

fame of Mr. Liston, or anticipate the consequences of your judgment being accepted.

You say, "Mr. Fergusson's paper is perfectly conclusive and unanswerable on the subject;" "the weight of evidence is undeniably with Professor Fergusson:" and you ask, "Who could be so competent a judge on such a subject as the assistant of the operator in more than forty cases?" the cases, namely, on which Mr. Liston operated in the Royal Infirmary.

Now, in the first place, permit me to ask, where is the evidence that the knife was held with the finger resting on its back? Mr. Liston has represented the reverse of this, and three "professors" have given the same view in their respective works. It is true that Mr. Fergusson accounts for this by alleging that Mr. Liston's artist committed an error, and that the professors had blindly copied this mistake. The meekness and silence of these gentlemen under this charge certainly tend to strengthen the suspicion pretty generally entertained as to the process by which so many surgical systems have been manufactured in recent times, and at all events render it unnecessary to take into consideration any of the representations except the original one of Mr. Liston. Now, all who are acquainted with Mr. Liston's tastes and habits, and the extraordinary care which he bestowed on the illustration of his writings, must be satisfied that nothing could be more unlikely than his allowing to pass unnoticed and uncorrected such an error as the one in question. But Dr. Monro, the professor of anatomy, published a work on the "Pelvis," in which the hand and knife are represented in the same relation as they were by Mr. Liston, with whom he was on terms of the greatest intimacy, and whose mode of operating he wished to illustrate. Was this also a mistake of the artist? Finally, I beg to state that in the Anatomical Museum of this University there is a coloured drawing, of the natural size, which Mr. Liston employed in his lectures to illustrate the mode of prostatic incision, and which represents, not only the position, but the peculiar form, of his hands—still in the same relation to the knife as that declared by Mr. Fergusson to be erroneous. It is surely not to be supposed possible that Mr. Liston could exhibit this representation to his pupils, and then proceed to operate in a manner entirely different.

Having now, as I hope, satisfactorily shown that the evidence afforded in the way of representation is entirely against the view of Mr. Fergusson, I proceed to consider the amount of confidence to be placed on his personal observation. You say that he assisted Mr. Liston in forty operations;* but as he was not appointed an assistant-surgeon of the Royal Infirmary until December, 1835, while Mr. Liston went to London in October, 1834, it is plain that this assistance could not have been rendered in the hospital, and as to any opportunities of observation, afforded by private practice, I trust that the circumstances will be my apology for stating that such a supposition is quite inconsistent with the intimate connexion of Mr. Fergusson and Dr. Knox, of whose dissecting-room he had the principal charge during a very eventful period, and with whom Mr. Liston had then no communication whatever. How, then, Mr. Fergusson, who, so far as I recollect, never even attended Mr. Liston's lectures, ventured to propose, or can persist in maintaining an allegation so opposed to good surgery, and so injurious to the character of a man he professes to honour, I am at a loss to imagine; but knowing how much mischief bad principles of practice may produce when allowed to get established through want of distinct exposure and decided contradiction, I feel no hesitation in thus explaining the grounds upon which I consider the refusal of the Medico-Chirurgical Society to sanction the publication of Mr. Fergusson's paper as in the highest degree creditable to the good sense of that distinguished body.

I am, Sir, yours &c.,

Rutland-street, Edinburgh, Oct. 1856.

JAMES SYME.

UTERINE PATHOLOGY.

[DR. TYLER SMITH IN REPLY TO DR. SCOTT.]

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I should not deem it necessary to reply to the letter of Dr. Scott, were it not for his assertion that I must have been influenced by "personal motives" in alluding to the case which has been the subject of discussion. This imputation must, I think, appear an absurdity when it is considered that the patient came under my notice several years before the time when I publicly referred to it, and that I only did so at all, after Dr. Scott's name had been introduced into our contro-

* A note from Mr. Fergusson in correction of our error will be found at page 493.—Ed. L.

versy, by Dr. Henry Bennet, as that of an authority against myself.

The patient in question was sent to me by Mr. Vincent Litchfield, of Twickenham, for my opinion. I could do no otherwise than give it; and to have waited, before doing so, to communicate with Dr. Scott at Madras would have been preposterous. I described the state of the os and cervix uteri exactly as I found it, without any reference whatever to the cause of its mutilation. Neither Dr. Scott's name nor treatment were at first mentioned to me, and I did not know if the injuries, the marks of which were evident enough, had been caused by sloughing after labour, pelvic abscess, destructive cauterization, or any other cause. After giving my opinion of the state of the uterus, I was told of the circumstances which had led to it. Mr. Litchfield knows that I spoke at the time in the most guarded manner as regards Dr. Scott, but that the husband, before he left India, had been made aware of the probable cause of his wife's condition. The patient was afterwards taken to one of the most eminent accoucheurs in this metropolis, who entirely corroborated my opinion as to the then state of the uterus and vagina.

I have opposed the use of destructive escharotics, such as the actual cautery and potassa fusa, in the treatment of affections of the os and cervix uteri, believing them to be unnecessary, and a frequent source of mutilation to an organ very requisite to the female economy. Dr. Scott repeats the cuckoo-cry, that as I have had no personal experience in such feats as the "rubbing down half an inch of potassa fusa on an hypertrophied os," I ought to be silent on the subject. But this is equivalent to declaring that only those who do the mischief are fit to estimate its results. On the contrary, I beg leave to think that they are, of all others, those most likely to suppress the truth, or to attribute the mutilation to any cause but the right one.

I will not say more than to declare my adherence to what I have elsewhere written about the injury done to the os and cervix uteri by the use of the more violent caustics, and to express my belief that their most strenuous advocates are becoming a good deal more chary than they were of their employment in the treatment of non-malignant uterine disease.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

October, 1856.

W. TYLER SMITH, M.D.

THE ROYAL MEDICAL BENEVOLENT COLLEGE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have perused with great interest the several letters which have recently appeared relative to the arrangements of the Royal Medical Benevolent College. For the information of all interested, I subjoin the following facts:—In the published balance-sheet of a similar institution for the year ending 1855, the sum of £6651 14s. 6d. is given as the total amount of its expenditure, which includes salaries and wages of masters and servants, victualling of the entire establishment, together with the general incidental expenses of the house and school, as laundry, gas, coal, stationery, books, &c. The average number of inmates (inclusive of all) during the year was 270, of whom 230 were pupils. Dividing the sum of £6651 14s. 6d. by 230, gives the average cost of each pupil as £28 15s. 9½d. There are eleven masters, ten of whom reside within the walls of the building—viz., the head master, second and third ditto, mathematical master, writing ditto, and five assistant masters. The French master resides without the walls. The subjects of study include English, French, Latin, Greek, Ancient and Modern History, Geography, Arithmetic, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy. The annual charge for board and education in all cases includes books, stationery, washing, and medical attendance. Now if all this can be effected in one institution, why not in another? I am an ardent admirer of the Royal Medical Benevolent College, and a zealous advocate of its claims upon the public, and the professed objects for which it was originally instituted. I trust the council will bear in mind the burdens of those "lesser lights" who are anxious to assist as far as they are able, the widow and orphan, and who only ask in return the opportunity of affording to their own sons, at the lowest possible cost, an education such as they most willingly wish to accord to the orphan.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

October, 1856.

AN HONORARY LOCAL SECRETARY.

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.—This evening (Saturday), Dr. Theophilus Thompson will read a paper "On the Effects produced on the Blood by Mental Labour."