times a day;" that in using it, he placed her upon a common drawing-room sofa; and that altogether (although she has now seen several obstetricians) his questions and examination were, she declares, more indelicate and painful than any others to which she has ever been subjected. Dr. Duffin, of Langham-place, knows the case I refer to.

In the last number of *THE LANCET*, in your Notes to Correspondents, you adduce the following as a kind of reason for admitting into your pages such letters and attacks upon me as that written by "Irons." "Dr. Simpson," you observe, "will not fail to recollect that his name is systematically published as that of one of the editors (conductors) of the *Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science*, a work which habitually contains very gross imputations on the reputation and conduct of the hospital physicians and surgeons of this metropolis. In consequence of not having repelled such attacks, we have been accused of exercising undue forbearance, and even of showing culpable partiality towards Dr. Simpson and his colleagues of the northern journal." The journal in question was assumed by its present conductors principally with a view of promulgating the doctrines of the Edinburgh Medical School, and of defending these doctrines from the mis-statements to which they were systematically subjected in your own and in other journals. For instance, from "culpable partiality," (?) you admitted years ago into your own pages various anonymous letters from "Irons" and others (or rather, I should probably say, from "Irons" under various other names), containing attacks and misrepresentations regarding myself and my practice, nearly as unprincipled and as violent as that which has just appeared in *THE LANCET*. Since becoming one of the proprietors and conductors of the *Monthly Journal*, I can honestly declare that I have never written one single word of blame or imputation against any London medical man. You must excuse me, however, for adding, that after what has happened, I do not pledge myself to be equally lenient for the future.

In my previous letter to you I mentioned that I was informed by one of your first surgeons in London that "he was attending the foot of a noble duke, whilst a celebrated homœopathist was attending to his grace's stomach and constitution." In your last number I am urged by one of your correspondents "to state fairly and openly the name of this surgeon." But

the surgeon in question told me this circumstance in the course and confidence of private conversation; and I could not but view myself as breaking through every rule of good faith if I complied with your correspondent's request.

Yours, &c.,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, Sept. 29, 1851.



## DR. SIMPSON IN REPLY TO DR. DUFFIN.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR.—In a former letter to "Isaac Irons," (see THE LANCET for October 4th,) in answer to his foolish allegation that it was to me that the profession was principally indebted "for the profligate use of the speculum," I stated that I utterly and indignantly denied such an accusation, and further I observed:—

"The essays that have appeared upon uterine disease in the pages of THE LANCET have, I know, done more than any other English writings to spread the use of the speculum in Britain; and neither in THE LANCET nor elsewhere have I, at least, ever written in its favour. In fact, I have always held and taught, that by the advocates of the speculum greatly too much was expected from its employment, and that it was often had recourse to in cases and diseases in which it was entirely uncalculated, because it was entirely useless. Among the various patients whom I have at the present moment here under my charge from London, (*hinc illae lachrymae?*) five out of the number are, or were, the subjects of aggravated retroversion. In all of these cases the speculum had been employed in London,—in three properly, because there were in them inflammatory lesions to treat; but in the other two, improperly, as I conceive, because the instrument was unnecessary as a means of diagnosis. One of these last two patients was a patient of 'Irons' himself. For some weeks during the last autumn she wore an 'infernal and impaling' intra-uterine pessary with complete relief to the symptoms under which she had been suffering for years. After the instrument was for some time finally withdrawn, she for the first time told me that she had previously consulted 'Irons,' who informed her, as I had done, that her disease was retroversion; that he recommended her to use a pessary, but advised the pessary to be withdrawn and re-introduced once or twice daily; that (though he has declaimed so much against the speculum, and though the speculum was assuredly not required in this, a mere instance of uncomplicated retroversion), he insisted upon employing it; that when she objected to its use, he and a medical friend who was with him argued that it was required 'a thousand times a day,' that in using it he placed her upon a common drawing-room sofa; and that altogether (although she has now seen several obstetricians) his questions and examination were, she declares, more indelicate and painful than any others to which she has ever been subjected. Dr. Duffin, of Langham-place, knows the case I refer to."

In this last sentence I certainly do not state that Dr. Duffin had anything to do with the medical or diagnostic management of the case referred to. But in the last number of THE LANCET (Oct. 11th) Dr. Duffin has thought fit to write to you, under the plea that his (?) "professional reputation would to a certain extent be compromised, were he by silence to admit that he countenanced improprieties such as those detailed;" and as a further consequence, he necessarily takes upon him the burden of averring that the instance which I have given in the preceding paragraph, of great abuse of the speculum by the "mythical" Isaac and him, is either "utterly false" or "grossly misstated."

"How easy it is," confesses the ingenuous Isaac Irons, "to prompt effusions of this kind by the hand of sycophants, while the principal aggressor skulks safely in the background." Being fortunately beforehand quite aware of this characteristic in "Isaac's" creed and practice, I, in consequence, sent the following note to the patient whose case is under dispute, during the evening on which I wrote my former letter to THE LANCET, lest perchance I should have inadvertently misstated anything.

"..... I have stated the case thus; pray tell me if the statement is right. .... 'That she had previously consulted Dr. Lee, who informed her, as I had done, that her disease was retroversion; that he recommended her to use a pessary, but advised the pessary to be withdrawn and re-introduced once or twice daily; that he insisted upon employing the speculum; that when she objected to its use, he and a medical friend who was with him argued that it was required 'a thousand times a day,' that in using it he placed her upon a drawing-room sofa; and that altogether (although now she had seen several obstetricians) his questions and examination were more indelicate and painful than any others to which she had ever been subjected.'

"Yours, &c.,

"J. Y. SIMPSON."

The patient wrote me in reply upon a blank page of the same note:—

"..... I have read the foregoing note, and beg to say that everything was exactly as you have stated it."

"Yours, &c.,

Dr. Duffin hints that the lady may have made her statements in answer to "leading, &c., inquiries" from me. But most certainly such was not the fact. I am not in the habit of gossiping with my patients; and the lady's statements regarding her former professional interviews with Drs. Duffin and Lee, were in the first instance spontaneously offered, and almost forced upon my attention by the patient, as occurrences, all the minutiae of which were living in and stamped in painful impressions upon her memory. Assuredly Dr. Duffin's account and hers, sadly disagree. But in making her statement she had no "leading" object whatever in view—nothing except the simple detailing of the truth. Dr. Duffin, however, makes his statement confessedly with a "leading" object, viz. lest "his professional reputation be compromised;" and I fear greatly, that this desire to guard his "professional reputation," and the reputation of his friend, has affected the Doctor's memory in the present instance in a specific way. For he makes a variety of statements, even on other points than those I alluded to in my previous letter, all of which equally betray this affection and perturbation of the memory. The patient, after being treated, and I believe very properly treated, for chronic metritis, by an able and excellent practitioner in the country, was advised by this practitioner, when she went to London, to consult Dr. Bennet. Dr. Duffin is, or was, the medical attendant upon some of her family in London, and when she happened to state her case and intention to him, he scouted the idea of her consulting Dr. Bennet, declared that he and others who used the speculum in such ailments ought to be "hooted" from society, &c., and advised her to see instead his friend Dr. Lee. To this she consented. In the mean time she was naturally much distressed by the impression, left on her mind by Dr. Duffin's conversation, that her medical attendant in the country had treated her improperly in having recourse to the speculum at all. Next day, however, when she saw Dr. Lee, she was still more astonished when he insisted on using the speculum; and at first she stoutly objected to it, in consequence of Dr. Duffin's previous strong statements and averments to her regarding its immoral impropriety and inutility. In all this there is truly a very strange discrepancy between Dr. Duffin's account and my patient's. But, if necessary, her first medical attendant and others who were made familiar with the circumstances at the time will, I believe, confirm all the different points of it; and Dr. Duffin, I am sure, will himself acknowledge that the patient is a lady so shrewd, calm, and intellectual, as not in the least likely to make any grave mistake, and one far too clear and too strong-minded to be misled by any "leading inquiries," even if such inquiries had been put to her.

But, Mr. Editor, take Dr. Duffin's own account, and I fear that his version will be found to weigh as strongly, if not more strongly, than the patient's, against the very reprehensible abuse of the speculum by Dr. Lee and himself in this instance. The case of the patient (after the metritis had been removed, in the country) was one of retroversion. She possesses, I believe, a written statement to this effect from Dr. Lee. The same opinion was given her by Dr. Locock. In every form of displacement of the uterus, "the speculum," as Dr. Lee correctly avers, "is wholly useless."† In this case, Dr. Lee, according to Dr. Duffin's own words, was "perfectly satisfied" with the result of a digital examination; but he afterwards did institute an examination by the speculum, (whether by or against Dr. Duffin's wish, does not matter for the argument.) But mark, Sir, the sad and miserable excuses which Dr. Duffin offers for Dr. Lee's subjection of this patient to the speculum. The patient, he argues, "would not, indeed, have considered that her case was properly investigated had this mode of inquiry been neglected." Indeed! Does Dr. Duffin actually believe that this is or was any proper reason for Dr. Lee employing the speculum in a disease in which its employment was, according to Dr. Lee's recorded opinion, "wholly useless." Was this in accordance with any code of medical ethics, or any moral medical creed? If our patients are thus allowed to dictate to us our means of diagnosis, surely they ought equally to be allowed to

\* In order that you, or Dr. Duffin, or Dr. Lee, may see the two notes copied in the text, I have placed the originals in the hands of Dr. Locock, as the mutual friend of all parties—as a former medical attendant upon the lady, and as very justly the acknowledged head of the obstetric profession in Great Britain.

† See discussion on the Speculum, at the Medico-Chirurgical Society, in THE LANCET for June 8, 1850.



dictate to us our means of cure. If such a perversion in practice had occurred in therapeutics, and not, as it did in this case, in diagnosis, would you not, Mr. Editor, have considered it your duty to expose it? "The patient," says Dr. Duffin, "would not have considered that her case was properly investigated, had this mode of inquiry been neglected." If Dr. Duffin or Dr. Lee had given her some homœopathic globule, and argued in the same strain, "the patient would not, indeed, have considered that her case was properly treated, had this mode of cure been neglected," would you not have denounced him? And is there any difference in principle between such charlatanism, as applied to symptomatology, and the analogous charlatanism as applied to treatment? Nay, does not the speculum, as the unnecessary means of diagnosis alluded to, imply an act of "reprehensible immorality and indecency," from which the analogous homœopathic medication would have been free? "Surgeons" (Dr. Duffin anxiously pleads as a further apology for Dr. Lee and himself,) "Surgeons are compelled to have recourse to instrumental examination in self-defence, to protect themselves against the charlatanism of those who use it still more unjustifiably; and such may be said to have been partly the reason why it (the speculum) was employed (by Dr. Lee) in the present instance." Can we possibly admit this strange doctrine? If it be admitted, then, at all events, every poor starving physician who unhappily turns homœopathist, may, forsooth, as logically and reasonably argue, that he follows the Hahnemannian creed merely as a means of living, and not from any conviction of the utility or efficacy of homœopathy; in other words, he might argue (again to quote Dr. Duffin's reasoning) that he was "compelled to have recourse to homœopathic medication in self-defence, to protect himself against the charlatanism of those who use it still more unjustifiably."

Look, Mr. Editor, at this subject for one moment longer in another light. The lady's medical attendant in the country used the speculum, conscientiously believing it was for the patient's good and recovery that he availed himself of this means of diagnosis. Drs. Lee and Duffin subjected the patient to the employment of the speculum, professedly not with any view to the good of the patient, but for their own good—in "self-defence." Surely this is a strange and sorry confession made in the cause and on the behalf of one who declaimed last year so vehemently against the unnecessary use of such an immoral instrument as the speculum, before the applauding members of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London.

The whole subject is confessedly a very painful one; but before closing it, I must add one painful item more; and I state it on the repeated and solemn authority of the patient. After the speculum was introduced by Dr. Lee in this case, he asked Dr. Duffin, in the hearing of the patient, to look and see what a marked case of retroversion it was. "See" a retroversion through the speculum! The displaced and retroverted fundus uteri is of course included in the cavity of the peritonæum, and we might as well pretend to "see" through the speculum a displacement of the spleen or kidney, or liver, as a displacement of the fundus of the uterus. Dr. Duffin apologises for Dr. Lee giving the patient pain in employing the speculum, by urging that he is not overmuch accustomed to the use of it. Let us in all charity hope that the above expression about "seeing" the retroversion was uttered merely in ignorance of the indications obtained by the instrument, and not with any view of deluding and cozening the patient.

Let me add, that Dr. A. P. Stewart, of the Middlesex Hospital, when he was lately in Edinburgh, visited the patient with me, and heard her state the particulars of her interviews with Dr. Duffin and Dr. Lee, as I have above detailed them.

As to your unhappy friend and correspondent, "Isaac Irons" and Co., (for another pen than his own has, I believe, assisted him in his last effort,) I have nothing in the way of answer with which to indulge his vanity. It is always—a fact well known to psychologists—a work of supererogation, to try, by any possible kind or any possible amount of evidence, to argue monomaniacs out of their morbid delusions. It is usually, indeed, deemed unkind even to attempt this, because all such attempts generally only fix and confirm these delusions the more. "A man," (says the late Dr. Gooch, in his "Thoughts on Insanity,") "A man may tell a lie till he believes it;" and "Irons" still shows, in his last letter, that he continues to persist in that old and odd delusion of his, which I mentioned in my former letter—viz., that the dogged repetition of untruths may really ultimately convert them into truths. In cases of *puerperal mania*, Dr. Lee, in his published work on Midwifery, strongly advises (p. 549) that especial care be taken that the "patients, who (he says) are sometimes violent and vindictive, inflict no

injury upon themselves." Do, Mr. Editor, take advantage of this sagacious hint of Dr. Lee's, and prevent, for the future, poor "Irons" from committing irremediable injury upon himself and his own character with his own pen.

But to be serious. I have been blamed, and perhaps properly blamed, by various medical friends, for already condescending so far as to answer at all an anonymous writer such as "Irons." And even if for the future he throw off the very flimsy mask which covers him, I believe every gentleman in the medical profession of England will fully absolve me from the disagreeable duty of stooping down to notice or answer one who has assumed a position beyond the pale of the common courtesies of professional life, by so far degrading himself as to use the cloak of an anonymous libeller, for the purpose of uttering under it fabrications and falsehoods which he was ashamed openly to own.

Yours &c.,  
J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, Oct. 14, 1851.