

**STAMMERING, AND OTHER
IMPERFECTIONS OF SPEECH,
TREATED BY SURGICAL
OPERATIONS ON THE THROAT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649232819

Stammering, and other imperfections of speech, treated by surgical operations on the throat by
James Yearsley

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JAMES YEARSLEY

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OPERATIONS ON THE THROAT**

STAMMERING,
AND OTHER
IMPERFECTIONS OF SPEECH,

TREATED BY

Surgical Operations on the Throat:

BEING

THE SUBSTANCE OF A PAPER READ BEFORE THE
WESTMINSTER MEDICAL SOCIETY,
MARCH 20th, 1841.



BY

JAMES YEARSLEY, M.R.C.S.

AUTHOR OF "CONTRIBUTIONS TO AURAL SURGERY," AND SURGEON TO THE
INSTITUTION FOR CURING DISEASES OF THE EAR,
BACKVILLE STREET.



LONDON:
CHURCHILL, PRINCES STREET, SOHO.

1841.

1117.

LONDON :
W. M'DOWALL, PRINTER, FEMBERTON-ROW,
COUGH-SQUARE.

TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
WESTMINSTER MEDICAL SOCIETY,
IN
RETURN FOR THE HONOUR THEY DID THE AUTHOR, IN INVITING
HIM, THOUGH NOT A MEMBER, TO READ A PAPER
TO THEM ON THE SUBJECT OF
HIS DISCOVERY
FOR THE
RELIEF OF STAMMERING AND OTHER VOCAL IMPERFECTIONS
BY
SURGICAL OPERATIONS.

STAMMERING, &c.

THE different degrees of Stammering and vocal imperfections form a class of maladies so distressing, that no apology is required for publishing any safe and rational means by which they may be alleviated. Persons who suffer from these affections, however otherwise fitted by the possession of talent to elevate themselves in society, are almost inevitably restricted to subordinate situations. A confirmed stammerer is not only himself rendered miserable, and a source of painful feelings to his immediate circle of friends, but the distressing spectacle of his infirmity obtrudes itself upon all who come in contact with him. It has lately occurred to me to witness Stammering of a more aggravated character than any I had before conceived to exist; in some cases the defect has almost amounted to total dumbness, the effort to speak proving so painful and prolonged, that the sufferers have practised writing their thoughts instead of attempting oral communication. In extreme cases the miserable deprivation has preyed on minds at all sensitive so deeply, as to produce a melancholy condition bordering on insanity. Many have confessed to me that they have often felt urged to the commission of suicide by brooding over their unhappy condition, and have withdrawn from all companionship to weep that their thoughts should be constantly anticipated and spoken by others before they could give them utterance.

My attention became directed to Stammering, and the mode in which it may be relieved, during the course of an extensive practice in diseases of the ear. Within the last few years some thousands of patients suffering from deafness have passed under my treatment. In every case it has been a practice with me to examine minutely the appearances presented by the mouth and throat: by proceeding in this manner I have very frequently discovered a diseased condition of the mucous membrane, with more or less enlargement of the uvula and tonsils. Such cases have always claimed particular notice from the great difficulty with which they are relieved by the ordinary means. Often have I found considerable deafness with distressing tinnitus aurium, when there existed no other objective symptom than an irritable state of the mucous membrane of the throat. This state of the mucous membrane in deafness has been cursorily mentioned by other writers, but its importance has never been sufficiently insisted on. As regards the tonsils, it should be observed that the deafness is not found in exact ratio with their increased growth as seen from the mouth, but rather with their hardness and extension upwards between the arches of the fauces, so as to compress the guttural extremity of the Eustachian tube. When deafness, accompanied by morbid alterations in the throat, has proved intractable under the usual remedies, it has long been my custom to excise portions of the uvula and tonsils, if either have presented increase of size. This treatment has generally had the effect of removing or alleviating the ear malady; but in such patients I have frequently found, superadded to the deafness, a certain degree of thickened speech, the voice being muffled, and rapid utterance impeded; conditions which are immediately corrected by the removal of the cause in the enlarged tonsils. I performed my first operation, specially for the improvement of the voice, in July, 1840. A gentleman, in some degree suffering from deafness, applied to me with tonsils of surprising

growth and hardness. In this case the voice was thick, nasal, and imperfect, evidently owing to the impediment presented by the diseased tonsils. The removal of these glands with the knife occasioned an immediate improvement in the tone and compass of the voice, which continued to grow clearer as long as I had an opportunity of observing the case.

From this time a new and interesting branch of practice opened itself to me; I found that the most varied affections of the voice and respiration may be produced by enlargement of the tonsils. In children especially, I have witnessed cases where for many years the voice had been thick and choking, swallowing greatly impeded, and the breathing so much obstructed as to occasion a habit of carrying the mouth open. During sleep the respiration is in such cases still more disturbed; a moaning noise is constantly present, accompanied by sudden startings, as if from danger of strangulation. All these troublesome and serious symptoms are with certainty removed by excising the tonsils, and giving freedom to the throat. In adults, the effects of this disease are somewhat different, and chiefly evident in a thick and drawling quality of the voice; a person thus situated always talks as if the back part of the throat and nose were plugged up, which is in fact the case. One of the minor miseries to which patients with these morbid growths are frequently subjected is the necessity of returning the morsel to the mouth to be remasticated before it can be received into the pharynx. We might expect, *à priori*, that persons accustomed to try the organs of articulation by public speaking would be most prone to these affections; and from very extended observations, I am convinced that a large number of clergymen and public speakers have the voice deteriorated by diseased growth of the tonsils. The larynx has usually been looked upon as the seat of these affections; but I feel impressed with a certainty that they may with greater justice be referred to the throat.