

1

15th July 1836

My dear Sharpey,

The day before yesterday I got a summons from Carswell¹ to see him in some way or other as soon as possible and when I called on him I found you were the subject of conversation. From what he said I think there is every likelihood of your being chosen by the Council of the London University, but of course we can have but a very imperfect notion at present. The Faculty of Medical professors were to meet today to discuss the matter & Carswell says that their suggestion is very generally attended to by the Council. Mayo² seemed to have an inclination to offer himself and Grainger³ is I suppose a candidate but Carswell seems to think that others as well as he is himself will be for having you.

I need not say what tumult of feelings all this raised in my mind.

The emoluments of the situation appear to be nearly £800 a year and you will deliver your lectures in much more advantageous circumstances there than you can do in Edinburgh. [I]t increases your chances of the Edinburgh chair⁴ and of preferment in every way and as far as I can see is most advantageous for you.

I wrote you thus promptly in case it were possible for me to be of any use to you in this matter. Write me at all events and let me know what you are thinking of the matter.

I weary to hear something of Surgeons Square.⁵ Indeed I feel melancholy whenever I think of it. & what will it be when you are away also?

Yours ever,
Allen Thomson

Address to me care of John Murray Esq., 50 Albermarle Street if you don't put your letter under cover to the Duke [of Bedford].⁶

If I get any information I shall write you again soon.

My papers will be down next week[.] You may have as many as you like to give away.

¹ Robert Carswell (1793–1857), in 1836 Professor of Pathological Anatomy at University College London. An intimate of the Thomson family, he had been employed by John Thomson in the 1820s to make a collection of illustrations of morbid anatomy. For this purpose he visited the Continent with William Thomson, and was in Paris at the same time as Allen Thomson (1828–9).

² Herbert Mayo (1796–1852), Surgeon at the Middlesex Hospital and Professor of Anatomy at King's College, London since 1830. He became Professor of Physiology and Pathology there in 1836.

³ Richard Dugard Grainger (1801–65), Lecturer in Anatomy at the Webb Street School which he had inherited from his brother Edward.

⁴ I.e., the Chair of Anatomy at Edinburgh University.

⁵ Surgeon's Square, Edinburgh: the site of Sharpey and Thomson's and other extramural teaching establishments.

⁶ See note 5.5, below.

2

Edinburgh 18th July, 1836

My Dear Thomson,

Many thanks for your kind letter. I am quite alive to the nature of its contents, but I assure you that when I received it you were better aware of what was going on than I was. Mr. R. Quain¹ heard a lecture from each of the Teachers² here without their knowing of it, he called on me after and spoke of the change about to take place asking me at the same time if I would be likely to come forward as a candidate. I informed him that I would relish teaching the branches he mentioned in a chair of the Lond. University very greatly indeed. I met him afterwards at dinner but no more passed between us on the subject, and your letter which I got yesterday was the next intelligence I had. This afternoon I had one from Mr. Quain advising me to come up to London as early as convenient. I called on your brother,³ and the result is that I start for London on Saturday. I can easily do this as the Session ends next week.

Dr. W[illiam Thomson] bids me request you to go over the list of Council with Mr. James Mylne⁴ – lest he know any one he could come at, he also spoke of Mr. J. Murray⁵ knowing Mr. Greenough⁶ who is one of the council. I fear many of them may be inclined to listen to Somerville⁷ and there is one whom I certainly could not expect to look favourably on me. I need not say I mean W—n [Warburton].⁸

I would say a great deal more to you my Dear T. on this matter, and what plans in the event of success we might pursue, but I feel that the prospect is still too distant to permit me (naturally the reverse of sanguine in my disposition) to indulge in what might turn out to be day dreams.

To speak of things as they are, and return to Surgeon's Square. We have got a splendid skeleton of one porpoise and most successful injection of the *wonderful net* in another. I have also made a good injected preparation of a turtle heart. — Mr Seaton⁹ and I tried Poiseuille's Exp¹⁰ on a dog much exhausted by having had his gullet tied a couple of days before the pipes were put into the carotid & crural, and the thing did well, the perfect equality of pressure is no exaggeration, it was quite conspicuous except when once or twice notwithstanding our constant [. . .] the tubes got slightly obstructed. The pressure was not great owing to the weakness of the dog. I have ordered the stopcocks to be taken off and made moveable, so that they may be fixed into the tubes, for we required corks in our experiments to plug the [. . .] in one vessel till we had got one fixed into another. I suggested to Christison¹¹ that we should make trial with it of the force of the heart under the influence of different poisons &c. and we mean to do it – Seaton will give you the results he is the note taker.

Sandy Monro¹² was married the other day, & Douglas Maclagan¹³ becomes folded up tomorrow. There has been a regatta where 99 of the 100 spectators knew nothing of what was passing. Your paper is highly approved of. It is really a good thing after all to be forced to write in the Cyclopaedia.¹⁴ By the way I praise God that Echinodermata is at last packed up with Messrs Sherwoods address on the back of it for the mail tomorrow. I was a fool not to have availed myself of your [. . .] to help me with the drawings. I have been sadly at a loss about them. Some are from Tiedemann¹⁵ copied

Letter 3

by Mr. [. . .] Scott. – Some from [. . .] by Mr Boyd and by myself. The engravers will have the pleasure and privilege of reducing them.

I would say more but till the London affair is over, one way or other, I shall feel in an uncomfortable state.

I am my dear Thomson
Yours most sincerely
W. Sharpey

¹ Richard Quain (1800–87), Professor of Descriptive Anatomy at University College London since 1832.

² Alexander Jardine Lizars, another private anatomy teacher in Edinburgh, was also a candidate for the University College Chair ('Report of Committee of the Senate appointed to examine the Applications and Testimonials of Candidates for the Professorship of Anatomy and Physiology', University College London MSS, AM 1–5 (3), p. 6.) It was probably his lectures that Quain also attended during his visit to Edinburgh.

³ I.e., William Thomson (1802–52), Allen's half-brother, in 1836 a private lecturer in the Practice of Physics in Edinburgh.

⁴ James Mylne was a member of the Council of University College London from 1830 to 1840.

⁵ Probably John Murray (1808–92), the son of the publisher whose home Thomson was then using as a mailing address. Both the elder and younger Murray had close ties with Edinburgh; the latter had been Allen Thomson's schoolmate.

⁶ George Bellas Greenough (1776–1855), geographer and geologist, was a member of the original Council of the London University.

⁷ Presumably William Somerville (1771–1860), Physician to the Chelsea Hospital.

⁸ Henry Warburton (1784?–1858), MP and founder member of the Council of the University of London.

⁹ Possibly, Edward Cator Seaton (1815–80), an Edinburgh medical student who graduated in 1837.

¹⁰ Jean Léonard Marie Poiseuille (1797–1869) a French physiologist who in 1828 published reports of experiments designed to measure the arterial blood pressure: 'Recherches sur la force du coeur aortique', *Arch. gén. Méd.*, 1828, 8: 550–4.

¹¹ Robert Christison (1797–1882), Professor of Materia Medica and Therapeutics in Edinburgh.

¹² Alexander Monro III (1773–1859), Professor of Anatomy in Edinburgh. In 1836 he married for the second time.

¹³ Presumably Andrew Douglas Maclagan (1812–1900), who graduated MD at Edinburgh in 1833 and became a Surgeon at the Royal Infirmary prior to commencing lectures on materia medica in 1839.

¹⁴ I.e., the *Cyclopaedia of anatomy and physiology*, 5 vols., London, Longman, 1835–59, edited by Robert Bentley Todd; see note 6.1 below.

¹⁵ Friedrich Tiedemann (1781–1861), a German physiologist who was the author of several anatomical atlases.

3

Campden Hill

[July 1836]

My dear Sir,

In answer to your inquiries concerning my friend Dr. Sharpey, I can have no hesitation in expressing the very high opinion I entertain of his merits.

I have now been on a footing of great intimacy with Dr Sharpey for some years. During that time his amiable moral qualities have made me sincerely attached to him and I have had the happiness of seeing him respected and lauded by all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance and friendship. I have had the best opportunity of knowing that Dr Sharpey in addition to excellent abilities is possessed of a remarkably sound judgement and very extensive information of a professional and general kind.

Letter 3

Dr. S. turned his attention in an especial manner to Anatomy at an early period of his professional career. He is deeply versed in the literature of this department of medicine. He is universally admitted to be a clear and accurate demonstrator of the parts of the animal body. He has a competent knowledge of comparative anatomy and is very intimately acquainted with minute or general anatomy — Indeed I believe there are few who surpass him for the knowledge of this branch of the science. His knowledge of physiology is also extensive altho. he has not delivered lectures on that subject.¹

He takes a great interest in the study & investigation of everything relating to Anatomy is a careful and accurate observer of renown to medical men of every thing relating to Anatomy and may in every point of view be regarded as a truly scientific Anatomist.

Dr. Sharpey has had the advantages of an excellent education. He had seen so much of the world as to have acquired that freedom from prejudice which travelling generally gives. In his visits to the most celebrated Continental Medical Schools he has made himself well acquainted with the mode of teaching Anatomy and other branches of medicine pursued in them.

Dr. S. has with hard labour formed a considerable Anatomical class and were he to remain there would soon I doubt not take the first place as an anatomical teacher. He delivers his Lectures in a clear and attractive style, and is in the habit of making use of drawings and models for the purpose of assisting the illustration. He is very punctual,² very attentive to the students, mild and amiable in his demeanour, straightforward gentlemanly and honourable in his conduct so that were he to become professor in your University he could not fail there to add to the reputation of the school to insure the attachment of the students & the respect and esteem of his colleagues as he has already done in Edinburgh.

So high an opinion indeed have I of Dr Sharpey that I may say you will do well to caution me against allowing the expression of it to be moderated by the desire I naturally feel to retain him in Edin. For there is no person companion [*sic*] whose loss I shall more feel as a friend and coassistant in labours. There is no one in my humble opinion who \langle My opinion then is disinterested when I say that should you obtain Dr Sharpey's services at the London University there is no one who \rangle ³ as a sound headed and scientific man and as a teacher in his particular department should you obtain his services will be a greater blank in the Edinburgh school and a greater acquisition to the London University.

You have asked me for my opinion and I have given it thus freely and perhaps presumptuously but I believe I may say that there are many others who entertain an equally favorable opinion of Dr. Sharpey that there are few who have had an equally good opportunity of judging him.

¹ This account of Sharpey's virtues is closely paraphrased in the Committee's 'Report', op. cit., note 2.2 above, p. 17.

² This statement is quoted *ibid.*, p. 19.

³ Thomson intended the words in the angle brackets, written after this paragraph, to be inserted here.

4

(London 1836 [The date is in Thomson's hand])

My dear Thomson,

I was not in time for the post.

I was elected today Professor of Anatomy, subject to such regulations as the Council may deem expedient.

The condition attached is merely this. I have been elected to fill the vacancy occasioned by Dr. Q's¹ resignation, in short into his place, but the contemplated and wished for alterations of duties &c. have not yet been adopted, it was felt this would delay the matter and the present proceedings makes all right. It was fortunate that the discussion respecting the allotment of the duties was not entered on, as time would have been lost and perhaps another adjournment been the consequence.

There was a division in the council but this is private. I had an immense majority. 9 to 2. Don't mention this.

My great desire now is to do justice to the appointment.

I will leave this Saturday. I think by the Dundee Steamer. I will be a couple of days in Arbroath and see you in Edin. on Thursday evening.

This is my present intention but I may change it.

Yours most sincerely,

W. Sharpey

¹I.e., Jones Quain (1796–1865), Professor of General Anatomy at London University from 1831 to 1835.

5

Edinburgh 3rd September 1836

My dear Thomson,

I write in a desperate hurry, and indeed it matters little for I have little to say.

Andrew¹ is to inspect the museum and put on a fire occasionally, during the winter, under Mr. Ramsay's² superintendence, whom I have seen and conversed with on the subject.

Macdonald³ is in Edinburgh again, he will not bother you or me about the museum, I have settled that. I think he is not positively certain of commencing but the probability seems to me in favour of his doing so.

I have carefully avoided directing the students as to their future teacher, but I can see from conversing with several that Handyside⁴ will be their preference, he (Handyside) is not in Edinb.

Your friends here think it advisable for you to announce your intention of teaching anatomy next year, and your brother and I have concocted an advertisement subject to your approval to be put in the papers when the proper time arrives. Of course you will let him know your opinion on it.

Letter 5

I start in a few hours by the steam boat for the new scene of my labours. I hope it may be as happy and comfortable a one as that which I leave.

I wrote about the plants & presume they will be sent for the Duke's⁷ inspection.

With sincerest wishes for your welfare I ever am

My dear Thomson
affectionately yours
W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

(The Doune of Rothiemunhar [in Thomson's hand])

[On the reverse of this letter, in Thomson's hand:]

Sharpey.

His new situation. his modesty at first. his confidence in himself. Desertion of Surgeons Square.

My plans to lecture on Anatomy. Preparation for this. His note of Lectures & plan of course. his advice.

My hopes of being with him in spring.

*Note to Imlach*⁸

Separate testimon.

note about Classroom & answer to his letter.

William

Imlach's plans. Nicholl.

My advertisement. the terms not difficult. begin to approve of the measure.

News of Dr. T.

Weight removed from my mind. could I stay so till I can make my bread.

Preaching. Collection of people. Ball at the Ellens [?]

Invereschie.

Walk around the Lakes.

¹ This Andrew appears to have been a servant charged with the upkeep of Sharpey and Thomson's classroom in Surgeon's Square, Edinburgh. He is probably *not* the Andrew [Wood] who appears later in the correspondence.

² Possibly the David Blair Ramsay mentioned in a later letter: see note 10.1 below.

³ Possibly William Macdonald (1791–1875), who lectured on anatomy in Edinburgh c. 1838.

⁴ Peter D. Handyside (1808–81), private lecturer in anatomy and surgery in Edinburgh.

⁵ John Russell, sixth Duke of Bedford (1766–1839), the father of Lord John Russell, who figures prominently in the later correspondence. Thomson probably owed this valuable connection with the Russell family to his father's prominence in Edinburgh Whig political circles: Lord Holland had recommended Thomson to Bedford.

⁶ Henry Imlach (1815–80) graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1836; he later practised in Liverpool.

6

Remember me most kindly to Carswell and all friends.

The Doune Lynwilg (by Perth), 6th October 1836.

My dear Sharpey,

I have the offer of an opportunity to London and take advantage of it to write you a note more for the purpose of demanding your news than that I have any of interest to communicate to you.

I was obliged to you for your note before you left Edinburgh and for your arrangements about the Museum which I trust will all turn out right. I hope that the leaving the preparations will not be inconvenient to you.

You must tell me how you feel in your new situation; how your preparations for lecturing go on; what you are to lecture upon; what your University constitution is doing and in short all about yourself that you can cram into a letter; for you know that I shall feel as much interest in your welfare in your present situation as I should have done had you still been at No. 9. It is indeed a sad change in that quarter. I cannot reflect upon it without the most melancholy feelings. We go from this to Ireland and in this way avoid Edin. on our return South which I am almost not sorry for; so vexed should I have been to see Surgeons Square without my being there in my usual occupations.

My advertisement arrived here and was read aloud by the Duke in the drawing room from the Caledonian Mercury, the other night, which annoyed me excessively as the date of my beginning my Anatomical lectures was stupidly made for this in place of next winter.

I was much obliged to you for managing Macdonald. I suppose if he begins this winter he will be absent from Edinb. or off the field before the next.

You will be surprised to hear that I have been very happy here; indeed it makes me wonder myself. I daresay a great deal depends on my natural buoyancy of spirits which from my improving health has regained the ascendancy. I am as fat as a porpoise and stronger than I can recollect to have been.

The field sports interfere dreadfully with the paper on Generation. I fear I must be greatly behind, but I have had no note of hurrying from Dr. Todd.¹ I wish you could find out & let me know if I am in a scrape. About half is written, and perhaps the most difficult part viz the introductory and general part. The rest I have still to do concerns the functions of the male and female sexual organs in Man – or in other words, Conception and fecundation. It will not be good.

Tell me in your letter what I should do to prepare for my Anatomy Courses. I fancy your mind will be in this subject at present.

We shall return from Ireland about January and I still hope to be some time with you in Spring.

Do write me soon and if you are so much occupied as not to be able to answer all my queries, write me a short note telling me how you are doing.

Believe me my dear Sharpey
Ever affectionately yours
Allen Thomson

¹ Robert Bentley Todd (1809–60), Professor of Physiology and General and Morbid Anatomy at King's College, London; editor of the *Cyclopaedia*, op. cit., note 2.14 above.

7

25 Dover Street, London
2nd December 1836

My dear Thomson,

I shall not waste space and time in vain apologies for my long silence, but proceed at once to say that things are going on with me here very comfortably. The class room is full every day, I like my students and I think they like me. They, I mean the majority of them, are really a hard working set of fellows, and I really begin to think favourably of the prize system at least when conjoined with that of giving honours as adopted here which really seems to have a pretty general effect in a class and raises the standard degree of diligence.

I have got through general anatomy, to which I devoted a pretty long allowance of the course, and am so far with the particular functions. I describe carefully the organs concerned, especially as regards their internal structure, but I see clearly that my course will be very free of mere descriptive anatomy. I should rather say external and topographical anatomy, I shall have nothing to do with the bones, the muscles of the limbs, nor their vessels and nerves. The course will be one of physical and physiological Anatomy – to compound small things with great on the plan of the *Elementa* of Haller.

I miss Andrew sadly, I can get nothing on a few hours notice, and the distance to the rabbit market, the slaughter house &c. are very distressing — I think I must send to Edinburgh for frogs, I had but one decent sized fellow which a pupil brought, and after showing the circulation &c., I used him for a filtration of the blood. [F]or you must know I took in the blood in the last article in my general anatomy, reserving its charges from art[erial], to ven[ous]. &c. till I got to respiration. In this way the processes of digestion and sanguinification will be easier followed. Our Museum is a showy one but though made principally by “*My uncle*”¹ or under his superintendence, I can assure you it is anything but a good working one. We have a man (a capital fellow) busy supplying good things for it; he has lately taken to inject lymphatics and has been most successful (with my old apparatus). [W]e have now preparations of the absorbents[,] of the skin[,] subserous tissue, glans penis &c. &c. and some splendid things from the intestines of the Ostrich; it was this began it, we happened to get an Ostrich, and knowing that the lacteals could be filled on the intestine as in reptiles, I injected a bit very nicely but our friend’s soon surpassed mine and has taken such delight in it that he has gone on ever since notwithstanding my double warning first against mercurial enthusiasm and secondly against the *monomania* which as you well know is so apt to seize on those engaged in hunting out lymphatics.

You must come to us and you shall have a quiet place and fresh viscera, penises, mammae, bits of skin &c. &c. from the hospital, from which you may make something for your campaign next year.

But oh I find such a great quarry of a place by no means so convenient for the daily preparation of lectures, and it will take some time before I get all well organized.

I have a young man engaged to draw for me, he makes the sketches on the board, copies them afterwards into a book, and enlarges them and renders them permanent at his leisure. I have introduced the oil painting but we are at a loss about some points on

Letter 7

which I must beg the favour of you to write me *most particularly* and in any other you may think useful. How is the canvas prepared? [I]s it done over with size or anything to prevent sinking before the ground is put on? How is the ground or indeed the colours generally rendered dull (not to shine)? How are they made to dry speedily? How long should a man take to paint such a thing say as the large oil painting of the Eye or Ear? I give 5 pounds a month and furnish materials, and the youth works from 10 to 4. From 12 to 2. I generally have him sketching on the *board* (I wish I could say *slate*) which he certainly does capitally; but we are somewhat at a loss in what colours to represent objects in the pictures. I would say to you that whatever you paint make it *large*, it is a great relief to the eye in a large room and you will yet have to lecture in some other place than Surgeon's Square. Talking of this it seems curious but it is the fact in my case that I feel less diffidence before a *large audience* now that I have got over the first trepidation, explain it as you best can.

I am living with Willis² who has taken a house in Dover Street; he has been *very ill* poor fellow, but is now getting sound. I mean to take a home next Summer in some quiet place.

Now that I have said enough of myself let us talk of you. First as to your Article. — The coming No. of the Cyclopa. has been delayed by Partridges³ *Ear* and T. Bells "*Edentata*".⁴ I suppose the latter are waiting for a full set of *Mineral succedaneum* from the hands of the author, but however this may be, poor Sherwood has been disappointed and Willis tells me and authorize me to inform you that there is no hurry for your "Generation" we will let you know when it is wanted; nevertheless I will forward your letter to Todd.

Keep your paper your own time and revise it to your content. I have ordered Flourens⁵ which will be *very soon* procured and dispatched by Belfast. A second edition of Burdach's first volm.⁶ is out, I have not seen it, but Grant⁷ reports on it not favourably.

I am joining the Med[ico]. Chir[urgical]. Society chiefly for the library though it is by no means a good one. Oh how I long for the flesh pots of Egypt in the shape of the Medical Society & College Library of Edinb. Here one can't step in after lectures and ask Lewis⁸ for the sight of a book. So much is this the case that I am ruining myself buying books, and mean to have a complete set of the French and German periodicals which are more immediately connected with my subject, such as the *Annales* and *Memoires des Musee* and the *Annales des Sciences Naturelles* which I have got already and Meckel's *Archiv* [für Anatomie und Physiologie].

In reference to your materiaux for next session, I would advise you to get Bourgery's⁹ plates for the bones, joints[,] muscles and vessels, and paint enlarged copies in oil for all these departments as well as some good ones of the other parts of Anatomy which of course I need not remind you of. This plan will illuminate a dry, at least a tedious part of your course. Quain has got such things and finds them of immense use, and you will have your slate *free* for plans &c. that occur to you at the time. But I would cancel three fourths of the small branches of vessels given by Bourgery.

A youth¹⁰ here who has been in Germany is translating Müller's *Physiologie*,¹¹ he knows the language and makes a *very literal version* but I fear it will require much

Letter 7

draping to make it presentible [*sic*] to English readers. I have nothing to do with it further than that the man was introduced to me as an old pupil of our school and a friend of Quain's. He is to put in a few cuts and note here and there. A thing occurs to me at present. If you would publish the article ovum as a separate book, I would engage to sell at least 100 copies a year among my pupils. Could you not arrange with Sherwood and Todd, but indeed you have nothing to do with them[.] [P]repare and print it as your own[;] there is no harm in this. Or will your new employment allow you time for a system of Physiology? I feel the greatest difficult in recommending a text book for Physiology. The only extent to which I at present see any prospect of myself being able to supply the deficiency is in so far as concerns General and Physiological Anatomy — Müller if *well* done into English shall be my textbook for Physiology next year. A new Edit. of Bostock¹² in one volume is just out, loaded with literature and therefore of little use to the student as a guide to the *best* sources.

I fear that in writing to Ireland I am half Irish myself, at least if an unconnected prattle is any indication – But before ending I must not forget your question as to our accounts.

The fees for last summer were:	£48.19	
	£17.18	– £17.18
	3 £31.01	
	£10.07	

Andrews wages	£8.10	Which is your share of the summer fees
Advertising	£ .14	
Current expenses }		
Coals etc	£4. 4	
Parts of body and		
Logs	£2.10	
Spirits (say?)	£2.00	

I paid P. Forbes an account in August which I have mislaid but I guess the spirits used in dissecting room at somewhere about Two pounds.

I am in no hurry for payment if it is not perfectly and entirely convenient, for I may now finger a part of my London fees.

Let me know how long you will be in Ireland and whether there is any other book we can send you a look of. I wish I had had the benefit of your assistance with the drawings for Echinodermata I fear from the proof that they will turn out queer things. The proofs on india paper are very good, but the ordinary printers bungle them abominably.

I wish you might suggest some good things for the ovum and development which I might get enlarged for my lectures, think of this like a good fellow, and with the sincerest wishes for your welfare in general and your success as a teacher in particular I ever am My dear Thomson

Very affectionately yours
W Sharpey

Write soon again

Letter 9

¹ Apparently a reference to Charles Bell (1774–1842), the first Professor of Physiology and Clinical Surgery at the University of London.

² Presumably Robert Willis (1799–1878), Librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons of London.

³ Richard Partridge (1805–73), Professor of Descriptive and Surgical Anatomy at King's College, London. He contributed the article 'Face', not 'Ear', to Todd's *Cyclopaedia*, op. cit., note 2.14 above.

⁴ Thomas Bell (1792–1880), Dental Surgeon at Guy's Hospital and Professor of Zoology at King's College, London.

⁵ I.e., a work by the French physiologist Marie-Jean-Pierre Flourens (1794–1867).

⁶ Karl Friedrich Burdach, *Die Physiologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, 6 vols., Leipzig, Leopold Vos, 1832–40.

⁷ Robert Edmond Grant (1793–1874), Professor of Comparative Anatomy and Zoology at University College London.

⁸ Presumably, Douglas Lewis, Assistant Librarian to the Royal Medical Society, Edinburgh.

⁹ Jean-Marie Bourguery, *Traité complet de l'anatomie de l'homme comprenant la médecine opérative*, 7 vols., Paris, C. A. Delauney, 1831–54.

¹⁰ I.e., William Baly (1814–61), formerly a medical student at University College.

¹¹ Johannes Müller, *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen für Vorlesungen*, 2 vols., Coblenz, J. Hölscher, 1835–40.

¹² John Bostock, *An elementary system of physiology*, 3rd ed., London, Baldwin and Craddock, 1836.

8

[Notes written on the wrapper of the letter above.]

Answered 24th December.

glad to hear from your own mouth the account of yr. success. gives me a good opinion of yr. students embarrassment. I know what it is. popular prize system charming subject.

Difficulties of preparing for lecture. Sympathies with frogs from W. Thomson.

Lymphatic preparations – apparatus – India rubber

Drawings – prepared canvas too expensive – patent Canvas preparation of – paint – sugar of lead. using turpentine & Japan – don't skin or dry quick & wash out easily – your terms cheap. McCartney got ././ a week, but much more.

Drawings for me – copies of Quain's and yours – suggest for the ovum – there are none.

Could not get physiol. out satisfactorily. Article ovum consider must laid on shelf.

Flourens by Dublin

Willis paper formation process. Epigenesis. Evolution. bring it with me.

9

25 Dover Street

22nd March 1837

My dear Thomson,

Since you left us nothing has occurred worth noting you except that the New University have had several meetings and have at last decided on the salary of their Registrar or Secretary. Warburton and Somerville's other friends wished to fix it disgracefully low and thus keep worthier men out of the field – they proposed £200 a

Letter 9

year to begin with, a sum for which you can scarcely procure a common clerk in London; but they have been victoriously beaten and £1000 a year is fixed on, if the Government will give it. If Forbes¹ gets the place he must I suspect give up his connection with or rather superintendence of the Journal – at least nominally – I do not know his sentiments.

I have got Coste² for you and will send it. Pross's prices are as follows. Stand £14. Compound body and 2 eye pieces £1"2. Micrometer Eye piece 18/6. – 1/2 inch focus achromatic object glass £3"7"6. 1/4" ditto £4"7"6 – Condensing lens on a stand £1"1.

I tried Humboldt and Müller's experiment on the frogs muscles³ and succeeded perfectly – it was a large female full of eggs one of those you gave me.

Jones⁴ (formerly in Edinb) has been on his way to Germany, he has been continuing his observations on the ovum and his paper⁵ to the R[oyal] Society with recent additions has now, I think, a fair chance of being published in the Transactions. Martin Barry (Monte Blanc) has been lecturing at the Argyle Square School (to Reid's pupils I presume) – on Development, he has published a queer paper in Jameson's Journal⁶ which young Macaulay (who is here studying at the British Museum) showed me the other day, I have not read it, but Macaulay tells me he can meet with nobody who understands it. Poor Martinus clamberus, I suppose if Reid gives up he will become a Lecturer.

A lot of near a dozen candidates have applied for the Chemistry chair. Fyfe⁷ was here and anxiously enquired for you. — Johnstone⁸ has also paid us a visit. [H]e is well spoken of in point of accuracy as an experimental enquirer, acquaintance with the literature of his subject and as a lecturer. — I wish you could obtain *for me* some information respecting Graham's⁹ qualifications as a teacher, his reputation as an original discoverer and scientific chemist of course I know.

I have got Valentin's book on Development¹⁰ – a great part of it seems to be compiled: A curious book by Schultze on the blood and another by Nape [?] on the same subject – were sent me to look at by Dr. Forbes – would you like to review them? – (you will be paid).

If so let me know when you write which in that case must be as soon as you can make it convenient and I shall let the Dr know.

I have no more gossip – say when you will be with us again, and for my sake make arrangements to be free by the middle of September at the very farthest.

In the mean time believe me ever
My dear Thomson
very affectionately yours
W. Sharpey

¹ John Forbes (1787–1861), editor of the *British and Foreign Medical Review*.

² Perhaps Jean Jacques Marie Cyprien Victor Coste, *Embryogénie comparée. Cours sur le développement de l'homme et des animaux, fait au Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Paris*, 2 vols., Paris, A. Costes, 1837.

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) German naturalist; Johannes Peter Müller (1801–58) German physiologist. Sharpey refers to early experiments in electro-physiology conducted by both Humboldt and Müller designed to determine the conditions under which muscular contraction occurs.

Letter 10

⁴ Thomas Wharton Jones (1808–91), at one time assistant to Robert Knox’s anatomical class in Edinburgh. After returning from a visit to the Continent, he practised as an oculist in London while pursuing researches in anatomy and physiology.

⁵ Thomas Wharton Jones, ‘On the first changes in the ova of the mammifera in consequence of impregnation, and on the mode of origin of the chorion’, *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 1837: 339–46.

⁶ I.e., the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, edited by David Brewster and Robert Jameson. On Barry see note 24.3, below.

⁷ Presumably Andrew Fyfe (d. 1861), a private lecturer in chemistry at Edinburgh in the 1830s and 1840s, who became Professor of Chemistry at Marischal College, Aberdeen in 1860.

⁸ Possibly James Johnstone (1806–69), an Edinburgh student who became Professor of Materia Medica at Queen’s College, Birmingham in 1841.

⁹ Thomas Graham (1805–69), Professor of Chemistry at the Andersonian College, Glasgow; he assumed the same position at University College London in 1837.

¹⁰ Gabriel Gustav Valentin, *Handbuch der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen mit vergleichender Rücksicht der Entwicklung der Säugethiere und Vögel*, Berlin, A. Rucker, 1835.

10

(17th May 1837?)

25 Dover Street

Dr. Willis’s? [this parenthesis is in Thomson’s hand])

My dear Thomson,

I have sent you all I can find likely to suit your purpose – after all it is but rubbish with one or two exceptions.

I have sketched out a plan for you such as I pursued and have timed the first half – which you may rely upon with tolerable confidence — But I would rather counsel you to take a little time from the first half (or at least the subjects I have included in it) and add to the second —

Serous and mucous membranes		
Glands. stomach Intestines & Digestion & lacteals		7
Heart & circulation		3
Arteries		13
Lungs, Voice glottis. &c.		5
Liver, pancreas, spleen, kidney &c.		5
Bladder, genital organs		19
Male. and perineum and lithotomy	4	7
		3
Nervous system	19	5
Senses, nerves &c.		5
		4
		—
		56

Female organs of generation. Development of foetus &c.

I think David Ramsay¹ took such notes as would at least be a record of the subjects lectured on with the order and time. I will enquire in Edinburgh.

Letter 11

I start tomorrow evening – & am therefore in a bustle –
With kind regards
very affectionately yours
W Sharpey

17th May London
25 Dover Street

¹ A David Blair Ramsay of Forfarshire matriculated as a medical student in 1835 and attended classes from 1835 to 1838. He does not appear to have graduated.

11

University College, 8th Dec^r 1837

My dear Thomson,

I take the opportunity of Dr Veltan's of Bonn going to Paris to introduce him to you and make him the Bearer of this small epistle.

Miss Thomson your sister the other day on leaving Mr Mylne's to visit Miss Baillie at Hampstead sprained her weak foot, with which she has been confined two or three days at Mr Mylne's. Dr Tweedie¹ saw her & meant to take Mr Travers² with him in order that the Edinb. folks might keep themselves easy as to the treatment.

I saw the foot yesterday evening and it does not seem to me very seriously hurt considering the nature of the accident. I have no doubt all will go right *tho'* as you know, a sprained ankle is a tedious affair —

The N^o of the Cyclopaedia with your paper has not yet appeared but we shall convey you a copy as soon as it can be obtained thro' Baillièrè if no other opportunity presents itself.

Simpson³ I hear is giving great satisfaction — The N^o of medical Students generally in Edin^b is smaller though the diff^{ce} from last year is not very considerable.

In Glasgow *where they have no Pathology* the falling off is quite fearful. Dr. Thomson⁴ the Chemist ascribes it to the state of Anatomical Instruction there (this *entre nous*).

We are going on favourably. I have continued to show a few experiments (more on *dead* than on *living* animals however) this year which I did not think of last year – and my attendance keeps up wonderfully – It astonishes me how people can attend lectures. I never could, at least except Murray⁵ the Chemist and your father's.⁶ I never attended any throughout with regularity and interest. There is no doubt a great charm in hearing interesting facts for the first time – and this accounts for chemistry and Physiology. — believe me

with sincere regard
My dear Thomson
Yours affectionately
W Sharpey

Letter 12

¹ Alexander Tweedie (1794–1884) trained in Edinburgh as a surgeon. He came to London in 1820 and became Physician to the London Fever Hospital and to the Foundlings Hospital. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1838.

² Benjamin Travers (1783–1858), Surgeon to St Thomas's Hospital.

³ James Young Simpson (1811–70), in 1837 selected as interim lecturer in Pathology at Edinburgh to assist John Thomson. Simpson was appointed to the Edinburgh Midwifery Chair in 1839.

⁴ Thomas Thomson (1773–1852), Regius Professor of Chemistry at Glasgow from 1818 to 1846.

⁵ Presumably John Murray (d. 1820), a lecturer in natural philosophy, chemistry, pharmacy, and materia medica in Edinburgh.

⁶ John Thomson (1765–1846) successively held the Chairs of Military Surgery and Pathology at the University of Edinburgh.

12

London, 68 Torrington Square, 30 April 1838

My dear Thomson,

The date of this letter will apprise you of my delinquency of the full extent of which I am perfectly sensible and under which sense I am now smarting. I know that since your sister wrote her share you must have had repeated communication from home, and in particular I feel that the event which has taken place since then may (for I have not read Miss T.'s letter) render it peculiarly and painfully unreasonable. I first heard of Poor General Millar's¹ death, by the paper, and I have not seen any of your family since. But I leave this distressing subject and to pass over all useless excuses for my delaying till the end of our session before I wrote you, I may now speak of the present as interesting us both infinitely more than the past. As to my own affairs, they move on so smoothly and I have such an even temper, that really I have nothing of interest to report. The New University² have not as yet announced a medical curriculum, I have seen the proposed Examination for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, it is a strange production, such a thing as you could suppose a man to jot down roughly after first thinking of it, not that it is short, but so unequal, here details of particulars there mere heads of subjects stated, &c &c. They propose examining in chemistry, and also in Animal and Vegetable physiology, these last a mere smattering. I suspect it would have been better to have confined themselves to those kinds of disciplines which are auxiliary or subservient for further study whether professional or general, such as languages classical or modern and mathematics, natural philosophy, mental philosophy – and perhaps chemistry and left physiology to the discretion of the candidate as taste might lead him afterwards for what is required is barely equal to the level of the Bridgewater treatises,³ and it may perhaps interfere with the *thorough* study of branches which require more severe application. You of course have heard how the election of Registrar went, at first between Rothman and Damill, the former being ultimately chosen; it was as well that Dr Will^m did not come up to town on the matter, it turns out it would have been useless trouble and expense. I still think he may get the Pathology chair in Edinb. and I have a little plan in my head which I cannot think is altogether chimerical, I cannot explain it to you now.

Your generation paper gives great satisfaction, but I fear the Cyclopaedia has got grounded for a time, I suspect Sherwoods house of their failure [they] had coquetted

Letter 12

too far with the offers made to them by other Booksellers for the Cyclopaedia and now they find themselves in the lurch, still it is a good property and of course will not in the end be allowed to drop. I think an alliance with Simpson and Reid⁴ would turn out well they are both capital men. Reid has given a *first rate experimental paper* on the nerves of doubtful function⁵ which you may have heard of. But my dear fellow, write me immediately to say that you are all activity and looking forward to the winter campaign, for I have seen several pupils from Edinb. (Geor. Newbiggin, Spittell – Johnny Wood⁶ &c.) who ask me if Dr A. T. is to lecture in Edinb. next winter, I of course tell them – he certainly is, but I wish I could speak of the matter more closely and definitely. I am vexed that you should lose any advantage by being out of sight. Mr Wood has been here, he told me Andrew⁷ was to lecture on pr. of physic – I suspect he is looking to an alliance with Peter Simple [i.e. Handyside], and probably because he fears you may not be able to fulfil your intentions. I have taken every care of your embryonic Prepar^{ns} which are at present in my keeping, but the *double goose* is in Edinburgh. I have offered a prize in Practical Physiology and chosen for the subject on this occasion the embryology of or rather the ovology of the rabbit, from the time the ovum leaves the ovary till the 10th day – as regards the embryo and the 15th as regards the rest of the ovum. Now is the best time for laying aside for you anything in the shape of preparations — You can have what you like by paying for the *interment*. Sections of *heads, pelvises*, and their contents, ligaments &c. Prepared muscles &c. The only difficulty is the expense of spirits, but come yourself, and then get down to Edinb. a considerable time before the winter, I regard that as of great consequence. I have just been interrupted in writing by a call from a most excellent person – a Mr Edward Hobson⁸ from Australia who has been studying here some time and has really *accomplished* himself in Zoology, Comparative Anatomy & Geology not neglecting the rest of this profession. He has gained Grants Gold Medal – and has brought various things for Owen.⁹ He is to send me a collection of gravid uteri of Australian Animals in Spirits – can you suggest anything else. (he goes in 2 months) I trust Lord Glenelg¹⁰ will do something for him[.] [H]e wishes the place of assistant surgeon to the Government Hospital at Sidney or in Hobart town in both of which there are vacancies – a place worth about £180 pounds per annum, and in which he has served already as a sub assistant. I trust the government will put him in a place where he may have the means of following out his favourite pursuits, it would be of the greatest benefit to science. Owen and Coste as you will see have been fighting about the honour of *discovering* the allantois of the *Kangaroo*.¹¹ To me the thing appears highly ludicrous, there might have been some interest in the dispute had they shown that the Kangaroo had no Allantois. I suppose you have *discovered* that an English Duke may survive in Nice as well as other people. But the last thing I say to you is come away as soon as your engagements will permit, and take up your position.

In the mean time believe me your affectionate friend

W Sharpey

¹ I.e., William Millar, soldier in the Napoleonic wars, who committed suicide in 1838. He was the son of John Millar (1735–1801), Professor of Law at Glasgow, who was related to William Cullen on his mother's side. One of John Millar's daughters was John Thomson's second wife and Allen Thomson's mother. William Millar was, therefore, Allen Thomson's uncle.

Letter 13

² I.e., the new University of London.

³ The Bridgewater Treatises were a series of volumes dealing with questions in natural theology which appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁴ John Reid (1809–49), at this time lecturing in the Edinburgh extramural school. It may be that there was a proposal for Thomson, Reid, and J. Y. Simpson to go into partnership; if so, nothing seems to have come of the suggestion. See also letter 15.

⁵ Presumably, 'An experimental investigation into the glossopharyngeal, pneumogastric, and spinal accessory nerve', *Rep. Br. Ass. Advmt Sci.*, 1837, ii: 109–12.

⁶ Presumably George Stewart Newbiggin (d. 1840), President of the Royal Medical Society in Edinburgh in 1837. Robert Spittal (1804–52) was an early exponent of mediate auscultation in Britain: he lectured on "medical acoustics" in Edinburgh in 1838. John Gillespie Wood (1816–73) graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1837; he later became a military surgeon.

⁷ I.e., Andrew Wood (1811–81), President of the Royal Medical Society in 1830 and President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1855.

⁸ Edward Charles Hobson (1814–48) studied medicine first in Hobart then in London. He left England in 1839 to practise medicine in Hobart, where he also continued his researches as a naturalist.

⁹ Richard Owen (1804–92), Professor of Comparative Anatomy and Physiology at the Royal College of Surgeons, London.

¹⁰ Charles, Baron Glenelg (1778–1866), Secretary of State for the Colonies.

¹¹ See Richard Owen, 'Remarks on the physiology of the Marsupilia, being a reply to the communication addressed by M. COSTE to the French Academy of Sciences, entitled, "Mémoire en réponse à la lettre de M. R. Owen"', *Mag. nat. Hist.*, 1838, 2: 407–12.

13

24th November, 1838

68 Torrington Square

My dear Thomson,

I was much gratified with your letter — What an happiness you have, over me, that you have some one to encourage you through your anxieties and struggles and make your fireside doubly happy when the week's labours are ended. You tell me to do the same, but I am now so little in the way of looking out that I despair of emancipating myself from the regular London University College batchelor stupid sort of life I have got into; I feel therefore gratified when a friend like you in a spirit of commiseration offer a hint for my guidance — I suspect however I am too old to be a suitable companion to your young friends.

I am of course delighted to hear of your class — I wished to keep down your expectations to *a dozen* though I believed you might have *twenty*, but I assure you I never expected you would have more to begin with. I therefore regard your success as *signal* the more so as the class is nearly new, indeed entirely so, there being none of my students but Mr. Hindle¹ who perhaps you have this term discovered is a very diligent and attentive person. The first year you will recollect I had 21, I think.

Now that all uncertainty and anxiety is removed as to the encouragement you might meet with, I will take the liberty of giving you a hint. You remember a tall gawky looking lad Davidson² (from Arbroath) who attended your lectures as well as mine — he was here lately — much improved — and I found on conversing a little with him that his remarks on the Edin. lecturers were really very *shrewd*, and from what I knew they seemed to me to represent pretty much the opinions of the average of country students who resort to Edinburgh, when their notions have been somewhat

Letter 13

corrected by experience. Nay I must add that you would have been astonished to hear so much sound sense come out of Mr Davidson's mouth — Now he told me that your lectures (I mean your former lectures) were very excellent as regards the information they contained, but he said your delivery *wanted force*. I have no doubt that three years more added to your life and the experience of the world as you have enjoyed it, must have supplied in a great measure what was frankly deficient; but notwithstanding all this, take the hint which I now offer you. I have heard nothing of your style since your reappearance, but within the limits of good taste you cannot be too forcible or impressive in manner and delivery. With great respect for Mrs. Siddons³ I suspect she devoted her efforts rather to give clearness and elegance to her pupils' style of delivery — Jones⁴ here used to abuse me if I was not forcible — he used to say “Oh! that is all nice and clear & so on, but you must remember that you must calculate on having to deal with careless auditors as well as attentive, and you must endeavour to *command* attention!!![”] You remember Charlie Bell's remark that your manner was too *confidential*. Davidson added of his own accord what was very agreeable to hear, that all my students were delighted by your superintendence in the dissecting room; this is a *Hauptsache*. Let your manner be cheerful, good natured, never ironical, and in all important things serious and impressive. Don't get impatient with stupid lads, many a boy who annoys you by his apparent stupidity this year may delight you by his proficiency the next. Keep all the lounging and gossiping friends out of the Dissecting Room. And last of all don't be too anxious and distress yourself — *you are assured of success*, take care of your health.

When I look back I freely feel the truth of *Andrew's* remark, and I am conscious that I often vented my feelings of impatience or disappointment on poor Andrew. You may tell him that I was sorry for it at the time and that I have not ceased to feel compunction for it yet.

We tried an experiment here with acetate of albumin as an antiseptic, injecting 2 *bodies* with it, but the result was not very satisfactory, the muscles were rendered friable and much discoloured — If arsenic were quite safe for the dissector it would answer admirably — We had a body injected with a solution of oxide of arsenic in water (mere water) prepared by long boiling, and the antiseptic effect *was complete*. The gentlemen who dissected it made no complaint, but I find doubts are entertained how far it is quite safe — For your class subjects & many of your larger wet preparations in tubs, I am convinced it would answer admirably. [T]here is no deposit from it with the albuminous matter of the body as with corrosive sublimate, the knives are not stained, nor is the colour of the textures materially impaired, not near so much as by spirits. I will add the receipt when I return from the college. We have not finished the directions for dissection but they are not forgotten.

Would you make Andrew get for me a lot of sheep's uteri and can some of your young men search them for foetuses — I mean of course early ones — We have got difficulty here and I shall be in want of some — Talking of sheep I rather anticipated that the Apostle's⁵ class would come down a little this winter, the *chosen few* will be still fewer and more scriptural next year. I am much amused by “*Dr Handyside's* case of suicide”[.]⁶ “Peter Martyr” or “Peter Poundtext” — I never had any grudge at him but I certainly do not disguise my dissatisfaction at some of the Balsam singers who took up

Letter 13

his cause when he first started. My class here is quite big enough to satisfy me. I have signed my 360th ticket and we generally have a sprinkling more at the new year or before the end of the session. I was in alarm because first 50 additional seats were added last winter and this summer in consequence of an additional alteration 40 more were obtained though the addition was not courted by me. I feared naturally that with 90 new seats the room would look scarcely filled but it looks very respectable notwithstanding.

Say to Mr Wood⁷ that I am obliged to him for his attention to the *tripartite treaty*,⁸ or the result at least of the triple alliance. On the whole it is good though in one or two minor points I would differ — I would be against holding out *repeated attendance on lectures* as one of the grounds of superiority in the education of the M.D. Extended education if you like, but I would not proclaim that frequent *repetition* of the *same course*, unless it be a clinical or a manipulating one, is likely to make one man much wiser than another who has diligently attended once.

I am against *exactng* more than one course on any subject — Supposing however they do why lend themselves to the deception of substituting military surgery for the ordinary courses. Mil. Surg. either is the same as common surgery or it is different[.] [I]f the same why a separate course? if different why substitute it — It is a class which *civil* licensing boards should have nothing to do with. The Medical Boards of the Army or Navy may demand it with propriety or rather a course of lectures on the duties peculiar to Military & Naval medical officers — but for others to admit it as equivalent to a second course of surgery (unless in my view of leaving a second attendance entirely to the judgement of the student or his advisers) is ridiculous. The reason of the proceeding is however quite plain to me — it began by adjustments, arrangements, bargainings for support &c &c in the College of Surgeons, and having adopted it then it must now be carried through. The Three Bodies should have availed themselves of their new arrangement to throw it out. I dont blame Sir George,⁹ who in arranging the University Curriculum behaved very disinterestedly in regard to his own course, but the over complaisance of his friends — I must add however that it gives me sincere pleasure nay more than I can express to remark the *spirit* in which the propositions have been conceived. So fair so free from selfishness, the *act* so conformable to the proposed intention I mean the improvement of education — What a contrast to the spirit which motivates the majority of the members of the old medical corporations in this quarter and in Ireland. The Edin. College of Surgeons has shown itself worthy of its high reputation for integrity and enlightened zeal for educational improvement.

Having spread over nearly another sheet of paper I conclude by subjoining the receipt I have alluded to — now with best regards to your wife and to Dr and Mrs W^m in whose anxiety respecting their little girl I sincerely sympathize, though I trust that by this time her recovery is advancing — I ever am My dear Thomson

Your sincere friend
W Sharpey

Take Half a pound avoirdupois of white arsenic grind it and boil it with five pounds and a half of water for two or three hours, adding to make up for evaporation if necessary.

Letter 14

Inject the clear liquor by the Aorta –

Receipt for Cold Injection

Take

Dryers (a preparation of white lead and oil known by that name in the paint shops) three quarters of a pound

Red Lead half a pound

Turpentine Varnish a pint (English) and a half

Boiled oil about a Pint

Grind the red lead on a stone with a little of the oil, not so much as to make the mass very thin otherwise the grinding is difficult.

Add the turpentine varnish to the ground red lead on the stone and mix.

Mix the dryers with enough of the oil to reduce it to the consistence of cream. Add it to the mixture of the red lead and varnish and stir all together with a knife or stick then inject immediately.

The quantity of oil to be used depends on the rapidity with which you wish the injection to harden – we generally use as much as makes the mass (when all the ingredients are mixed) about the consistence of thick cream or mustard. In this state it usually acts in a quarter of an hour & runs perfectly – if you add more oil you may delay the setting for one or two hours, but though thin it will not fail to set. For the dissecting room it needs the addition of red colour the red lead being quite sufficient.

¹ Possibly Richard Hindle, who matriculated as a medical student in Edinburgh for the 1835–6 session.

² Possibly Patrick Davidson (d. 1852), who graduated MD at Edinburgh in 1836.

³ Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), actress.

⁴ Presumably Thomas Wharton Jones: see note 9.4 above.

⁵ I.e. Alexander Monro III: see note 2.12 above.

⁶ P. D. Handyside, 'Account of a remarkable case of suicide, with observations on the fatal issue of the rapid introduction of air in large quantity into the circulation during surgical operations', *Edinb. med. surg. j.*, 1838, 49: 209–21.

⁷ Alexander Wood (1817–84), Edinburgh physician and lecturer on Practice of Physic in the extramural school.

⁸ These remarks seem to refer to a joint statement on the education of medical practitioners issued by the Royal Colleges and Medical Faculty in Edinburgh in October 1838. See: 'Propositions relative to the education and privileges of graduates in medicine and medical practitioners, agreed on by the medical and surgical professors in the University, the Royal College of Physicians, and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh', *Edinb. med. surg. J.*, 1839, 51: 262–7.

⁹ George Ballingall (1780–1855), Professor of Military Surgery at Edinburgh University.

14

London, 16th Feb. 1839

My dear Thomson,

I send you down a package the chief part of which is for your Brother William and one or two little things of your own.

Your letters are always welcome & and the larger the better — I have before me the one of the 23^d Dec. to which I have long been minded to write an immediate reply but various occurrences have withdrawn me from it. The egotistical part of your letter as

Letter 14

you express it is precisely what interests me the most – and I do assure you my dear Thomson that your great success this winter has afforded me many very happy moments when I have thought on it. My remarks in my last were well meant and I rejoice to think that as I expected they have been well received – but from all I have learnt I am inclined to think they were unnecessary tho' as perhaps serving to confirm you they might not have been superfluous.

Monat [?] who is man of judgement and taste as to manner at least whatever he may know of the matter of a lecture has given me a most favorable report of a lecture which he heard of yours – the more favorable in my opinion as it is judicious and he speaks specifically — Dont let yourself flag at the end of the session. You amuse me by your account of your *distressing mistakes*. I mean distressing to yourself – be assured they are of no consequence — But you astonish me by your diligence – in the midst of a first course with all its anxieties and needful preparations and with all the trouble and fatigue and necessary occupation of the dissecting room — I say you astonish me that in such circumstances you have been able to do what you have done Ligaments – viscera – preparations of teeth – drawings, new contrivances &c. &c. it is scarcely credible. Many thanks for the young lamb, it is small ones that I want – pray procure *several* stout bottles and pack them with wadding and spirit – not too many in each bottle – make Andrew keep my account.

Among the drawings you took with you there were some for which you or your father had a special regard some of those of Dr. Gordon's¹ and which I understood you were to retain – but so soon as you can spare the others I would be obliged to you to send them as I am hastening towards that part of my course and I fear I shall be destitute — I shall get those of *Reil's of the Brain*² done here anew so you need not send them, nor the base of the brain from Gall's³ views, nor Vicq d'Azyrs⁴ – indeed *none of those of the brain*.

Have you any observations on the formation of the Amnios in the human ovum? I see these Frenchmen have gone back to Pockel's view (chiefly Ibelin) – because they have seen a sac within the chorion & without any embryo – which they think must be the amnios into which no embryo has *passed*.⁵ The interior sac in such abortion ova may be the enlarged vesicula umbilicilis may it not? The best of the joke is that Breschet & Serres⁶ are disputing between themselves about the priority of what in truth belong to Pockel if there is any merit in it. They must be mistaken say I.

I send you down an article by Henle⁷ which will interest your Father — I do not know the author of the article Magnetism in the review.⁸ Baly has out another part⁹ which I shall enquire after tomorrow and if possible send in the parcel – (I find it has been sent you [by?] M^{rs} Maclachlan)

You will see we have done with magnetism at the sacrifice of Elliotson¹⁰ — It is a blessed thing for any body is better than he had latterly made himself — In many respects he was in my opinion all along an objectionable person – but he was a good teacher and a *man of note* – enjoying a large reputation in *the country* and as such useful. [B]ut after his absurdities of the magnetism & the scandalous proceedings carried on by him in the Hospital he could be regarded as nothing better than a broken pitcher which could no longer *hold in* or be of use to any body — You would hear of our *emetic*?¹¹ it was not so great as some people represent it, and the second night all was quiet – *perfectly so* and has been ever since.

Letter 14

What is this University Club?¹² Let me know about it because I have had a letter from Mr James Macaulay¹³ advertising it, and if it is not calculated to interfere with the existing societies, if they do not intend having a library or evening meetings to discuss papers – I think it would be stiff to withhold my subscription. The only think makes me doubt is that Peter Pompous [i.e., Handyside] presided over their constituent meeting, and it occurred to me that most probably the promoters of it were of the same stuff.

I had a letter some time ago from Mr Slater the sculptor wishing to know my directions respecting that famous production my *bust* which is still on his premises, 50 George Street – be so kind will you as look after it; make him pack it up and send it to my sister Mrs Colvill Arbroath, and might I beg of you to pay the expenses of packing and carriage — there is no hurry with this indeed it would be better to defer it for a couple of weeks, as I shall be writing to Arbroath before then.

With this there are some copies of an Introd. Lecture by Dr. Leighton,¹⁴ a friend of mine – & though some of the views defended in it appear to me heterodox never the less the spirit of it and general tone is altogether commendable – especially as emanating from a *London* teacher.

23^d Feb^r

I was late with my parcel — I send your father a little work by Dr. Gluge¹⁵ which may entertain him – I happen to have another copy which the Author sent me (from Brussels where I believe he is professor) so the Dr may add it to his library –

I return to you also some of your own books which I have kept too long. —

You will find the piece of stomach you wished for, also a very putrid bit which I put aside for you as showing the true Brunners glands of the Duodenum but I fear it has suffered so much as to be now nearly useless —

I had a letter from Syme¹⁶ since this letter was composed, he says you have a fair class and an excellent reputation giving great satisfaction to the students. He adds that you are sure of Glasgow – that he had been *there* lately and that your appointment was considered a settled – and as far as I gather from the content a desirable thing – I know there are *loud complaints* by Jeffray's¹⁷ colleagues at the great detriment the school is suffering by his inefficiency –

With every good wish believe me ever my
dear Thomson
Your sincere friend
W Sharpey

I send you a model in wax of a diseased bone (exfolient) we have one already in the museum & I have no use for more.

¹ I.e., John Gordon (1786–1820), private anatomy lecturer in Edinburgh from 1808 to 1818 and author of works on the structure of the brain.

² Probably a reference to: Johann Christian Reil, 'Fragmente über die Bildung des kleinen Gehirns im Menschen', *Arch. Physiol.*, 1807–8, 8: 1–58.

³ Franz-Joseph Gall, *Sur les fonctions du cerveau et sur celles de chacune de ses parties, avec des observations sur la possibilité de reconnaître les instincts, les penchans, les talens, ou les dispositions morales et intellectuelles des hommes et des animaux, par la configuration de leur cerveau et du leur tête*, 6 vols., Paris, J.-B. Baillièrre, 1825.

⁴ Félix Vicq d'Azyr, *Planches pour le traité de l'anatomie du cerveau*, new ed., Paris, Louis Duprat-Duverger, 1813.

⁵ See: [?] Pockel, 'Neue Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des menschlichen Embryo', *Isis*, 1825, cols. 1342–50; Gilbert Breschet, 'Remarques sur la communication faite par M. SERRES concernant le développement de l'amnios chez l'homme', *C.r. hebd. Séanc. Acad. Sci., Paris*, 1838, 7: 1031–8; E.-R.-A. Serres, 'Observations sur le développement de l'amnios chez l'homme', *ibid.*, pp. 996–1000.

⁶ Gilbert Breschet (1783–1845), French anatomist; Antoine-Etienne-Reynaud-Augustin Serres (1786–1868), French comparative anatomist and embryologist.

⁷ Friedrich Gustav Jacob Henle (1809–85), German anatomist and pathologist.

⁸ [Anon., Review of A. Mesmer, *Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal*], *Br. for. med. Rev.*, 1839, 7: 301–52.

⁹ I.e., Baly's translation of Johannes Müller's *Elements of physiology*, op. cit., note 7.11 above, published in 2 volumes by Taylor and Walton (London) in 1843.

¹⁰ John Elliotson (1791–1868), from 1831 Professor of the Practice of Medicine at University College London. He resigned in 1838 after differences with his colleagues over his use of mesmerism in the treatment of patients at University College Hospital.

¹¹ Probably a reference to the strategy employed by the Hospital's Medical Committee to force Elliotson's resignation. It ordered him to discharge Elizabeth Okey, one of his patients, who allegedly displayed the mesmeric gift of prophecy. This was coupled with a request that Elliotson cease to employ mesmerism on the wards. On receiving these instructions, Elliotson resigned.

¹² I.e., the Edinburgh University Club, founded by Edward Forbes and others in 1839.

¹³ James Macaulay (1817–1902) studied medicine in Edinburgh, but later turned to literature as a career.

¹⁴ Frederick S. Leighton, *On the objects and mutual relations of the medical sciences: an introductory address delivered at the Middlesex Hospital School of Medicine*, London, H. Renshaw, 1838.

¹⁵ Possibly, Gottlieb Gluge, *Observationes nonnullae microscopicae fila (quae primitiva dicunt) in inflammatione spectantes. Dissertatio inauguralis pathologico-anatomica*, Berlin, Nietach, 1835.

¹⁶ James Syme (1799–1870), Professor of Clinical Surgery at Edinburgh since 1833. He became acquainted with Sharpey while both were students in Paris in the 1820s.

¹⁷ James Jeffray (1759–1848), Professor of Anatomy at Glasgow from 1790 to his death.

15

[Thomson to Sharpey, undated fragment, presumably February 1839; see the letter above.]

me as I daresay it will be to you a sufficient proof of the erroneous nature of Pockel's view as well as of all french and english "Mechanics"¹ Coste has committed himself in this first volume beautifully on the matter & the best of it is I shewed him the error on his own specimens, after which he spoke so that you would have thought mine had been his opinion all along and that he had never participated in that of Pockel. They are a set of villains.

I think I told you that I found the spinal cord open in Reids² specimens wh^h appeared to be 14 or 15 days old — Cumins³ specimen presented only the primitive folds and groove —

I am glad that Elliotsons row is over you must have been in a state of prodigious excitement to utter that defiance of all the dastardly cowards sneaking in corners which the newspapers give. Who is likely to succeed?

Simpson has met with more success than ever attended any midwifery teacher or practitioner in Edinb. but he exerts himself too much & has too many irons in the fire. Inoculating chancres here, proving the truth of magnetism, then disproving it in another quarter &c &c &c.

We are going to have a monthly journal here in which a dozen of us have embarked for next session. Medical records in the line of the Lancet but all scientific. J. A.

Letter 16

Robertson,⁴ Simpson, Henderson,⁵ Balfour,⁶ Duncan Seller⁷ & myself with others. John Reid and I having the Anatomy and Physiology department.

By the bye the Lizars are to leave Argyle Square next season and go down to No. 1 in Surgeons Square which has been bought by an Aunt & is to be remodelled. This of course throws the great school into consternation. Robertson I suppose will do the Surgery there but they are at a loss for Anatomy. He has been trying I think to persuade Reid to start there in Anatomy but Reid I suspect declined. Reid would fain join with me and in fact the principal obstruction is the regulation of the College about two subjects by the same teacher. I have not seen him to speak to him, but I think we shall make some sort of arrangement together which would strengthen both of us considerably.

The University Club I know little about. They are only I believe to have journals & newspapers & a reading room. I do not hear of memoirs to be read or discussions. I think you may subscribe. I have never been applied to.

I should like to consult you about a great many Anatomical points as I used to do when we were together, but they are so numerous I fear I must leave all this till I have an opportunity of conversing with you. There is one however I must ask you to

¹ See note 9.2 above. These embryologists were “mechanics” because they maintained that the amnion was produced by a process of endosmosis.

² Possibly Henry Reid (d. 1868), President of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh in 1842.

³ Possibly Joseph Edward Cummins, who graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1837.

⁴ John Argyll Robertson (1800–55), private lecturer on surgery in Edinburgh.

⁵ William Henderson (1810–72), Physician to the Fever Hospital and Pathologist to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

⁶ John Hutton Balfour (1808–84) graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1833. He founded the Botanical Society of Edinburgh in 1833.

⁷ Perhaps a mistake for *William Seller*, who graduated MD Edinburgh in 1821. He was Physician to the Royal Public Dispensary and Extra-Physician to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

16

London 9th March 1839

My dear Thomson

I now write you confidentially I mean only for yourself and immediate friends, because unless perchance called upon by yourself or others I don't wish to be understood to interfere in the matter to which this letter refers — The thing may after all be *superfluous* for it is many chances to one that you are far better informed than I am on the subject of *Jeffray's Chair*.¹

I have just heard of his serious illness – from which it is said he will not recover, and I write to put you on your guard against anticipation, because I know that interest is now making for Dr. Mackenzie² as a successor. Application was made to Sir James Clark³ to interest himself for Mackenzie, and I am extremely glad to say that he told the party applying, that he had reason to think the chair would likely be conferred on another person whom he considered as deserving of it, and in the circumstances he thought Mackenzie's application would be useless; moreover that seeing what his own opinion

Letter 17

was he could not think of interfering on Dr. M's account. The person he meant as likely to get the appointment and so well qualified for it was yourself.

Now this may turn out to be "*Piper's news*" that is that you know it already, but I will put you to the expense of a postage because I think it important if in the event of Jeffray's death you should be required by Lord John⁴ to *give a reference*, that you should be aware of Sir James's sentiments respecting your fitness, for he would be a very proper referee —

I hope my present arrived without accident — Pray dont forget to send me the drawings of the *Ear*.

Give my best regards to all your household especially Mrs. Allen – and I say I anticipate the pleasure of soon paying her a visit in an old fashioned domicile not very distant from a certain very shabby street in the City of Glasgow.

Let me put in a word for *Andrew*.

Wishing Jeffray a most comfortable transition to a *better place* and in the mean time your own advancement to a *very good one*. believe me my d^r Thomson

very truly yours

W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ I.e., the Chair of Anatomy at Glasgow University.

² William MacKenzie (1791–1868), Professor of Surgery at the Andersonian College in Glasgow from 1819.

³ James Clark (1788–1870), Physician-in-Ordinary to the Queen.

⁴ Lord John Russell (1792–1878), the Home Secretary, had been a student in Edinburgh where he moved in the same Whig circles as John Thomson.

17

68 Torrington Square, London

4th Dec^r 1839

My dear Thomson,

I was delighted to hear from you, and to find that altho' *for the present* things are not so flattering as they might have been yet you are *true to your Philosophy* and meet all in a proper spirit. Your school is not singular. There is a defalcation in London this year and we bear our share of the loss, no better I dare say from the crisis we passed through last winter by the circumstances *preceding & accompanying Elliotsons secession*. Diminished numbers of new *entrants* in the profession which is now beginning to tell on the number of *students*, the pecuniary pressure in trading and manufacturing districts from which we receive a large proportion of students, the advantages such shortness of money gives to Provincial schools established chiefly in those very districts and encouraged to an injudicious extent by most of the Examining Boards – all these things combine to hurt us at present but things will get better again – So you must not be disappointed. The Aberdeen folks will not persevere in passing the door of what will before next year be proved to be the better shop, at least transcendentially the best in Anatomy & Physiology, so you will have it all your own way.¹

Letter 18

I think you had better follow Mr. Bannerman's² advice and dispose of your collection – wherever else you are likely to go there are collections already, and one thing is clear that when a public collection may be made I would advise no-one to collect one or continue collecting for himself. I restrict myself to Embryology in order to have something to show as my own, but it is folly to attempt a general anatomical collection for oneself. I should have difficulty in advising you as to the price to ask for it unless you send me a catalogue of the preparations. I should have great delight in seeing some old friends my own handiwork occupying a distinguished place.

Talking of Embryology — I don't believe Todd can be in any hurry for your article, but I am very sorry it is not ready for printing and separate publication, for I would not like the edge to be taken off it by Müller's Chapter in his Physiology – that will not be in the next part however it is not yet out in German even – the next part will contain generation and a rigmarole about the mental faculties which he had better left out as forming a separate science. But *Willis* has translated Wagner's little volume³ and I understand that Todd having done a little of it will *father* it all, so that it will appear with the Priest's arms (Kings College) upon the title page.

As the time of post approaches I am obliged to close my letter – but now that we can communicate for 4^d I will again soon write – indeed one of the consequences of cheap postage will be that we will write shorter letters and more of them –

With sincere regards to Mrs Thomson I am My dear Thomson

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

¹ Thomson had in October 1839 been appointed Professor of Anatomy in the Marischal College, Aberdeen.

² Possibly John Bannerman, mediciner of King's College, Aberdeen.

³ I.e., Robert Willis's translation of Rudolph Wagner, *Elements of physiology, for the use of students, and with particular reference to the wants of practitioners*, London, Sherwood, Gilbert, & Piper, 1841.

18

68 Torrington Square, London

28th November 1841

My dear Thomson,

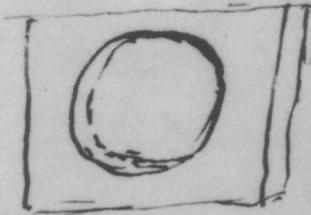
I write you hastily to say how delighted I am to hear of your signal success – it is indeed *most important* for you as regards both the present & the future.

Your present has arrived safe – the Embryos are beautiful – and I beg you to accept my best thanks for the gift – and to confer an additional favor by replying to a few questions – viz. –

What is the liquid used? is it Spirit or Goadby's Saline fluid (of which I have the recipe)? for what preparations is each best suited? How do you deal with the liquid in closing your preparation? Do you smear the edges of the lid with the cement previously to putting it on, or do you put the lid on clean – dry the edges, or allow them to dry, and then apply the cement outside?

after cement previously to putting it on, or do you put the lid on clean - dry the edges, or allow them to dry, and then apply the cement outside?

I see clearly the way of building up the sides - with slips of glass - your new plan of square tubing would be capital, ~~but I mean~~ to try how it would do to drill large round openings thru, in a



piece of plate glass - which will suit a square top and have the advantage of

perfectly level, and smooth surfaces for joining - My Brother Alexander who is here and has learned to make lenses (from Mr. Potter our new Professor of Nat. Philosophy who is a thorough work

Figure 1.

Letter 19

I see clearly the way of building up the sides – with slips of glass – your new plan of square tubing would be capital, but I mean to try how it would do to drill large round openings on them, in a piece of plate glass, which will suit a square top and have the advantage of perfectly level and smooth surfaces for joining [drawing here, see figure 1] — My Brother Alexander¹ who is here and has learned to make lenses (from Mr Potter² our new Professor of Nat^l Philosophy who is a thorough working man) tells me he thinks he can easily bore the glass provided he has a large enough drill; it is a curious fact that when wetted with Turpentine holding Camphor in solution glass works as readily as brass.

I find Plate glass cuttings can be had here of the Looking Glass Makers, of any thickness within reasonable limits, at the rate of nine pence a pound. I will try to procure for you some *thin ground* glass for covering minuter objects which can now be had here in broad pieces and not dear.

Do you first harden your preparations in Strong spirit to make it keep its form – how do you display it – I wish we could find something better than wax for pinning out upon – for strong spirit almost always dissolves a part of it & occasions a white turbid deposit.

Our school is greatly better this year in New Entries which have kept up our entire number rather above what it was last year tho' we lose the benefit this year of most of the old students of the time preceding 1839 which was the year we began to suffer a reduction in new entries — Indeed I had not expected to maintain our whole number equal to last year, but I am glad to say it has turned out otherwise —

With regards to Mrs Allen and the rest of the family believe me my dear Thomson

Most sincerely yours

W Sharpey

¹ I.e., Alexander Arrott, Sharpey's half-brother.

² Richard Potter (1799–1886), Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy at University College London from 1841 to 1843, when he moved to Canada.

19

68 Torrington Square London

27th June 1842

My dear Thomson —

I am much obliged to you for the trouble you take concerning my preparation glasses.

I am quite aware that I ordered 30 dozen and am not frightened at the expense of “bottomry”. Moreover I thank you for the suggestion as to the sizes of bottom plates which I would prefer to have of the measurement you recommend – and accordingly I shall return you the sketch lest you may not have kept a note of them. I see you are in doubt whether I meant the first 4 dozen of 3/4 inch diameter to be 1/6 or 1/16 of an inch in depth – I mean 1/6.

Letter 19

I have heard from what I consider *very good authority* that arrangements are about to be made for Homes'¹ resignation and therefore I presumed it has been determined on — In such event it is clear Alison's² Chair will be vacant, and I am satisfied that you not only have the best claim to it but will have the best chance of it — I should think from what I have repeatedly heard expressed on former tho' not very distant occasions that your appointment would meet with approbation from all the men in the University; and were you judiciously and timeously to strike in you would I think have scarcely an opponent — The great point will be to avoid being *taken up*, as the phrase is, by a particular party, and I think from the way you stand with every body you are likely to be the general favourite and have no occasion for party support. The excitement of an Election in Edinburgh is, however, ready to give rise to indiscretion if not in the candidate at least among his friends (witness Miller's³ friends) fit to peril the very best prospect — Midwifery, Surgery, — Pathology, Practice of Physic & Physiology! — a few more changes & the College will have got a new Stock a new lock and a new barrel. — Do not take it amiss if I entreat of you to caution your immediate or more active supporters to make no disparaging remark of other candidates — not that I have any *special* reason for doing so but being myself a looker on I take the liberty of offering this hint solely from what I have witnessed in other cases & from the *possible nature of the objections* that may perhaps be raised against some of the parties who may be your competitors — J. Macfarlane⁴ “of the Bridge” called and left his card a day or two ago — I wish I could see him.

With best regards to M^{rs} T. & my friends at Morland — I am,

My dear Thomson
yours very sincerely
W Sharpey

After putting on the top do you let the edges dry completely before you use the cement? — I find if you wait till the surface to be covered with cement is quite dry that a portion of the fluid between the contiguous surfaces or even within the cell is apt to evaporate —

WS

¹ James Home (1758–1842), Professor of the Practice of Medicine in Edinburgh from 1821 to 1842.

² William Pulteney Alison (1790–1859), Professor of the Institutes of Medicine in Edinburgh since 1821; he succeeded Home in the Practice Chair.

³ Presumably James Miller (1812–64), appointed Professor of Surgery in Edinburgh in 1842.

⁴ Possibly John Macfarlane (1796–1869), a surgeon at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The “Bridge” may be a reference to one of a number of local villages.

20

London 10th Aug 1842

My dear Thomson

I fear you will think I have forgotten your letter, but it was only today that I made out a call on Dr. Hodgkin.¹ The good little Quaker, it seems, declined giving Davy² a Testim¹ for the Pathology because he had previously given a strong one in favour of Craigie³ but offered Dr. D. his services in the event of his applying for another chair, & as the Physiolo^l Chair was meant, he thinks were Davy to be a candidate & find he had given you a testimonial Dr. Davy might justly complain of there being a different rule applied to him & to you — From a letter however which Dr. H has rec^d from Dr. D. it seems unlikely that Dr. Davy will apply for the Physiology Chair and if Dr. Hodgkin is authoritatively informed of Davy's determination not to offer himself he will then give you a fresh testimonial of the present date, and express in it what he *at once and unhesitatingly* declared to me orally, namely, that he knew no one in the three kingdoms better qualified for the appointment than Dr. Allen Thomson, and he would also exert any private influence he might possess to further your object —

Willis promised to alter his certificate and I forward you Liston's⁴ which he gave really with great cordiality and were you once in the field I think I could get him to write to some one of the Baillie Bodies with whom his opinion has weight. Clift⁵ & Owen are both out of the way — so you had better apply to them by letter yourself. — I return you their documents.

Christison or Syme could have informed you 2 months ago that *I* had no intention whatever of applying for the appointment, I can see no inducement unless to have a smaller return to make for that rascally Tory Income Tax.

You say I must declare to you whether or not I would be a candidate for *Monro's Chair*⁶ in case of a vacancy — Now I think all you can reasonably expect is to know *as much of my sentiments as I know myself*, and that I am most willing to tell, viz, that it would all depend on circumstances — Edinburgh might continue to drop lower, or the Patrons⁷ might make arrangements which would be very onerous on Monro's Successor — or on the other hand things might get wrong in London and tho' I do not see any prospect of that, yet, as you will know, medical teaching is liable to such reverses that no one can reckon securely on the permanent success of a school. It is clear therefore that however convenient for myself it would be to know what I should do in the event of Monro resigning and however agreeable it might be to me and consistent with the feeling of sincere friendship which exists between us to inform you, yet I cannot well be expected to make up my mind now when so much depends on contingencies, though I repeat that given my mind made up you should immediately know it and I conceive you would be entitled to know it. It is precisely one of those cases on which I can decide nothing till the events which would require me to act really occur — I am satisfied in the mean time that the Patrons are committing a great blunder in taxing the new professors as they are about to do — Retiring allowances must be provided but if a strong effort were made *some other source* would be found, the Reid or Straton Bequests or the Government perhaps. It is true there will be no lack of excellent candidates for the Chairs that are not connected with practice, but the

Letter 20

Patrons cannot reckon on getting at all times so good a man as Alison ready to their hand when they have such a chair as the Practice of Physick to fill up — *As it is*, Home's demand of £150 beyond your father should not be listened to for a moment — he has not the slightest claim to it.⁸

Dr. R.[?] Hamilton⁹ called the other morning on his way to the Continent — the same mild, intelligent, gentle creature he always was — but what an agreeable thing it was for me to see that he had undergone some sort of resurrection (one might call it) as regards his social & professional life. He is gone forth singing your praises.

I am now in the thick of Examⁿ at Somerset House and hope to be through early next week. I would fain get down to Scotland in the remaining part of August and hope to make it out tho' I am wanted in London by the 1st Sep^r. I had engaged to superintend certain portions of a new Editⁿ of Quain's Anat^y¹⁰ but find it no easy task — the gen^l Anatomy requires to be entirely rewritten and I have hesitated so long on the threshold that I cannot with a good grace now take the play for any long time. Taylor & Walton are long suffering and most obliging, but for that very reason discretion in availing myself of their disposition is required on my part, and it is painful for me to think *how little I have accomplished* — Still I think that a few days of the northern air would put me right — and even with a view to the better attainment of the object in question would I think prove advantageous.

I should first go to Forfarshire for two or three days — but I will write you again on the matter.

I have made a fresh copy of the testimonial I gave you with a few verbal differences, some intentional, others unintended — read it over and if you have any further alteration to suggest let me know and I will be most happy to adopt it.

With sincere regards & best love to yourself and all your household.

I am your devoted

W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ Thomas Hodgkin (1798–1866), Curator of the museum at and Pathologist to Guy's Hospital.

² Presumably John Davy (1790–1868), physiologist and anatomist, the younger brother of Sir Humphry Davy.

³ David Craigie (1793–1866), Physician to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and editor of the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*. He was the author of several works on morbid and general anatomy.

⁴ Robert Liston (1794–1847), formerly an anatomy teacher in Edinburgh (with Syme) and Surgeon to the Royal Infirmary. He was Professor of Surgery and Clinical Surgery at University College London from 1835.

⁵ William Clift (1775–1849), former apprentice to John Hunter and Conservator of the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, London.

⁶ I.e., the Chair of Anatomy at Edinburgh.

⁷ The Town Council of Edinburgh, which had the right to make appointments to University chairs.

⁸ Home was apparently demanding a larger pension from the University than John Thomson had requested upon his retirement from the Pathology Chair in 1841. In the event, Home accepted £100 more than John Thomson received from William Henderson, the new Professor of Pathology. Allen Thomson had a personal interest in these proceedings because he was obliged to pay half of Home's pension, while Alison supplied the remainder. See: Edinburgh University MSS, College Minutes, 1838–44, vol. 6, pp. 439–46, Senate Meeting of 30 September 1842.

⁹ Possibly Robert Hamilton (1794–1868), who graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1815 and was President of the Royal Medical Society in 1814.

¹⁰ I.e., J. Quain, *Elements of Anatomy*, 5th ed., 2 vols., London, Taylor and Walton, 1843–8.

21

London 13 Oct 1842

My dear Thomson

Excuse me for writing on this scrap of paper for there is none other within my reach —

It is almost too late to congratulate you on your success but not too late to say that it has given the greatest satisfaction to every one whom I have heard express themselves on the subject.

I should have written sooner to say that so far I can order your tubes you must give me the extreme breadth of the part of your eye piece *which is to be introduced into the tube* — if they are as my french ones you will find that the ring which holds the field glass or large glass of the eye piece is a little wider than the part immediately above, you must give me the diameter of this. My brother suggests that a hole cut in a card to the size and sent in a letter would be the best measure —

I fear I cannot keep my promise of presenting you with an adjustment, for my brother has expended much more work on them than I intended and has only made three in all — they are made of a stout circular mahogany base supported on three very low knobs — two uprights about 9 inches high strongly morticed into the base — a cross bar of brass piping from the top of one upright to the other, a piece of tube of about 3 inches long fixed vertically thro' the middle of the transverse bar — a long tube containing the glasses passed thro' the short tube & fitting with a sliding motion —

Stage consisting of a plate of sheet brass with a round hole in it, fixed across the uprights about 3 1/2 inches from the bottom, it is shored (permanently) into a saw rut in each upright which makes a very tight fitting — The mirrors are placed below and finished in the usual way — Now I intended that the mirror should be a much more simple affair — and that the cross bar which holds the fixed tube should be merely of wood. My Brother says that the tube may be very firmly fixed into it by means of a mixture of sealing wax & pounded brick melted on the Fire — I find the fitting will answer very well for *exhibition* as intended, for you can by giving the tube a screwing motion within the other find the focus with tolerable ease and once found it is not liable to be deranged by the inspector — It will not be so well adapted to recommend to students as a *working* microscope. For low eye pieces and opaque objectivity — like most of your best preparations — it will answer admirably.

The wooden uprights are a little [drawing here, see figure 2] elastic and yield somewhat when one adjusts the instrument but it is by no means a *shakey thing* — once the focus is adjusted it is as firm as a rock — I think a *broad brass stage* with a hole in it is better than any thing else, for when you lay a good big piece of plate glass on it for your object you can move it about almost as easily & firmly with your fingers as with the screw stage — the stage may be made to project more behind so as not to cut off light from the mirror — & being broad [?] it will hold a frog when you show the circulation —

I have ordered glasses for you but have not yet received them — I will however send you down what you desire from my own store in the mean time. Mr. Halley¹ who is to be in Edin. this Winter will take them with him, he goes by the Steamer on Saturday.

found it is not liable to be deranged by the inspector - It will not be so well adapted for the recommendation of students as a working microscope. For low eye pieces and spaper objects - like most of your best preparations - it will answer admirably -

The wooden upright is a little elastic and yield somewhat when it is adjusted the instrument but by no means a shabby thing.  The focus is adjusted it is as firm as a rock - I think a broad trap stap with a hole in it is better than any thing else, for when you lay a good big piece of plate glass on it for your object you can move it about almost as easily & finely with your fingers as with the screw stage - The stage may be made to project more behind so as not to cut off light from the mirror - & be bent it with hold a frog when you show the circulation -

I have ordered glasses for you but have not yet received them - I will however send you down ~~what~~ you desire from my own store in the mean time - Mr. Halley who is to be in Edin. this winter will take them with him - he goes by the steamer on Saturday

Figure 2.

Letter 21

I will not forget the mica tho' I dont exactly know where to get it perfectly good — I shall find another opportunity for the tubes I have no doubt, tho we can ill spare you any of our students.

The classes have opened here, and I must decidedly say we shall have a short-coming in new students, according to present appearances I take it that in our School we shall have about a *fifth* deficiency on the numbers of last year — this applies to new students, the old will be certainly not less in N^o than before, but unluckily the new men you know are the *Pabulum Vitae*. From what I can learn of other London Schools at least the *larger ones* such as Guys & Bartholomews I believe we have reason to be thankful — our *relative* position will I suspect be better than last year — but that is poor consolation for the absolute loss — As to the small Schools in general I hear of several that are *bad bad* Aldersgate nearly knocked up — Webb Street *had been* just given up in the course of the Summer and S' Thomas's with all their flourish of drums and trumpets and with the *debris* of the Webb Street² whom they receive on like terms as former pupils of their own, are likely to have scarcely more pupils than they have got of Lecturers — As to Kings College, Damill told me there was an increase in what they call their *matriculated* or regular Students who enter to their curriculum of four years & wear the gown but a short coming in *occasional* Students or such as dont enter to all the classes — what this means I dont know but I suspect they are not well off tho' I can easily conceive that *mere connexion* may get the usual numbers together in a school so inconsiderable — The whole is I think an indication that there is a deficiency of supply generally seeing that the large schools which are most dependent on the general influx of Students are likely all to be sufferers — I sincerely hope it may be different with Edinburgh tho' I fear that the same cause will tell against you — In the mean time now that the Session has gone on for near two weeks and we have a good grasp how things will be I am perfectly reconciled to it and it is curious as I now write to feel as little disappointed as last year — the consolation is that matters are not so bad as in 1839–40 — & that was a contrast with the capital campaign in 1838 — *pejora vidimus*. —

I find the plate glass bottoms answer admirably — and really I believe the Gold size and lamp black the best cement after all — I find that the air bubbles very generally come from the preparation itself especially if put into spirit of diff^r strength from that in which it has previously been — Air also is apt to get in unless you lay on your cement round the cover before the spirit dries up to the joining of the lid and cut surface of the tube — I believe however that Drake's thin glass (selected pieces I mean & tolerably flat) would make the best covers, it is so yielding that the shrinking of the spirit would do no mischief — I find that the glass cutters here use *sand* & not the [. . .] of diamond dust — it is a firm kind of sand got near Croydon in Surrey that is chiefly used for the purpose —

With sincere regards to Mrs Thomson & best wishes for yourself both generally and especially in your approaching session — I am My dear Thomson

Yours affection^{ly}

W Sharpey

I have given a Mr Williams³ an introduction to you — he is not likely however to attend physiology — his object being to graduate & attend the more practical subjects — He is

Letter 22

a little peculiar & odd but a very intelligent and *most excellent man* his father is Sir Somebody Williams the late Mayor of Shrewsbury.

WS

P[lease] T[urn] O[ver]

You ask about the change in the Inspectorship of Anatomy – I really know nothing further than this – that a Committee of the College of Surgeons consisting of Stanley[,]⁴ James Arnott⁵ & South,⁶ had been sitting during the Summer on the subject of the Supply of bodies to the Anat. Schools & that they recommended (or rather Stanley who was their *primum movens*) recommended a change of measures – and this I presume Sir J. Graham conceived to involve a change of men — This *is all I know*, as to Somerville's partiality &c. &c. – it is all nonsense and worse than nonsense, but Sir J. Graham failing to unseat him through means of this late Committee of inquiry (I mean the ordeal which Somerville had to pass through *last winter*), and being determined to get rid of him & please Brodie just thought he might do that by hook which he could not do by crook, and so gave him his leave — I understand Christian & Wood were written to[,] to recommend a person for Edinburgh (by Brodie? or thro' his instrumentality no doubt) and Mr. Wood very naturally recommended Andrew – who (if he would cut one of his recurrent nerves) will do well enough.

W.S.

¹ Alexander Halley (1824–75) graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1844. He practised in Leeds and later in Harley Street, London.

² The Webb Street private anatomy school was incorporated into St Thomas's Hospital in 1842 upon the appointment of its proprietor Richard Dugard Grainger as lecturer on general anatomy and physiology at the hospital.

³ I.e., Philip Henry Williams (1821–72), who graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1843 and later practised in Worcester.

⁴ Edward Stanley (1793–1862), surgeon and lecturer in anatomy at St Bartholomew's Hospital. He was elected a Life Member of the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1842.

⁵ James Moncrieff Arnott (1794–1885), surgeon to the Middlesex Hospital; see also note 44.1.

⁶ John Flint South (1797–1882), surgeon and formerly lecturer on anatomy at St Thomas's Hospital. He had been a member of the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons since 1841.

22

London 4th May 1845

35 Gloucester Crescent

My dear Thomson,

Your friend Mr Ackland¹ faithfully delivered his charge on Friday after noon, but as he was about to start for Edinburgh again the next day he remained with me little more than a quarter of an hour — When he affords me the opportunity (which he has promised to do) I will be most happy to afford him all the information and show him any attention in my power; but I have told him that he is likely no where to meet with useful advice as to teaching more readily than from yourself.

Letter 22

Pray accept for yourself and for Goodsir² my best thanks for your kind present – I have looked over the things with Ellis and Potter³ and am much pleased with them. The *tuberculous lung* is both a useful and handsome specimen – not to speak of the others in particular.

Perhaps too you will have the kindness to repair an omission of which I have been guilty towards Goodsir, and thank him in my name for the copy of his *Researches*⁴ which he has been so good as send to me – I have read through the greater part of the book & with much pleasure —

I expected no other reception for Quain's Pamphlet⁵ — It may be open to the charge of minor inaccuracies, but the real cause of offense in certain quarters is its truth. Of course it is unpalatable to the *old* Faculty who resisted pertinaciously for 15 years the opinion of all judicious men without its pale in the matter of preliminary education, and who admitted Midwifery & gen^l Pathology into the medical curriculum only on compulsion. It may be abused too by some who now find it convenient to take part with them, and who in my opinion confide more in their good intentions than past experience warrants. But really after an interchange of letters with Syme in which there was some anger (on both sides I freely admit) I am not disposed to run any further risk — Not a word is said in the pamphlet to disparage the instructions given in Edinburgh and for the best of reasons, because the writer of it holds opinions incompatible with any such disparagement; but that does not prevent Syme from telling me that we fail to make good surgeons, and that because we are not aided by the influence of *our character*, — he casts up to me a foolish step of one of my colleagues in presiding at a meeting of students, as if the Edinb. Faculty invariably kept its members from indiscreet acts. This in answer to a letter in which I reiterated an opinion I have never concealed viz that the Faculty were to blame for neglecting the preliminary education of their graduates, and in which I ventured to criticize (too sharply perhaps) the proceedings of Dr. Christison⁶ as representative of the University to the Government and writer in the Edinb. Review. — This for yourself and intimates (not for gossip). I have since written Syme again and in a cooler mood and I admit that my first letter was all the stronger in consequence of the tone in which Syme had thought proper to write to Mr. Quain and in consequence of a letter from Christison to Tweedie⁷ which was read to me immediately before.

There is no hurry with the Embryo — send it when quite convenient and by a sure hand — Koelliker⁸ from Zurich has been here some time and is now about to return home, have you seen his memoirs on the development of Cephalopods?⁹

I am most obliged to Goodsir for his book but I am not sure if it was well advised to republish all the papers it contains — He is an excellent observer and sound headed man, but too anxious to gain a reputation as a generalizer in science too prone to aim at establishing general propositions – the great aim no doubt of all science but not to be done rashly.

The consequence is that much will require to be unsaid. He is too fond also of employing new phrases – and not careful to avoid mixing inference and even assumptions with his expositions of facts. The paper of centres of nutrition¹⁰ was well as a passing contribution, but scarcely deserves its present place — That on the structure & nutrition of bone¹¹ is altogether wrong. — I have great doubts too as to the

Letter 23

essay on Cystic Entozoa,¹² and that on reproduction of lost limbs of Crustacea.¹³ Of course this is “privatissime” for the book is *there* and the above remarks can now do no good. Moreover I know no one likes criticism and I have a great esteem for Goodsir. — With best regards to Mrs Allen & the household at Moreland Law

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

¹ Possibly Henry Wentworth Acland (1815–1900), who was a student in Edinburgh from 1843 to 1845. Acland became Professor of Clinical Medicine at Oxford in 1851 and served on the General Medical Council.

² John Goodsir (1814–67), Curator of the Museum and Demonstrator in Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. He was appointed Professor of Anatomy upon Monro’s retirement in 1846.

³ George Viner Ellis and John Phillips Potter, Assistant Demonstrators in Anatomy at University College London.

⁴ I.e., John Goodsir and Harry Duncan Spens Goodsir, *Anatomical and pathological observations*, Edinburgh, Macphail, 1845.

⁵ Richard Quain, *Observations on the education and examinations for degrees in medicine, as affected by the new Medical Bill, with remarks on the proposed Licensing Boards, the Society of Apothecaries, the Registration of Medical Practitioners and the constitution of the “Council of Health”*, London, John Murray, 1845.

⁶ See *Edinb. med. surg. J.*, 1845, 63: 159.

⁷ Alexander Tweedie was at this time examiner at University College London.

⁸ Rudolf Albrecht von Kölliker (1817–1905), German histologist. He had held the post of Associate Professor of Physiology and Comparative Anatomy at the University of Heidelberg since 1844. He had previously been at Zürich.

⁹ *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Cephalopoden*, Zürich, Meyer and Zeller, 1844.

¹⁰ ‘Centres of nutrition’, in Goodsir and Goodsir, op. cit., note 22.4 above, pp. 1–3.

¹¹ ‘The structure and economy of bone’, *ibid.*, pp. 64–7.

¹² ‘Of the anatomy and development of the cystic entozoa’, *ibid.*, pp. 79–103.

¹³ ‘The mode of reproduction of the lost parts in the crustacea’, *ibid.*, pp. 74–8.

23

35 Gloucester Crescent, London

11th June 1845

My dear Thomson,

I do not know whether you may have any young men of merit to recommend for the office of Conservator to Edinb. College of Surgeons; but let this be as it may I have promised to write you to obtain a favorable consideration for the application of a young man who was formerly a pupil with Mr. Hamlin Lee. He is an intelligent, gentlemanly person, remarkably steady and industrious; and he has devoted himself very much for some time to comparative anatomy and palaeontology as assistant to Dr Mantell.¹ He is well acquainted with the use of the microscope for he has devoted much attention to the study of the infusory animalcules and other minute organisms – I think altogether you would be pleased with him.

I met Dr Patrick Newbigging² ten days ago at your friend Mr Murray’s he tells me you have moved to Hope Street, which is not only a pleasant situation but *convenient* for Morland. I hope all the inhabitants of both places are well — I heard from Dr William [Thomson] the other day, about an edition of W^m Hunter’s works contemplated by the Sydenham Society. Talking of W^m Hunter reminds me (by force

of contrast) of Dr Robert³ here and his uterine nerves⁴ — Mr Beck⁵ has at length sent his paper to the Royal Society, Brodie⁶ presented it. Lee will be quite floored at least in every body's estimation but his own. John Reid was here a short time ago and saw Beck's preparations —

The St. Andrews professors desire to give up the practice of granting Medical Degrees, provided they can get a compensation. It's no use attempting to dragoon them out of it when a hundred pounds or two a year will buy them off — Reid speaks very sensibly on this matter, but complains of the very unwarrantable statements put forth in the *Edinburgh Review*,⁷ with which he found Sir James Graham had been most industriously stuffed. I cannot help still thinking that the accredited representative of the University of Edinburgh should have informed himself better, if he could not refrain from making attacks on other places.

Dr W^m Macdonald dined with me one day last week, I am sorry for him poor fellow. He means to work in Canada at last, unless Sir Rob^t Peel selects him as specially qualified for a Professor in one of the new Irish Colleges.

With kind remembrances to Mrs Allen

believe me

My dear Thomson

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

¹ Gideon Algernon Mantell (1790–1852), physician and geologist, was resident in London after 1839.

² Patrick Newbigging graduated MD in Edinburgh in 1834 and became FRCSE in the same year. He was physician to the John Watson's Institution.

³ I.e., Robert Lee (1793–1877) obstetrician and author of works on midwifery and gynaecology.

⁴ *On the nervous ganglia of the uterus*, London, R. and J. E. Taylor, 1841; reprinted from *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 1841.

⁵ Thomas Snow Beck, 'On the nerves of the uterus', *ibid.*, 1846, pp. 213–35. Sharpey was accused by the *Lancet* of colluding with Beck to demolish the views expressed in Lee's 1841 communication. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, note 2 above (*Introduction*), pp. 244–5.

⁶ Benjamin Collins Brodie (1783–1862), Sergeant-Surgeon to the Queen and Surgeon to St George's Hospital. He had been a Fellow of the Royal Society since 1810.

⁷ See [R. Christison], 'Medical reform', *Edinb. Rev.*, 1845, 81: 235–72.

24

London 29th Oct. 1845

My dear Thomson,

Many thanks for your letter and for your taking the blame of the long interruption to our correspondence on yourself, but honesty compels me to say that the fault lay with me. Your commission shall be executed the moment my brother Alexander, who is at present in Manchester, arrives in London which will be in a day or two.

Our school has opened and in respect of new entries is the same as last year not one above and I believe not more below. This is not saying much, but from what I can learn of the schools generally I believe we may be thankful.

You congratulate me on the prospects of my general anatomy¹ – I wish I could deserve your congratulation. The publishers are determined to bring out the first half of the book in two or three days, but my contribution is barely begun — We have adopted a different paging for the “general anatomy” and there will be little more than the preliminaries now published – viz the generalities in the vital and physical properties and development of the textures and in the blood – so you must not judge it till it is all out, in fact the publication is hastened rather on account of the descriptive anatomy of the bones joints and muscles to serve our students along with Ellis’s book² as a text book for the Session.

I could have offered a classification of the textures, but at present this is all guess work. Classification is not needed in order to *manage* the subject as in the *multitude* of objects of Botany or Zoology, it can only be useful as showing the mutual relation of the textures and really this is too uncertain — In my lectures I am in the habit of giving a classification at the *end* when the relations can be made more intelligible.

The only excuse I can give for the preliminary account of the *more frequently occurring* chemical compounds of the animal body – is simply *convenience*. It is difficult to speak of “osmazone” and the varieties of “fat” etc. *comfortably* without having explained what you mean; the only other alternative was to leave *them out altogether*, and presuppose the knowledge; this I grant is the logical-philosophical view to take but practically the case assumed a different aspect; and by freely employing the smaller form of type on such occasions (for we have adopted a larger and smaller) I think I have kept things in their due subordination which is a greater point in an elementary treatise. To stop your mouth I shall cause a copy to be sent to you.

You once asked me about Martin Barry’s spiral.³ Last summer [. . .] he showed me muscular fibres from the turtles [and] frogs heart which he called double spirals, they had this appearance [see figure 3] which was obviously due to two rows of disks placed a little slantingly – he then brought things like this [drawing here] but these seemed to be threads of cellular tissue — lastly he produced one or two specimens of his own & one which he fished out among mine (of the growing fibre in the tad-pole), mine was not very conclusive though he persisted in thinking so – his own I must freely confess imposed on me; they had this look [drawing here] quite like an opened single spiral, quite the aspect of a *continuous thread*, and obviously part of the muscle — the only difficulty with me was, that only two or three of them could be found after all his searching, and this ought to have put me on my guard, and moreover they appeared far more distinct in his microscope than with mine, – *but there they were* & I could not see any fallacy; it occurred to me therefore that the filaments might originally be a spiral thread which got afterwards broken up into disks or rings as Mohl⁴ supposes to happen in the formation of annular ducts in vegetables – & that this might account for their being only exceptional in their occurrence for without doubt the muscular filaments generally were composed of series of disks or segments. *So I was deceived* and I will never again give an opinion on specimens that I have not leisurely examined, at home and by myself, repeatedly; that is, in doubtful cases. At length on looking at a specimen of pig’s muscle in one of Powells microscopes the following appeared – two fibrillae or filaments lay close together [drawing here, see figure 4] *when in focus* they appeared made up of light and dark segments which alternated in position in the two

month I shall cause a copy to be sent to you -

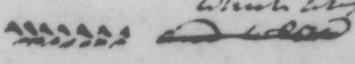
You once asked me about Martin Bury's spirals. Last summer two worms he showed me muscular fibres from the lenticular fringes he called double spirals, they had this appearance  ^{which may} ~~be called~~ obviously due to two rows of disks placed a little slantingly - he then brought things like this . but then seemed to be threads of celluloid paper - lastly he produced one or two specimens of his own & one which he fished out among mine (of the group fibres in the tad-pole), mine was not my conclusion though he persisted in thinking so - his own I must freely confess imposed on me; they had this look . quite like an ~~opened~~ opened single spiral, quite the aspect of a continuous thread, and obviously part of the muscle - the only difficulty with me was, that only two or three of them could be found after all his searching, and this ought to have put

Figure 3.

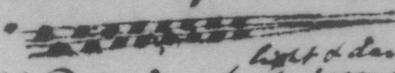
me on my guard, and ~~therefore~~ they
 appeared far more distinct in his microscope
 than with mine, - but then they were &
 I could not see any fallacy; it occurred
 to me therefore that the filament might
 originally be a spiral thread which got
 afterward broken up into disks, or rings
 as Mohl supposes to happen in the for-
 mation of annular ducts in vegetables.
 & that this might account for their
 being only exceptional in their occurrence
 for without doubt the ~~of~~ muscular
 filaments generally were composed of
 series of disks or segments. So I was
decided. and I will now again give an
 opinion on specimens that I have not
 leisurely examined, at home and by
 myself, repeatedly; that is, in doubtful
 cases. At length on looking at a speci-
 men of pig's muscle in one of Powell's
 microscope this following appeared. two
 fibrillae or filaments lay close together -

 when in focus they
 appeared made up of ^{light & dark} segments ~~of~~ which al-

Figure 4.

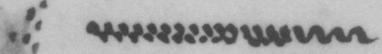
Letter 24

fibrils, on slightly moving the object out of focus the segments of the two fibrils coalesced and the two appeared as one thread coiled into a spiral or helix [drawing here, see figure 5.]

I immediately requested the Quaker to submit his specimens to one of Powells best instruments, which we did in Powell's presence, and tho' the result was not so clear as in the instance stated, it sufficed to convince me that these two or three examples Barry had found of apparent spirals were really owing to the cause just mentioned. [drawing here] [T]his was the sort of thing, and then it was quite clear that there were *two fibrils* present, which it is but fair to say, Barry had previously held to be the case. The appearance is most deceptive when one fibril comes to lie somewhat over the other & when you see the segments of the one through the interstices of the segments of the other; the slanting direction greatly helping the illusion.

But since then my eyes have been a little opened to the quality of the Doctors investigations — I had occasion for a particular object carefully to peruse his extraordinary papers on cells in the Phil. trans. and to *reperuse* all his older ones on the ovum.⁵ They are full of extravagances. I never gave in to his notion of the generation of a filament in the blood corpuscle. The appearance he described always appeared to me to be due to corrugation — And I must tell you a little anecdote, which at the time I rather chose to speak of only to friends as the poor Quaker was being worried by that cankered little cat Wharton Jones and I thought there was quite enough to overwhelm him without my lending a hand. The story was this. Barry one day brought a doe rabbit to the College to show me the wonderful spontaneous movement of the blood corpuscles which he had discovered *at a certain stage after the coitus*, and which of *course* Dr. Carpenter⁶ had adduced as proof of an inherent vital contractility of the red disks &c. &c. &c. The beast was killed and opened and the Dr. carefully *scraped* a little blood from the end of the fallopian tube and surface of the ovary, then displayed it under his microscope (for he carried his famous Schilck in a blue camlet bag through the streets) and desired me to look and wonder. I looked and sure enough there were the globules dancing and behaving themselves in the most ridiculous way like the fellows in a pantomime, indeed just as they are elaborately represented in their different phases in the Philosophical Transactions. But I had not looked a minute when I saw clearly the whole was owing to cilia — and indeed I could see the films of ciliated epithelium with the cilia moving on them, and it was only where they were seen that the blood disks were dancing. The epithelium was transparent & Barry could not see it or the cilia — I called Marshall⁷ (the young man of [the] H[unterian]. Museum) & he saw them plainly enough, the Doctor was not charmed. I pointed out that where the field was quite free from cilia and quite transparent the corpuscles were quiet — No says the Dr. I once myself thought it was an affair of cilia but I satisfied myself it was otherwise — Depend on it says I you'll find the motion in any she rabbit you choose whether she has had the benefit of the male or not, but there is a frog in the next room, let us put some frog's blood on the same spot as the rabbit's blood and see what will happen. The frog's blood corpuscles are mixed with the other on the field of the microscope, and they are also kicked about like the others, though not so much distorted and disfigured, for they are larger and stiffer — The Doctor does not see it at first, but at last admits that they are served in the same way — and in the end he turns to

turned in position in the two fibrils,
 on slightly ~~dis~~ moving the object out
 of focus the segments of the two fibrils
 coalesced and the two appeared as one
 then ~~wild~~ into a spiral or helix.



I immediately requested the Quaker to sub:
 mit his specimens to one of Powell's
 best instruments, which he did in
 Powell's presence, and tho' the result
 was not so clear as in the instance
 stated, it sufficed to convince me
 that the two or three examples Barry
 had found of apparent spirals were
 really owing to the cause just men:
 tioned. ~~was~~ this was the sort of thing, and
 then it was quite clear that there were
two fibrils present, which it is ~~truly~~
 fair to say, Barry had previously held to
 be the case. The appearance is most decep:
 tive when one fibril comes to lie some:
 what over the other & when you see the
 segments of the one through the interstices
 of the segments of the other; the slanting

Figure 5.

Marshall and says, that if he was to be corrected he was very happy to be put right by Dr. Sharpey – & there the matter ended; but I have heard it rumoured that the phenomenon has since been shown by the Dr. or his adherents in the Borough,⁸ on the original footing, and if this information be correct I infer he may have seen reason to return to his published opinion again.

What startled me was, that a person who has been so long and so exclusively working at minute inquiries, who is a draughtsman into the bargain; should not have seen the ciliated epithelium which to my eye was strikingly obvious at the very first sight — But I fear that he is led wrong by an inordinately ambitious desire to *discover*; he is a fearful spectacle of morbid craving for scientific distinction, and while in other respects I like the Quaker, you cannot conceive what a perfect loathing I now feel for that species of vanity.

I hope that the good Doctor does not know it, but I fear I have been the first to put a check on his papers in the Philosophical Transactions — He read a long memoir last winter, almost wholly speculative – and founded on what I thought erroneous observations, with a repetition of or reference to his old errors. The committee of the Society I suppose wished to wash their hands of it, for they sent it to me for an opinion; I could not deny that there were some probable enough speculations in it, some which accorded at least with facts observed by other inquirers; and amongst such a heap of random shots as the Quaker fired it was possible that some would tell in the end; but I could not recommend it for publication. Several statements in it indeed obviously rested on a misinterpretation of the things seen. The Doctor learned that the committee (who adopted my report) declined to recommend it and withdrew his paper. *This is entre nous.*

The little bit of examination duty Mr Naylor referred to, is that of comparative anatomy for the Assistant Surgeony in the E. India Co' service that is to be conferred by competition in the College next summer. The College is too poor to afford what they would deem a proper remuneration to a man like you, but if you would be willing to come and spend a few days with us, I have no doubt they will get something over paying your expenses, besides having the pleasure of laying us under an obligation to you — I suppose your article ovum wont be printed till then, & if so I have an embryo – between the one you described (of Reids) and the little one figured by Miller. The vertebral canal has just closed but burst open again, or perhaps it has never been completely closed — The amnios was entire but I opened it as well as the yolk sac.

[Drawing here, see figure 6]

I still intend giving some description of it, but if it cant be done sooner I believe I must let you figure it in your articles — So if you come up I promise you it will make your mouth water —

But my own mouth has watered ever since I received your very interesting account of your brother William's excavations – the moment I read your letter I remembered that Haller⁹ in the sketch he gives of his own life, mentions that when he was in London in 1727 Dr Ja^s Douglas¹⁰ was very kind to him and offered to associate him in an undertaking he himself was then engaged in namely a great work on the bones and joints. Haller adds that he saw in Douglas's possession an immense number of preparations of bones sawed up in various directions, joints preserved in salt water &

Letter 24

expresses his regret that the result of Douglas's labours had perished — No doubt your brother's very interesting discovery explains their fate — possibly [William] Hunter has purchased them with others of Douglas's effects¹¹ — One is reminded of the famous resurrection of Eustachian's tubes, by Lancisi, after being buried thro' [a] century and a half —

I did not reckon on so long a fit of scribbling when I began — I hope you will be able to read it

With best regards to Mrs Allen & all the rest I am

My dear Thomson

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

As you refer to the Alchemist¹² I may just remark (tho' the thing is stale now) that the London Chemists (I dont mean Graham) think he is cracked. *He* came up last winter with a letter of introduction to Damill begging him to undertake an investigation of the doctrines; but he hovered about the class room for about a week & then presented himself and it was observed that he seemed rather thankful than otherwise when Damill excused himself from meddling with the affair — I wish Graham had not meddled either, and had let the all sufficient wisdom of the thirty three [i.e., the Edinburgh Town Council] bring about its legitimate effects.

I never heard of such infatuation as seems to have possessed otherwise sensible people — Would not *common sense* have told them that had there been an atom of truth in Brown's extraordinary results, they would have been blazed abroad all over Europe by now? Did [Humphry] Davy need to go begging of chemists to verify his discovery of the alkaline metals? — It is true it might be said that Brown was an obscure young man & in a very different position from Davy, but he was backed by Christison and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, though Christison seems to me now to show symptoms of *backing out* — I dont find fault with a mistake. The best men will be occasionally mistaken, it is the obstinate, conceited, self sufficient perseverance in it — and the senseless outcry that Chemists wont attend to his discoveries and above all the stupid obstinacy of the Town Council;¹³ the only legitimate conclusion from the disregard of the alleged discoveries, is that they are not worth regarding — but I dont doubt that trials have been made in most laboratories of Europe in [. . .] of the sanction of the Royal Society — but trials which soon showed it was unnecessary to go farther. — But I am on dangerous ground, and I daresay Brown may not only be a clever but a very good fellow tho' he *deceived* [?] *my brother* in his dread of anticipation.

WS

¹ I.e., Sharpey's contribution to the fifth edition of Quain's *Anatomy*, op. cit., note 20.10 above.

² George Viner Ellis, *Demonstrations of anatomy; being a guide to the knowledge of the human body by dissection*, London, Taylor and Walton, 1840.

³ Martin Barry (1802–55), one of the British pioneers in the use of the achromatic microscope, lecturer in physiology at St Thomas's Hospital from 1843 to 1845. Barry published an article 'On fibre', *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 1842, Pt. 1, pp. 89–135, which held that fibres were made up of spiral filaments.

Letter 25

⁴ Hugo von Mohl (1805–72), German microscopist who did important research on the structure of the vegetable cell.

⁵ 'Researches in embryology. First series', *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 1838, Pt. 1, pp. 301–41; 'Researches in embryology. Second series', *ibid.*, 1839, Pt. 1, pp. 307–80; 'Researches in embryology. Third series: a contribution to the physiology of cells', *ibid.*, 1840, Pt. 1, pp. 529–93; 'On the corpuscles of the blood', *ibid.*, pp. 595–612; 'On the corpuscles of the blood—Part II', *ibid.*, 1841, Pt. 1, pp. 201–68; 'On the corpuscles of the blood—Part III', *ibid.*, Pt. 2, pp. 217–68.

⁶ William Benjamin Carpenter (1813–85), Professor of Forensic Medicine at University College London and author of numerous textbooks. A letter from Carpenter to Barry is printed in *ibid.*, pp. 228–9.

⁷ John Marshall (1818–91), Demonstrator of Anatomy at University College London.

⁸ I.e., the Borough Hospitals, Guy's and St Thomas's.

⁹ Albrecht von Haller (1708–77), Swiss anatomist and physiologist.

¹⁰ James Douglas (1675–1742), London anatomist and man-midwife.

¹¹ The referent of these statements is obscure. They seem to imply that William Thomson had identified some of the preparations in the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow as derived from Douglas's collection. Thomson had in 1839 conducted a survey of the Hunterian Museum: see Coutts, *op. cit.*, note 28 above (*Introduction*), pp. 515–6.

¹² I.e., Samuel Brown (1817–56), a chemist who held unorthodox views on the isomerism of certain substances.

¹³ The Edinburgh Town Council had, in 1843, refused to appoint Brown to the Chair of Chemistry.

25

London, 27th Dec^r 1845

35 Gloucester Crescent

My dear Thomson,

I only got your letter yesterday – as I did not happen to call at the College on Christmas day.

The private nature of your communication precludes me from consulting with any one here, and I scarcely regret it, because among my few intimate acquaintances here it would be difficult to find a fit counsellor in the circumstances — Imagine yourself for a moment away from Edinburgh and then you will be the best friend I can advise with.

I feel comfortable and satisfied here in the mean time, and I must say that residence in London as such – though in a humble quiet way such as I am in, has much to reconcile one to the absence of old friends and early associations, and assuredly unless Edinburgh were to me very different indeed to what it would be to a stranger I would scarcely change my present position for mere pecuniary advantages were they much greater.

My income from my class last year was £530, it will not be less this year – from this sum must be deducted £50 which I contribute towards the pay of the Demonstrators — Then I receive £175 as Examiner at the University of Lond. Thus £530 – £50 + £175 = £655. Such is my present emolument here — From your account I gather that in Edinburgh it might be securely reckoned as at least as much if not something more. Still were my present income secure the difference of amount would not be worth the change – but I cannot expect to continue much longer as Examiner, and again, looking still further forward I do not see what is to come of one in London as he approaches the close of his career – you enable a man to retire but we have no means of doing so, and *I* cannot save money.

Letter 25

I confess were I twenty years younger or had I even my London life to begin again I don't know that I should not prefer London, because past experience would suggest a more profitable line of proceeding, & in London resources are within reach of an active man which are denied him in Edinburgh — But in actual circumstances I am disposed to think that Edinburgh would be a better place for me — A man in my position in London ought to lay himself out for Medical appointments, he ought to *pretend* at least to practice & try to secure an Insurance Office or two by which he might have some £500 a year addition without a great deal of trouble. This is what I would do had I to begin again —

I shall say nothing about the kindness of my Edinburgh friends but keep to business & therefore I tell you directly that if you could manage to save me from entering the field as a candidate I should be happy to become Dr. Monro's successor¹ on the terms you mention. But I have a great aversion to being a party in an Edinburgh contested election and I think on consideration of my present position & the duty I owe to University College, my desire to avoid a competition will not be looked on as arrogant. Indeed the Council ought to see that if they desire men already tried in other places, they must smooth the way for them.

I have some other things to ask you about — especially as to the Practical Anatomy Class and as to Goodsir's position.² Supposing I had the Chair what is he to do? I should have great objection to a totally independent demonstrator and it is clear that with Goodsir's talent and pursuits he could not long continue as a mere subordinate — Is there any chance of Jameson's³ multifarious subjects being broke up (into two at least) — when his Chair becomes vacant. Comparative Anatomy and Zoology — for one and Mineralogy, Geology and Physical Geography for the other — Were this done Goodsir would be the man for the first.

The second part of the Anatomy will be out in a few days — the General Anatomy is not yet completed — These things grow on one in the working, and I have been led to treat the subject more fully than I intended — especially *Bone* in which I wished to introduce the results of pretty extensive observations of my own & this could not be done with clearness unless at some length. For the Brain also I am responsible. A young friend took notes of my Lectures on the Brain as a basis, with this he incorporated something more from sources which I indicated & then I finally put his MS into its present shape — There is *nothing new in it*, but I think it contains a fair account of what is known & it is well illustrated with figures. The part would have appeared this week but that the printers wont work in the holidays — I am busy on the sequel —

With best wishes of the season your sincere friend

W Sharpey

[On the back of the envelope:] Let me hear again before you let my resolution be known beyond trustworthy friends.

¹ I.e., in the Edinburgh Chair of Anatomy.

² John Goodsir had assisted Monro as demonstrator in the teaching of the anatomy course since 1844.

³ Robert Jameson (1774–1854), Professor of Natural History at Edinburgh.

26

London, 11th February 1846

My dear Syme,

When I definitely communicated to Dr. A. Thomson my views as to removing from London, I had fully considered my position and prospects here and came deliberately to the opinion that it would be right for me to embrace the opportunity of passing the remainder of my days in the scene of my early exertions among attached & old friends and in a most honourable station. In adopting my resolution I believed that I had considered every possible contingency & I felt confident that as I was not activated by light considerations there was not the remotest probability of anything occurring to shake it. It is true that from the confidential nature of our correspondence I was debarred from communicating with those about me but I confidently believed that the announcement of my determination would be met merely with strong remonstrances and these I had fully made up my mind to withstand. These were my sentiments as you well know when I last wrote you and when I received the Lord Provost's letter on Monday last week & I merely meditated a suitable reply to be at once sent off to a communication which held out a fair prospect of my translation to Edinburgh being accomplished in the way most agreeable to me.

It appeared to me right however when matters had arrived at that point to let my Colleagues here know (in Confidence) my intentions. I felt it would be wrong then to keep them in ignorance of it & at their earnest request I agreed to delay giving a final answer for a few days. You were not wrong in attributing this solely to a feeling of what was due to courtesy for I had not the remotest idea that the College *could* if it would do anything to interfere with my resolution. Suggestions of advantage were made to me but they were *such as I had foreseen* and therefore were not such as could warrant a change. There happened to be an ordinary meeting of our Council on Saturday but I positively refused to allow any of these suggested conceptions to be proposed to them, for I abhorred the thought of its being supposed that I should make the advantageous prospects held out to me elsewhere a ground of demands on the resources of the College which I knew it could ill afford & which though granted could in no way alter my resolution which as I said was not taken on light considerations. On Friday morning therefore I told my friends here again that as I had made up my mind I wished to be at rest concerning the matter and I went home with the intention of writing off to the Lord Provost that evening, I then found the enclosed letter¹ waiting me which I send not for the purpose of convincing you of my sincerity but as a testimony to others who do not know me. On Saturday and Sunday I felt at ease in the belief that I had passed the ordeal, for I assure you, it was one to resist such solicitations (especially from Graham) but on Monday I had the Council to encounter & on that day also a prospective arrangement was urged on me which will have the effect of increasing my income by one half with a present improvement in the mean time. This was a proposal I could never have calculated on, at least it never for a moment entered into my calculations & it *alters my situation* here so very materially that I think I ought not to move & I must write the Lord Provost accordingly.²

I already feel to the full how much you and Thomson may reproach me — “Why” — you will say — “did you allow us to urge on arrangements up to the very last & then disappoint us”. The only reply I can give is that up to the very last I

Letter 27

looked forward with satisfaction to the accomplishment of the same object. For whatever may now seem amiss the blame must rest with me, this letter must be your justification. But so distracted did I feel this afternoon that I had almost written to you inclosing two letters to the Provost, one accepting, the other declining, & placing myself at your mercy to give in which you should think right after explaining to you what had occurred to alter my views; but then I felt that I would be using the University of Edinburgh but indifferently well to occupy its Chair in such a mind; it would damp my very best efforts & be a source of distress to me & I sincerely believe also to you for long after.

But after all allowance for the mischief which I might have been answerable for, I would venture to hope that none of any moment is likely to arise. It is quite plain that Dr. Monro could not have gone on another session; that it will be greatly to the advantage of the Univ^{ty} that he has resigned & that by resigning at this season a longer time is allowed for eligible candidates to come forward. It is clear moreover that, *whoever* may succeed him nothing could have been more pernicious to the Univ^{ty} than binding the successor to any serious extent with retiring allowance, & the Lord Provost in his letter to me expressed his conviction that the Patrons would never consent to it, & I feel quite assured that nothing can tell better for the University *out of Edinburgh* than the recognition of a better principle in regard to retiring allowances. Pray be so kind as to show this letter to Thomson & ask him to excuse me writing another such. I can only further express to you how deeply I have felt the kind friendship of both, and my present sorrow that I should seem to have so ill requited it.

Yours &c
(Signed) W Sharpey

¹ See the next letter.

² There is no mention of Sharpey in the minutes of the Council meeting of Saturday 7 February. Richard Quain did, however, attend a meeting of the College's Committee of Management on 11 February, the day that Sharpey wrote to Syme. At this meeting Quain urged that steps be taken to persuade Sharpey to remain in London. On the following day an arrangement was proposed whereby Quain would surrender a portion of the teaching of the Descriptive Anatomy class to Sharpey. The latter attended on the Committee of Management meeting of 12 February and said that he had notified the Lord Provost of Edinburgh of his refusal of the Chair of Anatomy. The Committee guaranteed Sharpey an additional £150 per annum until the new arrangements regarding the anatomy class could be implemented. See: University College London Records Office, University of London Council Minutes, 1843–53, vol. 4, Session of Council, Saturday 7 February 1846; Committee of Management Minutes, vol. 3, Wednesday 11 February 1846: 'Chair of anatomy and Physiology. Mr Quain's communication'; *ibid.*, 12 February 1846: 'Chair of Anatomy'.

27

Friday afternoon. [6 February 1846]

Dear Sharpey,

You will I suppose adhere to your intention of yesterday not to send a definitive answer to Scotland before next [*sic*] & I send this note lest by any chance you should not adhere to that notwithstanding. Be so good then as to omit sending till the time you intended (next week).

Signed R. Quain.

28

To the Lord Provost of Edin^b.

London 11th Feb. 1846

My Lord,

When I wrote y^r Lord^p on Wednesday last I had made up my mind to accept the profess^p of Anat. in the Univ. of Ed. sh^d the Patrons see fit to honour me with an offer of the Chair and if I delayed giving a final answer to that effect, it was solely from a feeling of courtesy which I conceived to be due to my Colleagues & the Council of the Univ. Coll. on such an occasion & assuredly with no expectation that any thing could occur in the interval to alter my resolution.

Since then however arrangements quite unforeseen by me have been proposed which very materially alter my position here and which will prevent me from leaving London.

Desiring to express how deeply sensible I am of the consideration with w^h I have been honoured by your Lordship I remain

My Lord your very obed. Serv.

W.S.

29

London 9th March 1846

My dear Thomson,

I am so glad to hear from you again that I cannot refrain from sending you a line or two in reply on the spur of the moment. I can readily grasp the effect that my letter (to Syme) would have on him and you, but I assure you that had you been here and could you have appreciated my feelings at the time & for some time after, you would have been disposed to reply to me in any other rather than an angry tone.

The subject is to me a painful one and I can now only beg of you to accept of the letter I wrote to Syme as equally intended for yourself —

I am glad you have rec^d the second part of the Anatomy. I regret I should have given cause for Dr. Alison's animadversions for I entertain so great an esteem for him in every respect that I should feel much concerned at exposing myself to his criticism in any serious matter.¹ I have long since passed through the stage of life in which one is seriously disturbed by what are called attacks coming from frivolous or contentious men though I am free to confess that like others I am not indifferent to censure from any quarter; but Alison is a man whom I almost venerate on account of his active and *intrepid* benevolence in the cause of the suffering poor, and esteem greatly for his honesty and kindly disposition independently of his merits in science.

Todd spoke to me of your article and promised to send me the proofs but he has not yet done so — it will be a pleasure to me to look it over and offer my suggestions, but I fear I can add nothing or rather I should say I feel assured that nothing from me would add to its excellence.

I have never said anything against the granular structure of bone. All I know is that the lamellae of the soft part are made up of reticular fibres; how the *earth* is connected

with them I don't profess to know — I see granules in growing bone clearly enough — sometimes very large as in the leg metatarsus of young salamander larvae — I believe nature can calcify *anything* & sometimes she proceeds with little ceremony as in some diseased ossifications and in encroaching on articular cartilage — which I call a *crude form* of the process — see what I have said at the foot of page CLVIII —

I have been asked by more than one of the Candidates for a Testimonial — but in actual circumstances I have resolved not to interfere in any way even by the expression of an opinion on the merits of the Parties by the usual form of Testimonial — I have no doubt you will get an able and efficient professor —

I have read Steenstrup² (some three or four years ago) his observations are so far to the same effect as those of Sars³ &c — and perhaps susceptible of more interpretations than one in the present state of knowledge. If you would like it I will send you a loan of the book by the Bookseller's parcel — Has not Van Beneden⁴ denied the correctness of Goodsir's doctrine respecting the male of the Barnacles? I heard part of a paper of Goodsir's read in the Royal Society a few weeks ago — on the origin of the so called vascular glands — at least the Thymus Thyroid & Supra-renal⁵ — I did not quite understand what he had seen but I can scarcely form an opinion till I see the paper or an abstract of it. He seems to adopt Reichert's⁶ *membrana intermedia* — at least he uses the term. I have no confidence in Reichert as an expositor of things observed, nor in his reasonings respecting them; and I hope to learn you will be able to save us in your "Ovum" from an infliction of the Reichertian system.

The universal opinion here is that the Government is very shaky. I would not give much for the purchase of Sir J. Graham's patronage against even old Jeffray's lip — so I don't think anybody can be cock-sure of Glasgow. Were there a turn-about I have no doubt you would cut all out. Lord John [Russell] would give it you at once. If you did not get it I should next like to see Wharton Jones in it — he has worked hard and although he has been unwise in getting into scientific controversies which excite people against him he is a man of great merit.

With sincere regards to your own Mrs Thomson as well as to your father and mother I am

Your sincere friend
WS.

¹ These "animadversions" may have concerned an earlier dispute between Sharpey and Alison over the interpretation of some of the latter's views on the spontaneous motion of the blood. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, note 2 above (*Introduction*), p. 146.

² Johannes Iapetus Smith Steenstrup (1813–97), Danish biologist.

³ Michael Sars (1805–69), Norwegian marine biologist.

⁴ Pierre Joseph van Beneden (1809–94), Belgian zoologist.

⁵ John Goodsir, 'On the supra-renal, thymus, and thyroid bodies', *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 1846, pp. 633–42.

⁶ Karl Bogislaus Reichert (1811–83), German embryologist and comparative anatomist.

30

35 Gloucester Crescent, London

23^d Dec^r 1846

My dear Thomson,

Would you kindly look at the inclosed note and kindly aid the Medical & Chir[surgical]. Society in attaining their object.

It is a most uncommon thing for me to find myself in a position to complain of my friends being behind hand in their correspondence – but so it is at this moment – I have not heard from you or Syme for an age —

I can scarcely think of anything at present worth writing you that you do not know already —

Our classes at the Univ^y College (I mean the Medical) are much the same as last year on the whole – but with 6 or 7 fewer entries. Bartholomew's I am told has 3 or 4 more new ones this year than last. King's much as they were – with no increase. The Borough Schools fallen off.

Have you seen Weber (E.H.)'s Paper on the vestiges of female structure in the male generative organs – and on other topics connected with the reproductive function?¹

Theile's article on the Anatomy of the Liver in Wagner's Handwörterbuch is worth looking into.² Amongst other things it contains a curious account of the mucous glands of the biliary ducts. I have been lately examining these funny glands & I find Theile's account quite true – I did not inject the ducts – indeed that is not requisite.

A queer but yet a promising practice has just been tried here of stupefying patients by the inhalation of vapour of Sulphuric Ether in order to render them insensible during surgical operations – Liston cut off a man's thigh in the [University College] Hospital on Monday while the individual was under the influence of Ether – I did not see the operation but I am assured the man felt nothing. [I]t is true that the leg was whipped off quick enough – but the patient had got back to his bed before he felt any pain.³ — I suspect however that inhalation of Ether vapour if long continued or repeated at short intervals may in indiscreet hands do mischief by causing bronchitis – at least I am aware of this happening with more than one student who has tried it as a substitute for laughing gas.

I believe the Ether is inhaled off water by means of a vessel and pipe resembling a hookah – the water frees it from the sulphuric acid with which it is liable to be contaminated.

The use of ether for the above purpose is I understand a Yankee invention – the suggestor of it a Mr. Bigelow⁴ of whose name you must have heard.

Let me know whether the proposed free trade modifications of your Statuta have been adopted⁵ – whether they are as yet in operation & what is the promise. I wrote to Syme on the subject a good while ago – expressing my persuasion of the necessity of bringing up the fee to that of the University but also of the great practical difficulty of enforcing the observation of such a condition unless the private teachers agree to appoint a Receiver. Even then I fear *some classes* will not be in a fair position for Grinders⁶ will give tickets for Lectures on certain subjects – Materia Medica – Med. Jurisprudence – Pathology or even Physiology, and if they charge full price for these

tickets the holders of them will have some compensating abatement or privilege as grinding Pupils – I fear they will be too slippery for you —

Can you suggest any book or books, old or new, for the Sydenham Society? Their edition of Hewson by Gulliver,⁷ tho' his annotations refer to matters of detail, you will I think find useful – Gulliver has taken immense pains to have his references correct. As a general rule however I am rather averse to annotating works, especially of older writers. With Hewson it is well enough, for really excepting in the chemical history of the blood, which indeed he does not treat, he is a better guide than many of our own day. But writers a century or two gone by – cannot be made new by means of notes – any notes therefore to such old books should be merely explanatory or occasionally critical – never supplementary – and in any case annotation can only be trusted to a very discreet Editor –

With best regards to Mrs Allen
believe me My dear Thomson
Your sincere friend
W Sharpey

¹ Ernst Heinrich Weber, 'Zusätze zur Lehre vom Baue und von den Verrichtungen des Geschlechtsorgane', *Arch. Anat. Physiol. wiss. Med.*, 1846, pp. 421–8.

² [Friedrich Wilhelm] Theile, 'Leber', in Rudolph Wagner (ed.), *Handwörterbuch der Physiologie mit Rücksicht auf physiologische Pathologie*, 4 vols. in 5, Brunswick, F. Vieweg, 1842–53, vol. 2, pp. 308–62.

³ This is a singularly offhand account of the first British use of anaesthesia in a surgical operation.

⁴ Henry Jacob Bigelow (1818–90), the American surgeon associated with the first use of anaesthesia in an operation at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston in 1846.

⁵ These remarks seem to refer to a proposal considered by the Senate of Edinburgh University in 1845 that the lectures of extra-mural teachers should count toward graduation in the same way as those of University Professors: see *College Minutes*, op. cit., note 20.8 above, 1844–55, vol. 4, pp. 65–7. The Town Council accepted this proposal despite the University's opposition. Lengthy litigation followed, which culminated in a decision against the University by the House of Lords in 1854. See: *ibid.*, 1855–61, vol. 1, pp. 429–30 for a summary of the affair.

⁶ I.e., the tutors who provided intensive instruction to Edinburgh students prior to examinations.

⁷ George Gulliver (ed.), *The works of William Hewson, F.R.S.*, London, Sydenham Society, 1846.

31

My dear Sharpey,

The Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinb. are in the library of the Medical and Chirurgical Socy. up to vol ix part (1821) and we now think of completing the series. The Publishers of the last part we have are W. & C. Tait.

Can the volumes wanting be procured at a reduced price? — Will you be so good as to give any information on the subject, or if you cannot do so from your own knowledge will you oblige me by writing to Dr A. Thomson respecting this matter — We also in the quest of completing the set, would wish to continue to procure the vols. as they come out. May this object be attained by exchanging the Med: & Chirurg. trans. for the Trans. of the Royal Socy. of Edinb. — The answer would depend on the wish of the Royal Socy —

Letter 32

Will you do what is needful as soon as possible. The facts to be ascertained are
1st. The first price of the vols. wanting.
2nd. The price at which we may procure them.
3rd. If the Socy in Edinb. are likely to exchange Trans. on application being made by us —

Yours mo. truly
R. Quain

23 Dec 46 35 Gloucester Crescent, London

32

16th March 1847

Private

My dear Thomson,

I know you are a friend of Sir W^m Hamilton¹ and I think I heard lately that you were attending him professionally.² My colleague Mr. De Morgan³ has been corresponding in a friendly way with him upon some question in Logic, and from a letter from Sir. W^m which I saw today I am sorry to find that the upshot has been that Sir W^m. is seized with the notion that De Morgan has availed himself of disclosures in this correspondence to appropriate to himself certain original views belonging to Sir William. Now from all I know of De Morgan I feel quite assured that Sir W^m must be labouring under a misapprehension. De Morgan feels he must go on and is going on with the publication of what he conceives belongs to him and must take his chance of the consequences, in the mean time he writes Sir W^m to say that in the mean time he abstains from further correspondence by private letters on the subject.⁴

I write you this privately, to inform you that (although Sir W^m's letter is really *something beyond* a plain spoken one) De Morgan is activated by no pettish spirit in avoiding private controversy – he feels that in the end it must become public if Sir W^m persists in his persuasion. and that this persuasion on Sir W^m's part – erroneous as De Morgan conceives it to be – is no reason why De M. should forego his claim to what he considers his due.

De Morgan spoke with me to day about the matter and I know he is distressed especially at any angry misunderstanding at present knowing that Sir W^m Hamilton has barely recovered from a serious illness — He applied to him for information on certain points in the History of Logic because he knows & believes him to be incomparably the most learned man in that and in kindred subjects not in this country merely but of all men in existence. De Morgan had been long engaged with the “syllogism” before he applied to Sir W^m.

I write to you *privately* to give you an idea of the feelings De Morgan has on the subject and in the hope that if Sir William should possibly speak with you on the matter you may at least restrain Sir W^m's naturally impetuous tho' honest disposition from doing any thing hastily and rashly. A cool judicious friend might do much good in this matter.⁵

I had a copy of your Father's Biographical memoir for which I have to thank Dr William [Thomson].⁶ I am much pleased with it, but I fear that no memorial of your Father will well convey to them who had not the happiness to know him any adequate idea of the *personal* form and influence of his presence and conversation and oral instruction – above all his unquenchable enthusiasm in favorite pursuit. I can fancy I trace your Sister's hand in some passages — What a piece of meddling fastidiousness in Chambers⁷ to go out of his way about the letter to Lord Lauderdale⁸ – I should be glad to know how many of those that heard him (of whom I was not one) could have with any face pretended that they had rigidly observed the rule he professed to lay down! — He forgot that Lord Lauderdale was something more to your father than a “lay man” —

Would you be good enough to look at John Hunter's figures of the incubated Egg in Vol 5 of the Catalogue of the Hunterian Museum and explain what you understand by the representation of a layer of amnion reflected over the yolk-sac and another over the allantois – both different from the general continuation of the peripheral part of the serous layer or false amnios.

In Plate 75 Fig. 1 it is marked c and b.

Have you seen Pouchet's recent book & figures on the periodical separation of ova?⁹

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

¹ William Hamilton (1788–1856), Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh.

² This is the only reference in the correspondence to Thomson being engaged in medical practice. Hamilton had in 1844 suffered a paralytic attack from which he never fully recovered.

³ Augustus de Morgan (1806–71), Professor of Mathematics at University College London.

⁴ In November 1846 de Morgan read a tract ‘On the structure of the syllogism’ before the Cambridge Philosophical Society; he developed the arguments contained in this paper in his *Formal logic*, published in the following year. De Morgan had corresponded with Hamilton about the history of the Aristotelian theory of the syllogism and the latter accused de Morgan of plagiarizing his ideas.

⁵ Sharpey and Thomson's efforts at mediation in this dispute are recorded in several subsequent letters in the collection: Sharpey to Thomson, 1 April 1847; Thomson to Sharpey, 5 April 1847 (with a letter from Hamilton); Sharpey to Thomson, 8 April 1847. Only the last of these long letters is reproduced here because, although of some interest to historians of philosophy, they do not bear upon the principal themes of the Sharpey-Thomson correspondence. These letters make it possible to identify Sharpey and Thomson as the anonymous “friends” in Edinburgh and London referred to by both protagonists in the dispute: Augustus de Morgan, *Statement in answer to an assertion made by Sir William Hamilton, Bart., Professor of Logic in the University of Edinburgh*, London, Richard and John E. Turner, 1847, p. 6; William Hamilton, *A letter to Augustus de Morgan Esq. of Trinity College Cambridge, Professor of Mathematics in University College, London, as to his claim to an independent re-discovery of a new principle in the syllogism*, London and Edinburgh, Longman, 1847, pp. 39–40.

⁶ William Thomson, *Notice of some of the leading events in the life of the late Dr John Thomson, F.R.S.L. & E., formerly Professor of Surgery to the Royal College of Surgeons, and of Military Surgery, and more recently Professor of General Pathology in the University*, Edinburgh, Stark, 1847. Taken from *Edinb. med. surg. J.*, 1847, 67: 131–93.

⁷ Presumably, the Edinburgh publisher and writer Robert Chambers (1802–71). Apparently a reference to John Thomson's letter to Lauderdale written in 1830 discussing what was to prove the terminal illness of George IV: it was reproduced on pp. 184–5 of William Thomson's life of his father in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*. Chambers apparently questioned the propriety of John Thomson discussing clinical questions with a “lay man”.

⁸ James Maitland, eighth Earl of Lauderdale (1759–1839), Whig politician and author. He met John Thomson in Edinburgh in the winter of 1799–1800; the two founded a chemistry class, which met in Thomson's house, for gentlemen associated with Parliament House. In 1806, during the short-lived Whig ministry, Lauderdale was instrumental in securing John Thomson's appointment as Professor of Military Surgery at Edinburgh University.

⁹ Félix Archimède Pouchet, *Théorie positive d'ovulation spontanée et de la fécondation des mammifères et de l'espèce humaine, basée sur l'observation de toute la série animale*, Paris, J. B. Baillière, 1847.

33

Your Brother W^m is in London, and is to take dinner with me at 6.

London 8th April 1847

My dear Thomson,

I am obliged to write you very hurriedly in reply to your long & perspicacious letter —

I of course know that a man's belief is or ought to be the result of his conviction, & that he cannot alter it according to his will. So long therefore as Sir W^m H. retains his sense of the evidence before him it would be absurd to expect an alteration in his belief — He may consider his allegations as not made and not written — that of course is all he can do — to say his belief was changed while his conviction derived from the evidence before him remains unchanged would be to say what was not the fact. For a like reason I can hardly think Mr De Morgan could be expected to confess himself in error as to the time he wrote down his second view — unless he is convinced of having been in error — and for this reason I don't think he could have complied with the proposal in Sir W^m's letter to you of the 4th which I return inclosed.

There is an inaccuracy in the beginning of that letter which it may be as well for me to correct. — I admitted the possibility of Mr De M. being mistaken in his recollection of the time but I did not say that I thought it “not unlikely”.

Again Mr De Morgan was well aware of Sir W^m's high position as a metaphysician and would very naturally use expressions of admiration in speaking of it. But he said I did not believe he knew Sir W^m was *Professor of Logic* — this remark had reference to your suggestion that he might have heard thro' some pupil of Sir W^m that he held peculiar views on the syllogism — For all De M. knew to the contrary Sir W^m might still have been Professor of Universal History — His eminence as a metaphysician as you and I well know is independent of his position as professor. —

I wish to give no opinion on the manner in which Mr De M. has conducted his correspondence with Sir Will. — whether judicious — whether in good taste or with a due regard to courtesy — and this I say without any insinuation unfavorable to Mr De M — that is not the question between the parties — Without giving an opinion I will nevertheless remind you that Mr De M. asked Sir W^m to state his views because he *offered to do so* & because they were published sufficiently to secure the right to them.

I fear I shall go astray if I attempt to [. . .] a comparison of Sect. III of the Paper with the addition — It seems to me plain that the addition professes to give a complete theory and states distinctly and in plain words that the author ascribes[?] definite quantity to the subject and predicate of propositions — He then also clearly draws definitely quantitative conclusions — But in section III. he distinctly quantifies the middle term which includes the predicate of something, and he gets a conclusion expressed *within limits as to quantity* which is all he gets in the addition — In Sect. III he expresses by a fraction what is illustrated by which numbers in the addition — But again I must deem[?] that I have no confidence in my own judgment on this point, and, fortunately it is not needed.

Sir W^m's “articulate statement” indicating what Sir W^m's discovery *would do* led De M. to infer its nature, — it was able to do just what his own would — it was therefore

most probably the same – he furnished Sir W^m with some developments of his own view, but as far as I know he even now is not clearly informed of what Sir W^m's system is —

De Morgan wrote out his disputed paper at the commencement of the Session when there were few class exercises to look over – the session begins on the 15th October.

Sir W^m's letter proposes that De M. should confess himself wrong in asserting that his view was written out before seeing the “requisites” – to admit he may have got a hint and through confusion of thought cannot see that he got it, to correct himself in what he has no reason to believe a mistake as to time, or rather to *assert the contrary of what he believes to be true* – in order that Sir W^m may relieve him of a different and not greater imputation. I wish the affair could be settled without a “paper war” but I see plainly that De Morgan thinks that some sort of imputation of equivocal conduct will be apt to stick to him unless Sir W^m very decidedly & unreservedly clears him, and I think he is much more disposed to bring matters to a public arbitrement, than to settle them by any proceeding which might at any future time leave room for uncorrected misconception or misrepresentation by parties not now in the field. I regret this very much for various reasons – but especially for my respect for both parties. I feel that my voluntarily assumed office is at an end, and come what may I can say that it would *be equally* painful for me if either should suffer in the controversy — Indeed were it not so I think you will give me full credit for saying that from old recollections I should regret more that Sir W. H. should be wasted than his opponent except in so far as the matter touches Mr De Morgan's honour — In any case I am sorry for De Morgan – for, with every allowance, I feel it will appear ungracious in him, young, vigorous and hopeful, to allow himself to fall into a public wrangling with one so much esteemed and deserving as well as obtaining so much sympathy (even from adversaries) on account of his late melancholy affliction — Had it been a dozen years ago I could have looked gaily on the lists.

I wish you would look in to the subject of the development of the spermatozoa. You will have to notice it I presume in your article for Todd – unless there be a special article on the subject – I will gladly send you a loan of Koelliker's book if you desire it.

I have been trying an exper^t of Edw^d Weber first mentioned by Volkmann in his article *Nerven Physiologie*¹ in Wagner's *Handwoerterbuch* and since then by E. Weber himself in his article *Muskelbewegung*² in the same work. The exper^t was intended to show a different effect obtained from stimulating a nerve and a nerve centre respectively. A current or rather a series of interrupted currents from an Electro-Magnetic Rotatory apparatus is sent through the Sp. Cord of a frog – a tetanic state of the body is produced & this *continues* a little time (a minute or two in my expts) after the application of electr. ceases – but according to Weber & Volkmann when the same state is caused by passing the electricity through a *mere nerve* it ceases *the moment* the electricity is discontinued.

I do not get the same result – I find the tetanic state persists some time after the electricity is stopped in *both cases* – it may endure a *little* longer in the case of stimulating the cord than in that of the nerve but there is no absolute difference. There is no need in using the apparatus with a Natural Magnet — The ordinary Coil &

Letter 34

generating cell used medicinally for giving shocks has just the same effect – indeed I just tried the latter & find the result diff^r from that of Weber and Volkmann. I then tried the Natural Magnet – but the effect was practically the same. I wish you would repeat the Exp^r for I saw Todd the other day who told me he got the same result as the German Physiologists – I had not then tried it – I used strong large frogs.

Yours affectly
W Sharpey

I should have told you that I saw De Morgan last night & communicated to him Sir W. H's letter of the 4th – which I now return.

¹ Alfred Wilhelm Volkmann, 'Nervenphysiologie', in Wagner, op. cit., note 30.2 above, vol. 1, pp. 563–97.

² Eduard Wilhelm Weber, 'Muskelbewegung', *ibid.*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 1–122.

34

London, 20th December 1847

My dear Thomson,

I am well nigh prevented by very shame from facing you even in a Letter. I must acknowledge that you have met with a scurvy acquital at my hands for your kind letter and specimens of the growing cuttlefish as well as for your attention in collecting sheep — (I may as well mention that I should think another dozen or so will be sufficient) —

I send you very rough proofs of the chapter on the Nerves – a little bit remains which I will forward to you as soon as I can dispose of it.

I truly sympathize with you in your deprivation of Syme's services, but your loss is our gain – and I should trust his own¹ — He comes to us in our greatest need and the handsome way in which he has behaved in all the necessary arrangements demands our best efforts to second him both in his capacity of clinical teacher and practising surgeon — The circumstances as you observe are peculiarly favourable to *Syme in particular*.

I have heard from more quarters than one that Miller is seeking the Clinical Chair — In any case you will have a place vacant and I fear your difficulty is enhanced by being obliged to fill it up — Better it remained vacant than that certain candidates should be inflicted on you — I should think your freethinkers² professors Simpson & Miller would for their own sakes as members of the University do their best to get the best man notwithstanding differences of Church or State politics.

As to yourself – I presume this event would only seem to fix more firmly your previous determination to the West – unless you take a hint which I threw out in a letter to Syme the other day – as to a Prison Inspectorship which would make London your headquarters – Still I presume that Jeffray – [. . .] tho' he be – will put the Glasgow Chair first in your choice.

Letter 35

One thing I cannot pass over in silence, that is, the regret which I feel that we are obliged to withdraw Syme from among friends and associates who on a trying occasion have given him so disinterested advice — It is a happiness, however, to reflect on their behaviour, although it is alloyed by regret at their deprivation.

How famously Lord John is working the Bishops — and I doubt not he will force the Dean and Chapter of Hereford to make martyrdom of their *consciences* — for in the way they put their case the [*sic*] speak not of the alternative of sacrificing their *livings*.³ They will doubtless do the deed even against their *consciences* “*virtus post nummos*” or rather, speaking of sacrifices, “*virtutem ante nummos*.”⁴ There will be no *disruption* here. The Candlishes and Cunninghams⁵ of Prelacy have too much to lose —

With best regards to Mrs Allen

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ Syme was appointed Professor of Clinical Surgery at University College on 8 January 1848 following Robert Liston's death the previous year. It was Sharpey who conveyed the offer of the post to Syme: see Syme to Sharpey, 14 February 1847, College Correspondence, University College London MSS.

² James Miller was a prominent spokesman for the Free Church of Scotland during the Disruption crisis of 1843. Simpson also sided with the Free Church.

³ Russell had offended the High Church party by appointing the latitudinarian Renn Dickson Hampden as Bishop of Hereford. Thirteen bishops presented a petition of remonstrance to the Prime Minister. The Dean of Hereford was also opposed to the appointment.

⁴ “Virtue after lucre” (Horace, *Epistles*, i. i. 53); and “[sacrifice] virtue before lucre”.

⁵ A reference to Robert Smith Candlish (1806–73) and William Cunningham (1805–61), two prime movers in the Disruption of 1843.

35

London 35 Gloucester Crescent

28th Dec^r 1847

My dear Thomson,

Whenever you are about to make a new and important step in life I feel that my old sympathies have lost none of their vividness, and it is under their full influence that I say to you you will do quite right in taking the Glasgow Chair [of Anatomy], and would be quite right in so doing even independently of your third reason —

The only person in Scotland who occurs to me as a possible competitor is [John] Reid, but from what he hinted to me in Autumn I judged that his interest had lain with the late Lord Advocate (McNeill).¹ He seemed moreover to consider that not only your interest but your public claims would ensure you the Chair — and from all I saw of his position in St. Andrews it occurred to me that, though not worthy of his merits, yet it was sufficiently comfortable to prevent a man of his easy temperament from making any considerable or troublesome exertions for a better, particularly without a tolerably assured hope of success.²

In London the only person likely to cross you is Wharton Jones, and I doubt not he will put all oars into the water to pull into Jeffray's berth. I should think he has not

Letter 36

mended his chance by his proceedings last year nor indeed has his demeanour here been ever such as to secure him much kindly interest even with those who are most ready to acknowledge his scientific merit. Who may exert themselves for him in this quarter I do not exactly know – possibly Sir James Clark, but then *his* man again would be Lord John – with whom your claims are paramount.

I think it further not unlikely that interest may be made for Jones from the side of Glasgow – perhaps by applying through the MP's. In case of your success however, which I cannot doubt, another chance is open to Jones, namely, the Physiology Chair in Edinburgh – and I think that would be *his* best game, and best worth even his first efforts.

As I have said – I don't doubt of your success – but let us take care that there is no failure through mismanagement. Your friend James Mylar has access I think to Sir George Grey³ – but Lord John and Rutherford⁴ ought and will I suppose settle the affair.

Until Saturday (ie holiday time) direct to me at my house — The old Porter at the College did not forward your letter and I am constrained to write in great haste to secure the post – With kind remembrances and Christmas compliments to Mrs A – I ever am

My dear Thomson
Your sincere friend
W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson.

¹ Duncan McNeill (1793–1874), Lord Advocate from 1842 to 1846.

² At this date Reid was Professor of Medicine at St Andrews.

³ George Grey (1799–1882), Home Secretary since 1846.

⁴ Andrew, Lord Rutherford (1791–1854), Lord Advocate from 1846 to 1851.

36

38 Gloucester Crescent

9th Jan 1848

My dear Thomson,

I write to acknowledge your reply to my letter – but principally just to *remind* you to try and secure the uterus in any cholera case in which abortion may have recently taken place.

I am glad to see by today's paper that the deaths are not increasing – I would hope from this the disease may be about to pass its acme.

The Board of Health here have so precipitately committed themselves on the question of contagion that I cannot look for any unbiased evidence to be collected by their agents. I have lately been pursuing the evidence brought together by Simpson respecting the last epidemic of Cholera. I wish even greater vigilance were employed on this occasion so as to arrive if possible at a settlement of the question.¹

Letter 37

In the meantime I sincerely sympathize with the inhabitants of your Town and Neighbourhood in their afflicting visitation.

Yours very sincerely
in haste
W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ The question of whether cholera was contagious or was propagated by a "miasma" remained contentious throughout the nineteenth century.

37

London 25th Jan^y 1848

My dear Thomson,

I this morning rec^d your letter but as yet have seen nothing of your book.¹ I was not aware you would be so sharp with it otherwise I would have sent the remaining proof of the Nerves (which I at the time had not beside me) in order to serve as an answer (in some sort at least) to your queries in your last letter. I now regret I was so dilatory but I dare say it was of little moment after all.

I will tell you fairly what I privately think of the book, that is, the whole truth – and I doubt not it is a performance of which the whole truth may be safely told to all – and that my inclination and determination to give it a friendly greeting will be gratified consistently with rigid justice.

I have just got back into writing order again – and hope to get rid in no very long time of the millstone that has been so long about my neck – I will never again engage in composing a systematic treatise —

I thank you for your correction of neurilema, though it came too late. The word ought certainly to have two m's (if we look to the original Greek) but I did not look to this – and in pursuance of my usual custom of following the usual custom wrote neurilema because it is the commonly followed spelling.

I begin to think that old Jeffray's friends are using his name to draw his salary as some Chelsea pensioners have drawn their pensions long after they were dead & buried. Ought not a non efficient but salaried professor to be shown at stated times at Kirk or Market?

We hear rumours here of Jameson's expected retirement – and of expecting successors – I hope they will give the place to some worthy man – such as Edw^d Forbes² – at least that it won't be thrown away on old Fleming³ or Traill,⁴ if Traill be madly ambitious of it. The only good of giving it to Traill which I see would be the getting Douglas McLagan⁵ into the Med. Jurisp. which would be a useful move I believe.

My neighbour Mrs Potter tells me of a Mr Jamieson of Rutland Square – having died and left something to the University which would especially benefit the Professor

Letter 38

of Mathematics – is this true or what is the truth? The Potters will be interested to know on account of their connexion with Kelland.⁶

Yours very sincerely
W Sharpey

Dr A. Thomson

¹ Part I of Thomson's *Outlines of Physiology, for the use of students*, Edinburgh, Maclachlan and Stewart, 1848.

² Edward Forbes (1815–54), Professor of Botany at King's College, London. Forbes succeeded to Jameson's Chair shortly before his own death.

³ John Fleming (1785–1857), clergyman and naturalist. Formerly Professor of Natural Philosophy at Aberdeen, he was appointed to the Chair of Natural Sciences at the Free Church College of Edinburgh in 1845.

⁴ Thomas Stewart Traill (1781–1862), Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh.

⁵ Andrew Douglas Maclagan (1812–1900), an extra-mural lecturer in *materia medica*. He succeeded Traill as Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in 1862.

⁶ Philip Kelland (1808–79), Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh since 1838.

38

London

Monday [Undated, written between 26 and 31 January 1848]

My dear Thomson,

Confound the old lumberer! On breaking the seal of your note today I expected of a surety that it contained an announcement of his having been gathered to his fathers.

I have neither spoken nor written a word on the matter to any one save Syme to whom you have already communicated your views —

I remember hearing during the Tory regime that an objection to giving two Regius Chairs in the University to two Brothers would be held fatal to your claim¹ – but it was a frivolous objection and without precedent – and the professors are not likely to try in your case the game of the Bishops in Dr. Hampden's and obstruct a Royal mandate.²

I suppose that Miller being already a member of the Edinburgh Senatus will be subject to no further test.

The only step which it appears to me you ought to take or at least consider the propriety of taking – is that of letting Lord John know in some way or other that your views are directed towards the Glasgow Chair — He may not know the respective advantages of the position as compared with your present place – which he may very naturally suppose better – and from not being better informed of your wishes may commit himself with the first influential applicant – or his wife may promise her intercession — If therefore Lady John could be made acquainted with your intentions in any allowable way I think it might be prudent to do so – it is I admit a delicate point, but I think it right to say to you what has occurred to me in reflecting on the actual circumstances.

Your sincere friend

W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ William Thomson had been Professor of Medicine at Glasgow since 1841.

² See note 34.3, above.

39

London, Monday 31st January, 1848

My dear Thomson,

I got your Outlines [of Physiology] on Saturday afternoon & have by this time dispatched the copies to Carpenter and Todd. I have dipped into and turned over the book throughout, and have begun to peruse it from the beginning with care — The result is that without flattering you I have to tell you that I find it greatly to my taste — it is just what I had reason to expect — Short yet wonderfully complete, everything in due proportion, given with great *neatness* and conciseness yet perfectly clear — and above all in a becoming philosophical tone — which is quite refreshing. The only serious fault in it is that it is not ended.

I will read it over with care in due time and freely point out any smaller “spots” that may catch my eye & make any suggestions that may occur for your next Edition — I have no expectation that such opportunities will be frequent and in any case I may say

“Verum ubi plura nitent in carmine,
(non ego paucis
Offendar maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura.”¹

But to turn to something else.

If anything else could enhance the gift of your Outlines (*Part 1st*) it would be the news I found waiting me today, of Old Jeffray’s extinction — but are you sure it is not another “Cry of Wolf”? George the Third was anxiously impatient for the demise of a certain Madam Schullenberg whom he sorely disliked and when informed of her death he was not satisfied till one of his Pages actually bore testimony to having seen the old lady laid out — Our young friend John ought to have got a sight of the corpse of the Glasgow Patriarch.

I do not know if Sir George Grey has a medical confessor, or if so who is the man — I shall endeavour to learn — As to Sir J. Clark I know he is or was a patron of Wharton Jones — but whether he will keenly interest himself on his account, especially against one who has personal claims on Lord John — I do not know — Clark’s influence would lie with Lord John — I am not aware that he attends Sir George Grey. I don’t know that Brodie has anybody to promote — from what I have seen I should judge he has not — and besides although a man supported by him might give some trouble I have no idea he will prevail against you — indeed were it generally known among the medical men of London that you were a candidate I think it would in most instances be considered a good reason for declining to bring forward or to use interest for others. I think you had better write Sir Jas. Clark or perhaps rather get Scott² to write him (that is to say if you don’t think yourself sufficiently intimate) in order that he may be fully appraised of your application — for then he may probably consider that a sufficient excuse for declining interference at least.

I am greatly obliged for the trouble you have taken about the “young lambs” — There will be quite enough — and as you will, like Syme, soon have to “pack up” — perhaps it might be as well just to make a parcel of them and send by Steamer —

Letter 40

I will order Plates of the Arteries – for in the extremely improbably case of your non-translation it will be easy to arrange with the Publishers – they are still some 50 below the 500 copies.

With best wishes
Yours most sincerely
W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ “But when the greater part of a composition is resplendent, I shall not find fault with a few blemishes which inattention let slip in a hurry, or to which human nature failed to be alert.” (Horace, *Ars poetica*, II. 351–3). I am obliged to Mrs Betty Knott-Sharpe for identifying and translating this quotation.

² Possibly John Scott (d. 1853), Physician to the Queen in Scotland.

40

London, 8th February 1848

My dear Thomson,

I received your note last night. I have no doubt your prospect of the Glasgow Chair is all but certain although I learnt last night that Jones is in the field. I saw Sir James Clark and remarked to him that I did not see how your public claims and personal interest could be met by those of any body else. [I]t struck me that he was rather *shy* of the topic especially when I asked him if he knew of other candidates – he said I probably knew that Jones had applied but added that he had very little chance of succeeding.

Lord John is likely in a few days to have another piece of equally important patronage on his hands which it may cost him more trouble to please people in the disposal of, than happens even with a Glasgow Chair — The old Primate though younger than your predecessor (being 82) is not so tough grained – and is said to be dying – I suppose this will keep the Bench right on the Jewish disability question.¹

Poor Peter (Peebles) [i.e. Handyside] is not to gain his great plea yet, – why does he not stand for Miller’s place or Syme’s if Miller is not translated?

Yours very sincerely
W Sharpey

Dr Allen Thomson

¹ On 11 February 1848, William Howley, Archbishop of Canterbury, died. He had been opposed to the removal of civil disabilities against Jews.