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to undergo Malignant Degen-
eration after Intralaryngeal
Operations.

BY
FELIX SEMON.

REPRINTED FROM THE
New York Medical Journal
for September 1, 1894.



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ON THE ALLEGED SPECIAL LIABILITY OF BENIGN LARYN-
GEAL GROWTHS TO UNDERGO MALIGNANT DEGENERATION
AFTER INTRALARYNGEAL OPERATIONS.

LONDON, *August 15, 1894.*

To the Editor of the New York Medical Journal:

SIR: The method of Mr. Lennox Browne's letter published in the *New York Medical Journal* of August 4th will not surprise any one acquainted with his controversial tactics. It is constructed upon the old recipe: "No case, abuse plaintiff's attorney!" Mr. Browne, exactly as on previous occasions, attempts to pass with a few high-sounding phrases over the real question at issue, and to turn the tables by representing a protest against the perversion of scientific facts as the mere outcome of paltry personal spite. In speaking of Dr. Newman's and my own "attempt by a side blast to discredit his contribution" he conveniently forgets that it was *he* who attempted to discredit the weight of our statements by misrepresenting our facts, and that we only acted in self-defense; in complaining of our 'notions of honorable fighting' he equally conveniently forgets that *he* never informed us what use he had made in a text-book, published in America, of our unambiguous words, and that we, too, had seen his article only by a chance visit to a public library. Thus again he simply reverses the facts of the case. His insinuations of disloyalty against the late Sir Morell Mackenzie I can afford to treat with the contempt they deserve. I have frankly opposed Sir Morell when I considered this to be my duty while he was alive, but I have not misrepresented his views and statements nor distorted his cases after he was dead.



But, sir, all this is wide of the mark. The real question stands thus: I have brought a series of grave charges against Mr. Browne and I have given chapter and verse for every charge I made. Mr. Browne does neither attempt to traverse a single one of the facts I have stated nor to apologize for the inexcusable manipulations he has permitted himself; and his reply, after some empty protestations of good faith, which are perfectly meaningless after his actual deeds, in his own words amounts to this: that "such paltry matters are unworthy Transatlantic publication—at any rate, he could be no party to a correspondence on them under the obvious disadvantages attendant thereon."

I need not ask you, sir, whether your opinion coincides with that of Mr. Browne, because you would probably not have extended to us the hospitality of your journal if you had considered the charges we brought so "paltry" as to be unworthy of Transatlantic publication, but I should be greatly obliged to you if you would in an editorial addendum to this letter state your views as to the *ethical* aspect of the whole question. A reply to that effect, it is true, has already been given by the editors of two of your English contemporaries—viz., the editors of the *Lancet* and of the *Glasgow Medical Journal*. Dr. Newman raised a protest against Mr. Browne's literary methods in these two journals, limiting himself strictly, however, to the perversion of his own statements of which Mr. Browne had been guilty. A controversy in both journals followed, which in both instances was ended by editorial notes, which I here verbatim append:

Editorial note in the *Glasgow Medical Journal*:

"We publish Mr. Lennox Browne's letter, but must at the same time express regret at its tone and method. Dr. Newman pointed out that Mr. Browne, in what he cites as an *exact* quotation, alters an important word, thereby changing the meaning entirely. Mr. Browne does not deny altering the word, and we are convinced that his contention that he has not altered the meaning is not made good. When an author who is citing a case as cancerous from the onset states that at one period he believed it to be innocent, it is altering his meaning entirely to substitute 'demonstrated' for 'believed,' and to make it appear

that he still believes it to be innocent at the time of the first examination. Mr. Browne's further claim that Dr. Newman was at one time an adherent of the opinion that such innocent growths may by surgical interference be transformed into malignant tumors seems to us to be equally devoid of foundation. The passages quoted by Mr. Browne from Dr. Newman's writings show that the latter believes in the transformation of innocent into malignant growths, but we have not discovered a single word favoring the idea that he ever believed that instrumental interference is an element in producing such transformation. The long quotations in which Mr. Browne indulges are thus entirely wide of the mark and do not bear out his contention. We have made these remarks without consulting Dr. Newman, and simply to bring back the reader to the points in dispute, which Mr. Browne obscures in a cloud of words.

"EDITORS *G. M. J.*"

Editorial note in the *Lancet*, July 14, 1894:

"* * * The matters in dispute between Dr. Newman and Mr. Lennox Browne have been much simplified by Mr. Browne's last letter to us. It will be seen that he expresses regret for substituting one word for another in quoting or abstracting a report of one of Dr. Newman's cases. We highly approve of this apology, and only regret that it did not come sooner. It is always incumbent in public controversy, in quoting an author, to do so with absolute accuracy, using only the *ipsissima verba*; half the misunderstandings which occur between public men arise from the neglect of this obvious rule. The rule is, of course, most binding in matters so grave as that of surgical interference in cases of intralaryngeal growth. It is quite open to Mr. Browne to argue in favor of his views from the published cases of Dr. Newman or any other laryngologist, but he does not advance his argument by misquoting the statements of those whom he criticises. We are not called upon on this occasion to express an opinion on one of the most serious and urgent questions of surgery which has been projected into prominence by historical events and controversies of recent years. If such a correspondence as that we have published settles anything it settles this: that even from an expert's view there is much

difficulty in defining the course of professional duty in any given case, and that in any given case much responsibility will rest on the general advisers of the patient. We can not devote further space to this correspondence.—ED. L.”

Now, sir, although the editors of both these journals, as you and your readers will have seen from the foregoing notes, have spoken plainly enough, their judgment refers, as it were, to one third only of the evidence which I have laid before you and your readers. My charges are even more serious than Dr. Newman's, because from them it appears that Dr. Newman's case does not stand alone, and that Mr. Browne has in fact resorted to a perfect *system* of misrepresentations of the facts of his opponents. I can not believe that Americans should judge less severely of breaches of literary good faith than their English *confrères*.

What I, with a slight variation of Dr. Newman's words in his letter to the editors of the *Lancet* of July 7th, wish to know is this: Are medical ethics merely nominal, and good enough to be preached to students in introductory addresses, but “paltry” enough to be with impunity disregarded in practice, or is there a moral obligation on the part of every member of the profession to truly render the exact meaning of the unambiguous words of other writers?

FELIX SEMON.

* * We coincide entirely in our English contemporaries' comments on this controversy, and can not consent to its further prolongation in our columns. In our opinion, it goes without saying that ethical principles are good for nothing if they are not to be lived up to, and that an injurious misquotation, even if it is made by accident, should always be acknowledged promptly and without evasion.

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