

Box Robertson (C.A.)

*"Something is rotten in the State of Denmark."*

THE

Strange Defense of Dr. James H. Armsby

AGAINST THE CRITICISM OF HIS REPORT,

CONSIDERED BY

CHARLES A. ROBERTSON, A. M., M. D.,

*Ophthalmic and Aural Surgeon at St. Peter's Hospital, and  
Surgeon of the Albany Eye and Ear Infirmary.*

"Poena gaudebis amarâ

"Nominis invisî, tandemque fatebere letus,

"Nec surdum nec Tiresiam quenquam esse deorum."

ALBANY:

THE ARGUS COMPANY, PRINTERS.

1870.

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THE

Strange Defense of Dr. James H. Amory

AGAINST THE CRITICISM OF HIS REPORT,

CHARLES A. ROBERTSON, A. M., M. D.

Professor and Head of the Department of Hygiene and  
Bacteriology in the University of Michigan

ALBANY:

THE ANDRUS COMPANY, PRINTERS.

1870.

“ If thou hast a truth to utter,  
Speak, and leave the rest to God !”

TO THE MEDICAL READER :

In the *New York Medical Journal* for March, Dr. James McNaughton publishes a “ Reply ” (not an *answer* !) to Dr. Robertson’s critique. Regarding this Reply as entertaining, with all its maundering, Dr. Robertson is disposed to give it circulation, and, therefore, at his own expense, has ordered twice the number of reprints, in pamphlet form, which Dr. McNaughton modestly bespoke. In the *Medical Journal* there are prefatory remarks by the editor, and he also furnishes the *Reply* with a *frontispiece*, which, however creditable to the artist, Haines, discredits much that follows.

The preliminary matter, by the editor and by Haines, is in the following language, but without italics and capitals :

DR. MARCH’S CASE.

We have received from Albany a reprint copy,\* from the present number of the *Journal*, of Dr. McNaughton’s reply to Dr. Robertson’s criticism on the original paper giving the account of the case. This reprint has pasted in it a slip which does not appear in the *Journal* communication, and is worded as follows :†

Dr. Armsby never, to my knowledge, desired or expressed a wish to buy or suppress a negative of the picture of Dr. Marsh’s (*sic*) disease. He always purchased an equal number of copies of both to send or give away.

E. S. M. HAINES,  
Photograph Rooms, 478 Broadway.

ALBANY, January 29, 1870.

\* This reprint was issued in advance of the *Journal*, to allow of its distribution at the meeting of the State Medical Society.

† Since this paragraph was written, and in type, we have received from Professor Lansing, of Albany, presumably by Dr. McNaughton’s advice and consent, a request to insert in the *Journal* this slip. This request we have acceded to, and the above comment, therefore, is no longer strictly true. As a simple matter of justice, however, we deem it advisable to let the paragraph stand as written, and to give both sides of *this singular transaction*.—ED. N. Y. MEDICAL JOURNAL.

As pertinent to this matter, and as a part of the history of the controversy which has risen upon this case, we publish another statement by Mr. Haines, which has also been forwarded to us from Albany:

On the 18th of June, the day after the death of Dr. March, Dr. Henry R. Haskins, Demonstrator of Anatomy in the Albany Medical School, brought to me a bladder and prostate gland, said to be from the body of Dr. March, and desired a photograph. Dr. Haskins called afterward and stated that *Dr. Armsby*, who was out of town when the photograph was ordered, *was not pleased, for the appearances did not present themselves to suit him, and wished no more copies of this photograph to be sold.* A few days after, he *confidentially* asked me what I would take for the negative. I asked him *whom* he wanted it for, but *he would not tell me*; said no matter, and he wished no more to be said about it. I presumed that Dr. Armsby wanted it, but I refused to sell it.

On the 25th day of July the same specimen, which had been preserved in some fluid, was brought to me again, for the purpose of having me take another photograph. After the specimen had been GOTTEN READY (IN A MANNER SO UNUSUAL as to occasion my subsequent comments), by Dr. Armsby, having molded it, as I have said, like PUTTY, and TRIMMED IT TO HIS SATISFACTION, I took the negative picture. Copies of this negative only Dr. Armsby wished to be sold, as Dr. Haskins stated.

I did state, to both Dr. Edward R. Hun and to Dr. Robertson, what I believed to be the fact, that DR. ARMSBY WAS CHIEFLY INTERESTED in this matter, and that I regarded Dr. Haskins as HIS AGENT. Since Dr. Armsby did not PERSONALLY express to me a wish to buy or suppress a negative of the picture of Dr. March's disease, I did not refuse to sign the paper, which he brought to me, for it was TECHNICALLY true; BUT I DID NOT SIGN IT WITH ANY INTENTION OF CONTRADICTING DR. ROBERTSON.

E. S. M. HAINES.

Sworn to before me, this 7th }  
day of February, 1870, }  
J. M. BAILEY, Notary Public.

We may state here that, so far as this journal is concerned, we consider the controversy should now end. Both parties have now had an opportunity to bring forward their sides of the question, and we do not deem that *the interests of science or a regard for the truth* call for any further comment. *The opinion of our readers*, and of the profession at large, *is*, undoubtedly, *well formed on the merits of the case*, and, probably, no further discussion would materially alter such opinion. We deem it proper, however, to add that we have received from Dr. Robertson a rejoinder to Professor McNaughton's reply. This rejoinder is most courteous in language and tone to Professor McNaughton, and expresses the greatest satisfaction at the appended letter of Professor Gross, which he (Dr. R.) claims *fully substantiates* the view he took as to the proper course to be followed in the treatment of the case.—*N. Y. Medical Journal.*

Then commences Dr. McNaughton's "Reply."

In presenting a reprint of Dr. McNaughton's "Reply" to the argument\* against the treatment of Dr. March's case, as set forth in the "report," published by Dr. James H. Armsby in the *New York Medical Journal*, in October last, Dr. Robertson expresses his satisfaction that, after publishing the affidavit of Haines, the photographer, which puts Dr. Armsby in a most discreditable position as to veracity, the editor of the *Medical Journal* thinks no rejoinder from Dr. Robertson necessary; and he does "*not deem that the interests of science, or a REGARD FOR THE TRUTH calls for any further comment!*" Leaving, therefore, Dr. McNaughton's "Reply," as meriting no special notice as to scientific or logical value, a moment's consideration of the matter of the two statements by Haines is requested.

Dr. Robertson charged Dr. Armsby with tampering with specimens representing Dr. March's disease, and with trying to purchase a negative picture of the photograph first taken, and desiring copies to be sold from a second negative only, taken more than a month after death, and misrepresenting the fresh appearance of the disease. Dr. Armsby does not deny the charge. He resorts, instead, to a shameful subterfuge. He procures the signature of the artist to a statement, that "Dr. Armsby never," &c.; that is, that Dr. Armsby, *in person*, never did what is charged, not that he did not do it *by an agent*. He pasted this contemptible evasion, printed on a slip of paper, in the pamphlet containing Dr. McNaughton's "Reply," and a boy was employed to hand a copy to every member or visitor of the State Medical Society, at its recent session. This trick was intended to impeach the truthfulness of Dr. Robertson's statement; but how does the trickster appear, now that the whole truth comes out, sworn to by Haines? Is not the last state of that man worse than the first? On him has fallen the mantle of Alden March! What a fall was that! Commence with *Gehazi*, continue with *Ananias*, and what would be a fit name to complete the catalogue? In this connection the following language, from a recent report of a committee to the *Suffolk, Mass., District Medical Society* (published in the *Boston Medical*

\* The review of the Armsby article is incorrectly but with perverse persistency called an attack. It is simply criticism, severe but merited.

*Journal*) may be quoted, viz.: "*The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* Your committee know of no act of villainy greater than that which a scientific man commits when he voluntarily takes the witness-stand and then fails to act upon this noble rule."

If there was not something to conceal, why the attempt to make the sun tell a story in the second photograph different from that incontinently *blabbed* in the first? If the transaction was legitimate, why resort, by means of a slip of paper, to subtlety and suppression of part of the truth respecting it? To whatever height falsehoods are cumulated, they serve no other purpose than to make greater the inevitable tumble which comes at last. Whatever was thought before, no one will doubt now, that something wrong was contemplated in this photographic imposition, so appropriately supplemented with duplicity. It did not seem remarkable to read afterward, in the city newspapers, Dr. Davidson's card,\* publicly stigmatizing the chief actor in the above exhibition. Neither he, nor any one for him, can now complain that his reviewer was too severe in his criticism.

No one will think it strange that the self-respect of Professors Hun, Quackenbush, Vanderpoel and Mosher compelled them to resign their positions in the Albany Medical College, to be quit of him, and that the City Hospital, of which he is the autocrat, loses its most valuable medical attendants in consequence of him, and of the removal of Dr. Robertson, which he effected. The recent censure of him by the County Medical Society, was only a matter of course.

Allusion may properly be made to the impropriety, or, as Dr. McNaughton prefers to call it, the "brutality" of the person, who sent a pamphlet, containing Dr. Robertson's review, to the family of the deceased. The act was certainly improper, and the suspicion is that it was done by an unscrupulous person, in order that Dr. McNaughton might have pretext for hurling his envenomed

\* A CARD.

I am informed that Dr. James H. Armsby is circulating an anonymous letter, which is very derogatory to the character of Dr. James McNaughton as a teacher of medicine, and announcing that I am the author. I pronounce the assertion a willful and malicious falsehood, and caution the profession to discourage the circulation of the paper, as its only tendency is to injure the President of the College.

J. REID DAVIDSON, M. D.

sentence. It was much more unfeeling, though, that a brother-in-law should "post with such dexterity" to the dissection of the warm body of the deceased, before *six hours* had sped after his final breath. That was not "*usual treatment*," and in some countries a *post-mortem* examination, so soon after death, is forbidden by law.

But even this shocking, if not "wicked speed," is surpassed by the revolting narration that parts, *healthy* parts, too, not morbid specimens, of Dr. March's body were transmitted through the country to Philadelphia, instead of being decently buried. No demand of science called for this heartless act; it was sacrilege, heinous and unpardonable. It seems unaccountable that one defending Dr. Armsby, the brother-in-law, should expose this great and deliberate unfeelingness, when he calls it "brutality" to send to the friends a pamphlet containing a criticism of the treatment published in a scientific journal. The nature which could be guilty of such shocking profanation of the remains of the dead, could readily violate the sensibilities of the living. Could the lamented artist, Elliot, come forth from his peaceful tomb, he would tell of the loved wife he left widowed, when the colors which glowed divinely in his life were extinguished. He would say how tenderly she nursed him, how appreciatively she felt every kindness or succor, that others seemed to extend to him. When, at last, his journeying done, and his reckoning settled by her as the final act, how happy she was to find in her husband's physician one who knew his genius and valued his work, and she was more than glad to know that her limited means would be spared when the kind-hearted physician assured her that he had no account against her. Her grieving heart swelled with gratitude. She chose among her treasures the canvas animated by the portrait of the painter's friend, touched and retouched lovingly from time to time with the marvelous brush of the skillful artist, and offered this to the *good doctor* in lieu of a pecuniary requital. The choice gift was accepted with expression of seeming pleasure and appreciation, for the benevolent man called himself "a patron of art." Not long afterward a distinguished personage of New York city, well known in the profession, the friend of Elliot, was amazed to be told that his picture, in an elegant frame, was exposed for sale

in Snedecor's art store, price \$500! When informed of the fact, the affronted and indignant woman reclaimed the portrait. She *paid a bill presented by Dr. Armsby*, and took back her picture, after being at additional outlay of ~~eighty~~ <sup>53</sup> dollars for the frame.

Let "the powers that wait on noble deeds" mete out judgment, the writer measures none.

The writer cannot permit the opportunity to go by without expressing due acknowledgment of the fact to which Dr. McNaughton queerly enough refers in the present connection, viz., that he has entertained so favorable an opinion of Dr. Robertson in the practice of a specialty in medicine, as to often deem it for the interest of his patients that they should consult him. Although it is not clear what relation, in the mind of Dr. McNaughton, this has with the treatment of Dr. March's case, it is doubtless a little comforting to him in his distress, to feel respect for his critic in the capacity of a specialist, while resenting the liberty the critic has taken to manifest training and knowledge as a physician, and to have the audacity to engage in a tilt with a brace of "professors." Certainly the venerable doctor does not mean to imply, by an insinuation, that an "oculist" is not a physician, or that diseases of the eye can be properly treated by any one not well educated in medicine and surgery. If he has heretofore entertained such a fallacy, he has doubtless ere this become convinced of his error. Dr. McNaughton's advertisement of Dr. Robertson as an "oculist" is objectionable, since the *American Ophthalmological Society*, of which the latter is a member, resolved at a recent session that this was not a professional title, and should not be announced. As Dr. Robertson's kind friend is a stickler for "medical ethics," he will probably not so offend again.

In order to show to the profession the kind of logic, in addition to personal detraction, with which Dr. Armsby tries to prove the incorrectness of the criticism of his report of Dr. March's case, and to establish that he did not improperly treat the patient, the following letter to the Governors of the City Hospital is introduced, reprinted from the *Albany Argus* of January 24th, 1869:



*To the Governors of the Albany City Hospital:*

GENTLEMEN—I have received official notice of my removal from the Albany City Hospital, and the fact having been published by the press in this city and in New York, I present publicly the following statement:

Five years ago I came to Albany, after consultation as to the expediency of the movement with my friends, Drs. Agnew, Bumstead and Hinton, surgeons in the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary. I called on the leading members of the profession here, and stated to what branch of medicine I purposed confining my practice, and mentioned my credentials, both from home and abroad. I was courteously received by all, and my amicable feelings towards them were never disturbed, except in the case of one person, whose covert conduct early troubled me, and whose discourtesy and meddling offended me.

After I had been in Albany two years or more, having secured the confidence of the profession generally, as I had indubitable evidence in the fact, that prominent members of it not only recommended patients to me, but honored me by consulting me themselves, and by entrusting members of their families to my care, I began to make efforts tending to the establishment of an Eye and Ear Infirmary of a charitable character. I spent a good deal of time in the unenviable labor of trying to enlist sympathy and co-operation. Occasionally, I met with a reception characterized by a kind of civility that was not encouraging, but still I persevered in my self-imposed task, and in December, 1867, I had the satisfaction of having effected an organization, legally incorporated under the title of the Albany Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary. Gen. John F. Rathbone was elected President, and Peter Cagger, Esq., Vice-President.

It still remained necessary to obtain funds for putting in operation the newly created organization. By persevering efforts, and by argument before the Committee of Ways and Means, strengthened with a petition bearing names of influential public men in different parts of the State, as well as citizens of Albany, I succeeded in getting an appropriation from the Legislature of four thousand dollars, payable on condition that ten thousand dollars be obtained from other sources. I received conditional pledges of several thousand dollars from private citizens, and continued my efforts to procure the sum requisite for securing the four thousand dollars from the State treasury. In the meantime, at my own expense, I hired two rooms at the corner of Hudson and South Pearl streets, and opened them for the free treatment of the poor, afflicted with disease of the eye or ear. I did this nominally under the auspices of the incorporated infirmary. Patients repaired to this place, and the need of the charity was manifest. In order to provide hospital shelter for patients, requiring it in consequence of surgical operations, Gen. Rathbone, the President of the Infirmary, made application to the Governors of the Albany City Hospital for permission to use for this purpose some of the many unoccupied beds of the Hospital. In a few days response was made, and truthfully, too, that there were no unoccupied beds. Suddenly as Clan Alpine's warriors sprang multitudinously up, "On right, on left, above, below," at the shrill whistle of Roderick Dhu, so suddenly were these hospital beds peopled with patients. In a few more days the unrumpled coverlets bore quiet testimony of the rapid convalescence and departure of these patients!

The Governors of the Hospital, through their President, now made overtures that the Eye and Ear Infirmary merge itself in a department of the Hospital, which they proposed to create. The statement was, that a building, next to the Hospital, had been purchased, at a cost of \$10,000, for such department, and, indeed, a statement went the round of the newspapers that Mr. Thomas W. Olcott had purchased and generously donated it to the Hospital for an Eye and Ear Infirmary.

Who originated such report in the newspapers is easily guessed. All know whose shoe fits in that track! Even while I was laboring to secure means to carry on the work of the infirmary just constituted, a short article appeared in the *Evening Journal* (February 10th, 1868), under the caption of "Eye and Ear Infirmary," stating that "the patrons of the Albany City Hospital" were about to establish an Eye Infirmary and "to occupy an adjoining building," and the institution be carried on in connection with the Hospital. The publication of such an article, at such time, was clearly not meant to facilitate my enterprise. Dr. Armsby volunteered to assure me that he did not know who wrote the article. It had been already intimated to me, at the proper quarter, who did write it, and Dr. Armsby's disavowal seemed peculiar. Nevertheless, whoever wrote or published that article, Dr. Armsby did take a paper-writing to Gen. Rathbone, for him to sign, after I had expressed my readiness to accept the overtures of the Hospital, and to contribute the results of my labors to that institution; for the purpose of effecting a "more economical and efficient conduct and management of the Eye and Ear Infirmary." This paper-writing contained an affidavit, "that the Hospital and Infirmary had formed a connection," that the building above alluded to "was purchased at a cost of ten thousand dollars;" that "said building is made necessary by reason of the connection," &c., &c., and, in fine, that the condition imposed by the State had been complied with, and the appropriation of four thousand dollars, which I had obtained, might now be legitimately paid out by the State Treasurer. Relying on the statements of Dr. Armsby, that this affidavit was true, and being confirmed by my assurance, that I believed it true, and done in good faith, the President of the Infirmary signed the document. An order for the payment of the four thousand dollars to Mr. Thomas W. Olcott, President of the Board of Governors, was also signed by Gen. Rathbone, as President, and myself, as surgeon. The Comptroller paid the money to Mr. Olcott as ordered, and took Mr. Olcott's receipt in March, 1869.

Every reasonable person will naturally assume that good faith was kept on both sides; that the purchased building was occupied for the avowed purposes; that Gen. Rathbone was not deceived, or apparently compromised; that Dr. Robertson was treated with just consideration, and that the large sum of money which he had been the means of bringing to the Hospital, was not diverted from the object contemplated by the Legislature of the State.

By resolution of the Governors, Nov. 6, 1868, Dr. Robertson was constituted Ophthalmic and Aural Surgeon of the Hospital, and in a few days he began his professional work. The adjoining building was not to be vacated until spring. Accordingly, a sort of crypt, under the Hospital, was furnished a little, and there the Eye and Ear Infirmary was placed, I may properly say, as the event has

proved, interred. In May, 1869, "the building, made necessary by the connection," was, strangely enough, hired from the Hospital for a year by the occupant from whom it had been purchased! At a recent meeting of the Governors, a committee was appointed, as I am told, to let it for another year! So much for the building. Now, how have I been treated, personally, by the authorities of the Hospital, to which I have rendered unpaid services for more than a twelvemonth, and which has taken and appropriated the money, the result of my efforts to establish an Infirmary for an unfortunate class of the poor? This is the answer: At a meeting of the Governors of the Hospital, held at the Mechanics' and Farmers' Bank on the 13th of January inst., a resolution was passed, constituting a certain medical practitioner an associate to alternate with me. Last June, Dr. Armsby, unknown to me, and to other leading members of the Hospital staff, had the presumption to originate a petition, to which he secretly obtained a few signatures, for the accomplishment of this identical project. He procured the presentation of the petition to the Board of Governors. A member of the Board was struck with the remarkable omission of names. He inquired if Dr. Robertson desired an associate; if he regarded the person proposed as competent, or as agreeable; whether he knew anything about the petition, and pronounced it an insult to him, if gotten up without his knowledge, and said that he would not be a party to offering Dr. Robertson an indignity. The matter was thereupon dropped.

This gentleman was absent from town when the recent meeting took place, and had no knowledge that a meeting was contemplated, although he made inquiry before leaving home; and he has not changed the opinions that he expressed in June. Just before the meeting, on the 13th, adjourned, Mr. Olcott proposed my removal from the Hospital. The preamble to his resolution states that the interests of the Hospital "made it expedient." The motion was put and carried, the negatives not called. No debate took place, as the result was a foregone conclusion. This appears from a remark made by one of the Governors to another, on entering the bank, that part of the business of the meeting was to remove Dr. Robertson.

After learning the fact of my removal, I called on some of the Governors. Several let me understand that the action of the meeting was not in accordance with their judgment. One gentleman, who sustained the action, assured me that there was no intention on the part of any one to insult me; that there was no dissatisfaction with the management of my department, or want of respect for my professional qualifications; but, as it was said that the usefulness of the Hospital seemed imperilled by dissensions in the medical staff, the Governors felt it necessary to act as they did in order to secure harmony. I replied that I was glad to know that there was no intention to inflict an outrage on me, but, nevertheless, I could not but feel that a great injustice had been committed, both in depriving me of the fruit of my labors, and in pronouncing judgment against me in a secret conclave, without giving me an opportunity to be heard.

It transpired that the dissension was one between Dr. Armsby and myself. The fact that I repudiated all relations with him, for what seemed to me good and sufficient reasons, never had created any trouble in the hospital, and never could

so long as each of us faithfully discharged our duties to our patients in our own provinces, without meddling with affairs which do not pertain to the functions of the medical officers of the hospital. But the Governors thought differently, or else they regarded Dr. Armsby as entitled to dominant rights in the hospital, and themselves as merely the placemen to execute his will,\* and sacrifice any gentleman on the medical staff who does not regard him and his nature with admiration, who does not confide in his mild and measured tones, and think that all his statements are free from guile and never require corroboration.

Why Dr. Armsby should possess prerogatives unheard of in any other hospital, is asserted to be for the reason that he has done a great deal for the Albany hospital. So he has, but the institution has done more for him. It is, in no inconsiderable degree, a valuable *placer*, where he picks up many a nice little nugget. It is, also, an engine of power, like the college, which he has been able, again and again, to wield against men who certainly were as well informed in medicine as he, and whose maintenance of professional honor could not be impeached. With these engines, and by his unrestrained assumption and license he has bred discord in the profession repeatedly, until at last, the abused patience of men can tolerate the annoyance no longer. He has become generally obnoxious to the profession, and the Governors of the hospital will soon discover that, besides doing me injustice, they have made a mistake in expecting harmony in the medical staff to result from their action.

The charitable character of the hospital, it would, perhaps, be out of place to portray now; another occasion will be better; enough, that no one who knows it as I have known it, would think of conceding to any man peculiar honor or privilege in grateful recognition of it. The "new part" of the hospital, the great work of Dr. Armsby's genius, is simply a boarding-house for private patients, and, occasionally, for other persons, if it pleases the proper authority.

Those citizens who subscribed, recently, in sums ranging from five dollars upwards, thinking in their honesty that they were aiding the poor, parted with their money to build this boarding-house for patients who require no charity, and it remains to be shown that a dime of the money obtained by Dr. Armsby was ever expended for the needy sick.† Nevertheless, this efficient getter of contributions claims distinction, lordship, privilege, and the Governors back him, not because of his superiority as a scholar, a practitioner or a man, but, forsooth, because he has done so much for the hospital, that is, so much for a boarding-house for his patients! I am confident that, while money may be got for such

\* He has influenced the Governors of the hospital into action which does honor neither to their heads nor their hearts. St. Peter's Hospital, under the benign auspices of the Sisters of Mercy, has just been inaugurated, and the Governors of the Albany City Hospital vote to prohibit the medical officers of the latter from *giving* their services to the former hospital! Gentlemen who rarely see the outside even of the hospital in which they profess to be concerned, forbidding humane doctors from visiting the sick and the poor without reward, in whatever place they may be! What means this? Surely *religious intolerance* is not cropping out in this fungous proscscription, is it? "The quality of mercy is not strained" in St. Peter's Hospital. The sick, of every religious belief, are cared for there alike, and its medical officers are not restrained by any illiberal rule or insolent dictation, from doing good, wherever they have opportunity.

† It is said that not one bed has been added to the number intended for the poor, although some \$40,000 have been obtained for the hospital as a charity.

an institution from the treasuries of the State and city, whose donors do not know its nature, the Governors of the hospital, who do know it, if dying, would hardly yearn to demise a bequest to the institution, as a pious act that might make their coffins easier.

Conversation with the Governors let out other causes of displeasure. I had dared to use the diamond point of my recording pen, where others might have preferred a castigation, in heeding an offense unbecoming a gentleman. But a greater blame than that existed. The head and front of all my offending was a pamphlet. I had opened the box of Pandora, and evils flew thick around. I had exercised my right of criticism. A thunderbolt was launched from a serene sky, charged to repletion with truth and sternest logic. Then there appeared a scathed and blasted man, with pretense hanging in shreds about him, trying to hide himself away from the light blazing wherever a pamphlet had fallen, and in banks, and counting-rooms, and parlors he sought shelter, bemoaning "the ingratitude" of his race, and appealing piteously for protection from the terrible "persecution," as he wailed the word, of a man who fearlessly proclaimed that, sometimes, *ignorance in a physician is no less culpable than crime.*

Gentlemen who have not read my criticism of a scientific subject or who do not appreciate it, may attempt, in behalf of another, to punish me for exercising the right of judgment and of speaking professionally, but it will not seem judicious to the community to make the attempt in a manner that is unwarranted and unjust, and so compromising to themselves as the recent act of your Board. I am confident that the personal fairness of the individuals composing your Board, who favored this act, must sooner or later cause them regret for the inconsiderateness and precipitancy of their official conduct. But, whether this be so or not, the treatment of me becomes, in my estimation, of little moment, when I find myself sustained professionally, as I do, by medical gentlemen of distinction in different parts of the State, and in language stronger, too, than this, which I quote (using it with permission) from a letter received from Prof. Lewis A. Sayre, M. D., an eminent surgeon of New York city. He writes: "Although an entire stranger, permit me, in the name of an insulted profession, to thank you for your masterly review of the reported case of the late lamented Prof. March. \* \* \* When I read the first report in the presence of several medical gentlemen, all of us expressed our astonishment that there was no one in Albany that could diagnosticate and treat so simple a case. \* \* \* Therefore, the necessity for your paper, for you all would certainly suffer in professional reputation without the explanation which your most valuable paper so ably sets forth. Again thanking you for this timely and masterly defense of professional honor and capacity, and proper exposure of professional ignorance, I remain, &c."

All of which is respectfully submitted.

CHARLES A. ROBERTSON, M. D.

While preparing the present article for the press, the *Buffalo Medical and Surgical Journal* for February has been received, and in it appears an article by the editor, a stranger to Dr.

Robertson, expressive of professional judgment concerning Dr. Robertson's position as a critic, and the conduct of the board of hospital governors. The article (not italicized in the *Journal*) reads as follows :

[FROM THE BUFFALO MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.]

ALBANY CITY HOSPITAL.

It appears that Dr. Charles A. Robertson's review of the published report of the case of Prof. March has obtained his dismissal from the (so called) Eye and Ear Department of the Albany City Hospital. The action of the Governors, so far as can be known from the present statement of facts, appears quite *inconsistent with fairness* and a *true sense of their obligations to the public*. Again, the public expose of the manner in which the Hospital obtained \$4,000, appropriated by the State for the Eye and Ear Hospital, is not very complimentary to their own honesty. Dr. Robertson is too sharp and TOO MUCH IN THE RIGHT to be treated *unhandsomely with safety*, and we believe his dismissal from the Hospital will return to torment his pursuers. Certainly if he has been treated, as now appears, unfairly, it will only advance his own name and standing, and work irreparable injury to the Hospital and the men who have effected his removal.

After the printing of the foregoing matter, a Boston medical periodical, containing the following article [without the italics], was received. The article is shortened by omission of a few unessential parts:

[FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE GYNÆCOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF BOSTON, FOR MARCH, 1870.]

We had been much interested in comparing Dr. Robertson's criticism at the time it appeared with a certain semi-official MS. in our possession, from another hand, purporting to describe Dr. March's last illness, decease and autopsy. The discrepancies were so obvious that we had anticipated the result that has now taken place. As Dr. R. was formerly a practising physician in this city, and has many friends among us, we do not hesitate to say a few words concerning his case.

Five years ago, by the advice of his friends, Drs. Agnew, Bumstead and Hinton, Surgeons to the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, Dr. Robertson, a skilled ophthalmologist, settled in Albany, with a view to special practice. Having secured the confidence of the profession and the community, he succeeded in effecting the organization of the Albany Eye and Ear Infirmary and in obtaining funds for its maintenance, and, very properly, was elected its Surgeon.

The Albany City Hospital, \* \* \* disliking to see a professional charity existing in its vicinity independent of the sway of its masters, overtures were made for the juncture of the hospital and infirmary, upon certain conditions in favor of the latter, which it is alleged were never honorably carried out.

A member of the College Faculty, who was also one of the hospital attendants, *Dr. Armsby*, took occasion, it is said, to force a quarrel upon Dr. Robertson, and to lessen, so far as he might be able, his professional influence. It is charged that *this was done in an underhanded and cowardly way*. Meanwhile Dr. Alden March, the great surgeon, died, being attended by Dr. Armsby, who immediately took pains to send by print and by letter to those more prominent in the profession, his version of the circumstances of the decease.

Dr. Robertson, in the exercise of what he supposed a right, and on the ground of its scientific character, sharply criticised, in the *New York Medical Journal*, Dr. Armsby's report, charging that *Dr. March died from simple unrelieved retention of urine*, and that stereographs of the late surgeon's bladder, copies of which, sent by Dr. Armsby, are in the possession of the Gynæcological Society, of which Dr. March was an honorary member, were got up, so to speak, *for the purpose of covering a fatal error of judgment or neglect*.

For this unpardonable offense his opponent, a member of the College Faculty, while Dr. Robertson was simply a subordinate lecturer, has secured his temporary disgrace.

What, however, had been the act of which Dr. Robertson was really guilty? We quote from his terrible letter to the Governors of the Albany City Hospital, published in the *Albany Argus* for January 24th:

"The head and front of all my offending was a pamphlet. I had opened the box of Pandora, and evils flew thick around. I had exercised my right of criticism. A thunderbolt was launched from the clear sky, charged to repletion with truth and sternest logic. Then there appeared a scathed and blasted man, with pretense hanging in shreds about him, trying to hide himself away from the light, blazing wherever a pamphlet had fallen; and in banks, and counting-rooms, and parlors, he sought shelter, bemoaning the ingratitude of his race, and appealing piteously for protection from the terrible "persecution," as he wailed the word, of a man who fearlessly proclaimed that sometimes *ignorance in a physician is no less culpable than crime!*"

The final result is not yet. An Albany medical friend, uncommitted to either side of the deplorable controversy, writes us that penance "of this kind seems poorly calculated to do Dr. Robertson any harm. He has many powerful friends, whom his review seems to have called up. The result of it all will probably be a reconstruction of the College Faculty, or a total break up, and then a second school."

The following letter from Professor E. H. Parker, M. D., at one time President of the New York State Medical Society, is deemed valuable in the issue that has been raised by the history of the bad treatment of Dr. March's disease :

POUGHKEEPSIE, March 29, 1870.

DEAR DOCTOR ROBERTSON :

McNaughton's "reply" to your paper concerning Dr. March's case has just been received and read by me. I cannot say that I am *surprised* at it, but its whole tone and spirit *shock* me. Before now, however, I have seen men of some position in the profession attempting to use their supposed influence to throw dust into peoples' eyes. What course you will pursue, I of course, cannot judge, but if I did not know some of the other surgeons in Albany to be men of ability, I should advise the profession in that city to try to persuade some one to take up his residence there who is competent to pass a catheter in a difficult case, and to judge correctly whether or no a bladder is distended when the symptoms are not perfectly simple. "*Detention of urine*" is good.

Yours truly,

E. H. PARKER.

Dr. C. A. ROBERTSON.





