THE EASTERN OPERATION OF COUCHING FOR CATARACT

From a picture in the possession of Mr. R. R. James, dating from the
Siege of Delhi.

SIR WILLIAM ROBERT WILLS WILDE
(1815—1876)

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5.—SIR WILLIAM ROBERT WILLS WILDE
(1815-1876)

BY

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DUBLIN.

SIR WILLIAM WILDE was born at Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, in 1815. Like many other distinguished men he was of mixed race, his grandfather being an Englishman from Durham, who came to Roscommon as agent to a local landlord, and his grandmother and mother being Irishwomen, natives of Connaught.

He was educated at the Royal School, Banagher, and the Diocesan School, Elphin. It was in boyhood and during school life that he acquired the intense love of fishing and the keen interest in Irish legends and popular superstitions and antiquities which became so prominent a feature in his later life. Wandering over the district and speaking Irish fluently with its inhabitants he was a frequent and welcome visitor at patterns and cockfights, at weddings and funerals, where he noted the superstitions and ceremonies connected with the various feasts, and he repeatedly examined the cahirs, the caves, and the ruined forts in the vicinity of Castlerea and in the plains of Rathcroghan.

Wilde began his medical education in 1832, when he was bound apprentice to the celebrated Abraham Colles, and became a resident pupil in Dr. Steevens' Hospital, to which at that period there was attached a flourishing medical school.

In 1837 he obtained his diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and shortly afterwards was recommended by Sir Henry Marsh and Dr. Robert Graves to take charge of a patient who was sailing in his own yacht to the Mediterranean. In this vessel Wilde spent nine months, during which time he visited Corunna, Lisbon, Madeira, the Canaries, Teneriffe, Gibraltar, Algiers, Sicily, Rhodes, Asia Minor, Beyrout, Syria, Jaffa, Palestine, and Athens.

The narrative of this voyage was Wilde's first effort in literature. It was published in 1840 in two octavo volumes, and was deservedly successful. The keenness of his observation allowed nothing to escape that attracted his interest, and his interest was boundless. Nature, science, scenery, topography, antiquities, folk lore, humanity, all receive attention in the narrative, and the book remains to this day a most interesting account of the whole region, more especially of the Holy Land.

While still a medical student, Wilde had already written papers, one of which, on "Spina Bifida," was read before a Medical Society in 1836.

It is recorded also that during one summer vacation he boldly opened a child's windpipe with a sharp-pointed scissors, in order to extract a piece of hard-boiled potato, the operation being performed in the presence of the village community on a Sunday morning on his way to church.

An account is given in one of Graves's lectures of Wilde's conduct during the cholera epidemic in Roscommon. A travelling pedlar died of cholera in a lodging house in the village of Kilmaine, and the owner of the house caught the disease, and ultimately died. No one would enter the house, and Wilde stayed there alone in attendance till the patient's death, procured a coffin, and with the help of a drunken pensioner and an ass's cart conveyed the corpse to the graveyard, and buried it with a covering of quicklime. Returning to the house he burned all the furniture, and fumigated the rooms with sulphur and tobacco, the only disinfectants obtainable in Kilmaine.

On his return from the Mediterranean Wilde resolved to become a specialist in ophthalmic and aural surgery, and he devoted the next three years to the study of these subjects in London, Berlin, and Vienna, principally in the last-named capital, where he was a private pupil of the celebrated Professor Jaeger. At Moorfields he worked under Dalrymple, Tyrrell, and Guthrie.

The publication of the narrative of his voyage occupied most of his leisure during his early days in Dublin, but he read papers before various societies on antiquities (home and foreign), mummies, comparative anatomy, etc. He attended the meeting of the British Association at Birmingham, and made communications on

ethnology, the preservation of fish, and the physical geography of the coast of Tyre. Some twenty years later he presided over the ethnological section of the Association, in 1857.

While studying at Berlin he presented a paper upon Irish ethnology to the Geographical Society, but Vienna evidently attracted his interest more than either Berlin or London. It was in those days the most celebrated school of ophthalmology in Europe, and doubtless had even then the charm that Berlin has never been able to exercise upon its visitors.

An interesting account of "Austria: its Literary, Scientific, and Medical Institutions," was published by Wilde in 1843. This work had the important result of calling the attention of the Government of the day to his capacity for dealing with statistics, and he was appointed as medical commissioner to the census of 1841, the report of which was then in process of production.

Wilde held this office till his death, and the censuses of 1851, 1861, and 1871 all contain valuable work from his pen.

The census of 1851 includes the Famine year, the great cholera epidemic, and the fever epidemics. To the report of this decade Wilde appended an analysis of all the pestilences recorded in Ireland from the earliest times. As this analysis fills 600 folio pages of a Parliamentary Report, the reader may form some idea of the amount of labour and research entailed upon its sole author.

It was in appreciation of his work as medical commissioner of the census that he received the honour of knighthood in 1864, an honour which was less common in those days than at present.

Wilde's sympathy with the sufferings of the poor was very keen, and his place in the ranks of Irish ophthalmic surgeons has been mainly determined by his successful efforts to obtain proper treatment for the eye diseases of the poor, not alone in Dublin but all over Ireland.

He began in 1841 by opening a free dispensary for ophthalmic and aural diseases at his own expense. The patients soon became so numerous and the cost so great, that he tried to make it more or less self-supporting by charging a small sum monthly for medicines. At this dispensary 1,056 persons were treated in 1843, and a total of 2,075 from its opening till he succeeded in establishing St. Mark's Ophthalmic Hospital and Dispensary for Diseases of the Eye and Ear, in February, 1844. This was a public hospital with a managing committee, Sir Philip Crampton being the consulting surgeon, and Dr. Robert Graves the consulting physician. This hospital maintained a separate existence till 1897, when it was amalgamated with the National Eye and Ear Infirmary, and the building of the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital undertaken.

In the first annual report of St. Mark's Ophthalmic Hospital the influence of the statistician is evident. It contains a classification

of patients with diseases of the eye and ear, according to their diseases, sexes, and ages. This classification was published annually till the fusion of the two Dublin Eye Hospitals in 1897.

In 1850 the colour of the eyes was noted in every case (gray, blue, hazel, or brown), probably for its bearing on ethnology. This was discontinued in 1871.

In 1850 a list of the operations performed in the three years preceding was also inserted, and this was continued till 1897. The first list of operations is interesting. Cataract was extracted in 55 cases, no doubt by the old flap operation, and was treated by "solution" through the cornea in 76 cases, and through the sclerotic in 14.

The other operations were for artificial pupil, staphyloma, pterygium, strabismus, entropion, trichiasis, ectropion, tarsal tumours, lacrymal sac, epicanthus, and plastic operations on eyelids.

In the first report amaurosis figures as the diagnosis in 5·8 per cent. of the cases, and the percentage is even higher in the report for 1847. In 1850 the affections of the retina are given as asthenopia, congestion, and amaurosis, and in subsequent reports these are under the heading of "Affections of the optic nerve and brain."

It is not until 1863, after the appointment of Mr. Henry Wilson as assistant surgeon, that we have the diseases of the retina separated from those of the optic nerve and brain, and that such anomalies as myopia and presbyopia make their entry.

Glaucoma first appears in 1858, hypermetropia in 1866, detachment of the retina in 1867, sympathetic ophthalmia (*sic*) in 1871, and astigmatism as a separate item in 1875. Amaurosis disappears from the list in 1877.

The first removal of the eyeball on account of sympathetic disease seems to have been done in 1868.

Clinical instruction was given in the hospital from the very start, the earlier students being chiefly men already qualified, but medical students were also present from the commencement. A detailed account of this clinical teaching was furnished to the Board of Superintendence of the Dublin Hospitals by Wilde in 1858.

This course of ophthalmic surgery was recommended to students by the Board of Trinity College sometime before 1858, but attendance at an ophthalmic hospital was not made compulsory in the Trinity College School till 1870.

Wilde took the first step in teaching ophthalmic surgery to medical students in Dublin, and Ireland may be proud of the result that followed his action. It is that for the last 30 years every medical student in Ireland has had to attend an ophthalmic clinic for three months, and also to pass a practical clinical examination before obtaining a surgical diploma.

Wilde's personal contributions to ophthalmic literature are mostly to be found in the transactions of the various medical societies which existed in Dublin during the middle third of last century, and are not of much present-day value.

The *London Journal of Medicine* for 1851 contained an article by him, "Observations on the epidemic of ophthalmia which has prevailed in the workhouses and schools of Tipperary and Athlone." In 1854 he wrote "Medico-Legal Observations upon Infantile Leucorrhoea" in which he established the important point that the disease may occur quite independently of gonorrhoeal contagion.

Trachoma was very prevalent in Ireland during the latter half of last century, as is shown by the reports of St. Mark's Hospital and the census. The disease has greatly decreased since then, although an increase occurred of late years owing to the immigration of Russian Jews, and the strict censorship of the medical officers of American Steamship Companies, which left crowds of trachomatous individuals stranded in Irish seaports. The decrease of trachoma is due to several causes, of which the advance in medical knowledge is one of the most important, and this is largely due to Wilde's activity, but the general increase of cleanliness and better diet have had their share in the improvement. The treatment upon which Wilde relied in this disease was "blue stone" (sulphate of copper), applied as a smooth polished pencil to the conjunctiva, a remedy which to this day is held by many surgeons as the most effective of its type. Expression of the follicles was not a practice in Wilde's day, but he anticipated this development by scraping the excrescences off with his thumb nail. It is needless to observe that antiseptic or aseptic surgery was unknown in Ireland in Wilde's palmy days. Wilde's position in otology has been more widely recognized than in ophthalmology. His book on "Aural Surgery and the nature and treatment of the Diseases of the Ear" (1853) had a large circulation and a world-wide reputation. It is quoted in all the important works on otology published in the third quarter of the last century, and his "mastoid incision" and his polypus snare are noted in all modern books.

For many years Wilde edited the *Dublin Quarterly Journal of Medical Science* (the continuation of the *Dublin Journal*) and most of the literary work published in it during those years came from his pen.

Among his descriptive writings that on the "Beauties of the Boyne and Blackwater," attracted the attention of Macaulay, and the historian had the advantage of being personally conducted by Wilde over the scene of the battle of the Boyne before publishing the account of that event in his "History of England."

Wilde was a man of tireless energy and immense versatility. It was not enough for him to do the work of medical commis-

sioner for three censuses, to create and support and staff the largest, if not the only, eye and ear hospital in Ireland, and to edit the chief Irish medical periodical, but he also wrote interesting books on Irish scenery and topography, and made important contributions to the study of Irish antiquities.

His catalogue of the contents of the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy is a monumental work of archaeological erudition, and deservedly obtained for him the Cunningham gold medal, the highest honour in the gift of the Academy.

In his latter years he lost much of his wonderful energy and the keen interest he took in so many departments of humanity. For instance, it was a matter of astonishment to his pupils that he never really mastered the ophthalmoscope, and he was in the habit of sending his private patients to Mr. Wilson to have the fundus examined, or he would get the opinion of the newly-qualified house surgeon of St. Mark's Hospital.

Honours.—1864: Knighthood by the Earl of Carlisle, and M.D. (*Honoris Causa*) University of Dublin; Surgeon Oculist in Ireland to Her Majesty Queen Victoria (the first appointed); Honorary Member of the Antiquarian Society of Berlin; Member of the Royal Society of Upsala; Companion of the Order of the Polar Star, and Chevalier of the Kingdom of Sweden; Cunningham Gold Medal of the Royal Irish Academy.

Wilde married in 1851 Jane Francisca Elgee, the daughter of a clergyman. They had three children, a daughter who died in childhood, and two sons, of whom the younger was the well-known writer, essayist, poet, and dramatist, Oscar Wilde.

Politically, Wilde was a firm but broad-minded Unionist, but he was very familiar with Nationalist ideals, as these had been enthusiastically advocated by Lady Wilde in her early life, both in prose and verse. Under the pseudonym of "Speranza," she was a frequent contributor to the *Nation*, till its suppression for sedition in 1848. Indeed, the last number of that Journal contained an article from her pen entitled, "Jacta alea est," appealing to the young men to take up arms, and the Crown relied on this article in its unsuccessful prosecution of the editor, Gavan Duffy (later Sir Charles), for sedition.

Wilde's house in Dublin was a rendezvous for everybody distinguished in art, science, or literature, who visited Dublin during the last two decades of his life, and was a sure and certain refuge for every struggling genius or broken-down artist; all were welcome—poet, painter, musician, or litterateur.

Works by Sir William Robert Wills Wilde.

- 1 "Narrative of a Voyage to Madeira, Teneriffe, and along the Shores of the Mediterranean." 2 vols. Dublin, 1840. Second edition, etc., Dublin, 1844.
- 2 "Austria: Its Literary, Scientific and Medical Institutions." Dublin, 1843.

- 3 "Lecture on the Ethnology of the Ancient Irish." Extract from the *Dublin Literary Journal*. 16 pp. Dublin, Kirkwood, pr., 1844.
- 4 "The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life." Dublin, 1849. Second edition, enlarged, Dublin, 1849.
- 5 "The Beauties of the Boyne and the Blackwater." Dublin, 1849. Second edition, enlarged, Dublin, 1850.
- 6 "Observations on the Epidemic Ophthalmia, which has prevailed in the Work-houses and Schools of the Tipperary and Athlone Unions." Reprinted from the *London Journal of Medicine*, Jan., 1851. 30 pp. Dublin, 1851.
- 7 "Irish Popular Superstitions." Dublin, 1852.
- 8 "Practical Observations on Aural Surgery and the Nature and Treatment of Diseases of the Ear." London, Dublin printed, 1853.
- 9 "On the Physical, Moral, and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb." London, Dublin printed, 1854.
- 10 "Medico-legal Observations upon Infantile Leucorrhoea." London, 1854.
- 11 "A Descriptive Catalogue of Stone, Earthen, Vegetable, Animal and Bronze Materials in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy." 2 parts. Dublin, 1857-1861.
- 12 "A Descriptive Catalogue of the Antiquities of Gold in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy." Dublin, 1862.
- 13 "An Essay on the Malformations and Congenital Diseases of the Organ of Sight." London, Dublin printed, 1862.
- 14 "Description of the Tonymore Crannog, County of Cavan." Reprinted from the *Proc. of the Roy. Irish Acad.* 14 pp. Dublin, 1863.
- 15 "Ireland, Past and Present: the Land and the People." Dublin, 1864. Another edition, see Dublin: Young Men's Christian Association: Lectures, 1864, etc., 1865.
- 16 "Lough Corrib." Dublin, 1867.
- 17 "Cleopatra's Needle. A Proposal Relative to the Nelson Testimonial." Printed for private circulation, 1877.
- 18 "Memoir of C. Beranger, and his Labours in the Cause of Irish Art and Antiquities." Dublin, H. M. Gill, 1880.

COMMUNICATIONS

NOTES ON SIX CASES OF IRITIS AND CYCLITIS OCCURRING IN DYSENTERIC PATIENTS

BY

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DURING the winter of 1916-17 we have had opportunities of seeing six cases, the subjects of infection with *B. dysenteriae* (Shiga) who developed iritis or cyclitis. All these cases were drawn from the Mediterranean area, and in four of them arthritis occurred as well. Our attention was first directed to this subject by Colonel A. E. Garrod, C.M.G., A.M.S., to whom we should like to take this opportunity of acknowledging our indebtedness.

Case 1.—Pte. W., aged 18 years. This patient reported sick with diarrhoea and the passage of blood and mucus in the stools on September 18, 1916. On September 27, 1916, i.e., on the tenth