

# Controversial Issues Surrounding the Professional Life of James Fitzjames Fraser West

## JAMES FITZJAMES FRASER WEST'İN MESLEK HAYATINDA TARTIŞMA YARATAN YAYINLAR

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### Summary

In this article, controversial issues surrounding the professional life of West, ethical principles of medical men and Lister's treatment of wounds that was supported by West are discussed.

When West entered Queen's Hospital, Birmingham to take up his post as surgeon in October 1857, he was assaulted by two of the institutions senior professors, William Sands Cox and John Birt Davies. Their preference was for Josep Sampson Gamgee and yet the predominantly lay council who responsible for the election disagreed and elected West instead. Gamgee was several years older than West and had experience both here and abroad. West's achievements, on the other hand, were not brilliant. The professors, declared West's election "null and avoid", and appointed Gamgee insteated. Furious letters and articles appeared in the local press and the medical journals. The Lancet, the British Medical Journal and Medical Times and Gazetta all covered the dispute, but accusations can be found in virtually every issue of Birmingham Weekly newspaper, Aris's Gazetta from the middle of October to the end o March, 1858. The Lancet was to support the professors. The other newspapers gave West their backing from the start. Students of the college joined in the controversy. A letter send by them to the medical journals and the press for supporting West.

The Reverend Dr. Miller, Rector of St. Martins was a key player in the dispute. He formed to urge subscribers to withhold their subscriptions to the hospital, soon became a vehicle of protest. These powerful men, backed by the public were expressed their outrage with the help of press.

The incident was resolved thanks to a compromise in the end with both Gamgee and West being appointed on equal terms. In a paper written by West in 1875 West refers to Gamgee as an "esteemed collague" and when West died in May 1883, Gamgee was among the mourners at his funeral.

West may have got off to a difficult start in 1857, but by the time he died, he was a well respected and muck liked man. He always saw himself as a student. He was a very strong of Lister's method.

**Key Words:** J. West, Ethical principles, Professional life

T Klin J Med Ethics, Law and History 2002, 10:168-177

### Özet

Bu makalede, West'in meslek hayatında tartışma yaratan yayınlar, tıp adamlarının etik ilkeleri ve West tarafından desteklenen Lister'in yara tedavisi tartışılmıştır.

West, 1857 Ekim'inde Birmingham Queen's Hastanesine cerrah olarak atandığında enstitünün iki profesörü William Sands Cox ve John Birt Davies tarafından saldırıya uğradı. Tercihleri Joseph Sampson Gamgee'den yanaydı, fakat seçimden sorumlu konsey buna karşı çıkarak West'i seçti. Gamgee, West'ten daha yaşlıydı ve ülkede ve yurtdışında tecrübesi vardı. Diğer taraftan West'in başarıları parlak değildi. Profesörler West'in seçilmesini hükümsüz ilan ettiler ve yerine Gamgee'yi atadılar. Yerel basın ve tıp dergilerinde sert mektup ve makaleler çıktı. Lancet, British Medical Journal, Medical Times ve Gazetta tartışmayı kapattılar, fakat suçlamalar 1858 Ekim ortasından Mart sonuna kadar Birmingham haftalık gazetesi ve Aris's Gazetta'nın adeta her sayısında yereldi. Lancet, profesörlere destek verdi. Diğer gazeteler desteklerini baştan WEST'e verdiler. Tartışmaya kolej öğrencileri de katıldı. Tıp dergileri ve basına West'i savunan bir mektup gönderdiler.

St. Martins rektörü Rahip Dr. Miller bu tartışmada anahtar rol oynadı. Protesto şekli olarak abonelere, abone ücretini hastaneye vermemelerini sağladı. Çok sayıda abone ve halk tarafından desteklenen bu güçlü adamlar basının yardımıyla haklarının çiğnendiğini beyan ettiler.

Sonunda olay karşılıklı ödün verilerek sonuçlandırıldı. Gamgee ve West birlikte, eşit şartlarda tayin edildiler. 1875'de West tarafından kaleme alınan yazıda Gamgee'den "saygın meslektaşım" olarak sözetti ve West, Mayıs 1883'de öldüğünde Gamgee cenazede yas tutanlar arasındaydı.

West 1857'de zor bir başlangıç yapmış olabilir fakat öldüğünde saygı gören, sevilen bir insandı. Kendini her zaman bir öğrenci olarak gördü. Lister'in metodunun kuvvetli bir savunucusu oldu.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** J. West, Etik ilkeler, Mesleki yaşam

T Klin Tıp Etiği-Hukuku-Tarihi 2002, 10:168-177

When he entered Queen's Hospital, Birmingham, to take up his post as Surgeon in October, 1857, James Fitzjames Fraser West was assaulted by two of the institutions senior professors, William Sands Cox and John Birt Davies. West had secured the post by a majority of one on the 14th of October after having served as a House Surgeon in the hospital for three years. Before the election, Queen's most senior professors (the chief of whom was Cox (1)) submitted a list of six eligible candidates and made their recommendations. Their preference was for Joseph Sampson Gamgee, and yet the predominantly lay council responsible for the election of medical officers disagreed, and elected West instead. The dispute which followed raged for over six months. Gamgee was several years older than West and had had experience both here and abroad. The professors felt they were quite justified in thinking that Gamgee's claim was superior. During his time at University College, Gamgee had won five gold medals while West's achievements were honourable rather than brilliant. He had three Honorary Certificates and a prize for an Ophthalmic Report to his credit. West did achieve honours in Anatomy in the first examinations for an MB, but had taken the degree no further.

At a meeting soon after the election, the professors declared West's election "null and void" and appointed Gamgee instead. West protested, and tempers soon became frayed. In the event, the election of West was honoured and an attempt made by the professors to fob West off with a junior position failed, but it was not before furious letters and articles had been published in the local press and the medical journals. *The Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal* and the *Medical Times and Gazette* all covered the dispute, but the local newspapers entered into the fray with a vengeance. Accusations and outpourings can be found in virtually every issue of the Birmingham weekly newspaper, *Aris's Gazette*, from the middle of October to the end of March, 1858. *The Birmingham Journal*, a bi-weekly newspaper, printed

thirty-one articles altogether, with two, three and even four articles in some issues. *The Birmingham Daily Post* published three editions containing two articles in its twenty-seven features on the dispute, and even printed one on Christmas Day itself. Many articles were lengthy, but the longest - some 670 lines - was published in *The Birmingham Daily Post* on December 10th, 1857.

Interestingly, the first instinct of *The Lancet*, that champion of the rank and file, was to support the professors. The press was not universal in its support for West either. *Aris's Gazette* backed the professors initially. The other newspapers gave West their backing from the start. It was not long before the papers discovered that Davies' own son had been one of the candidates in the early rounds. On November, 4th, *The Birmingham Journal* voiced the suspicion that the attempt to appoint Gamgee had been a convenient means of avoiding offence to Dr Davies. In electing an outsider, they could dodge the issue of appointing a local rival of the young Davies.

Even students of the college joined in the controversy. A letter sent by them to the medical journals and the press in support of West was considered impertinent by *The Lancet* and *Aris's Gazette* but was reported with sympathy by *The Birmingham Journal*. In an article dated 18th November 1857, which commences with the words 'The plot thickens, and new actors come on the stage,' the newspaper states 'The third act opened on Saturday morning' and it details the incident which provoked the students into putting pen to paper. West, 'surrounded by a score of students,' was attending to out-patients when Sands Cox, Drs Davies, Heslop and Fleming and Mssrs Knowles (2), Gamgee and two others, whom the paper describes as 'minor performers' entered. Knowles was then asked whether he agreed to hand his patients over to Gamgee. He said that he did. The article goes on 'and amid ominous silence possession is taken of the remaining out-patient, poor devil, and he is "treated" by the opposition Surgeon. Mr. West protests, the students are requested to follow Mr. Gamgee, to a man they decline to stir a step; no invitation to breakfast,

dinner, and et ceteras....will tempt them to recognise Mr. Gamgee.'

One of West's supporters, the Reverend Dr. Miller, Rector of St. Martin's Church was a key player in the dispute, and it was Miller and other powerful like-minded men, who founded a Committee of Subscribers which almost ruined the Hospital. Formed to urge subscribers to withhold their subscriptions to the hospital, it became a vehicle of protest, not only for the injustice perpetrated against West, but also against the autocratic behaviour of the professors. These men, backed by large numbers of subscribers and the public, expressed their outrage with the help of the press. Sands Cox and Davies were dubbed as a despotic pair, guilty of arrogance, self-will and trickery by the *Birmingham Daily Post*. The paper frequently referred to them as 'the firm of Cox and Davies.' Terms used to describe the two in *The Birmingham Journal* were no more generous. The paper describes the pair as 'the individuals who have occasioned all the mischief' (3) and calls them amongst other things, obdurate, offensive and dominant.

Both Gamgee and the professors published long statements (4) which they hoped would overturn the decision of the 14th, October. The professors' report was described by the *Birmingham Daily Post* as 'long, wearisome, and incorrect, treating in a style of solemn verbosity matters that, had, no relation to the question of Mr. West's election,...' (5) Both alienated the press. The main thrust of the argument in both was election by merit as opposed to election through the use of influence. Talk of 'saving' the Institution was a theme common to both statements. These educated and intelligent men put forward powerful and coherent arguments. West, both claimed, was not only unfit for the job when compared to Gamgee, but had also been guilty of canvassing. West responded with a statement of his own dated 17th November.

'Mr. Gamgee,' says West, 'wrote a very lengthy pamphlet, in which he certainly did his best to damage my position and character as a

professional man, without going so far as to render himself liable to an action of libel; while at the same time he ventured, with the most flagrant and uncalled-for impertinence, to assail two gentlemen,' (the Rev. Dr. Miller and the Mayor), 'whose position and influence as men of honour and strict integrity no one who knows anything of them will for a moment dare to question.' (6) Gamgee's pamphlet does deride the ability of West, as we might expect, but it also flatters the despotic pair and is peppered with moral blackmail. He refers to the institution as the 'University of Central England,' and asked if 'PRIVATE INTEREST OR PUBLIC DUTY?' is to prevail. He reminds the reader seven times, and in italics, that his opponent was elected by a 'majority of *one*.' He ascribed dramatic 'stage' roles to the real characters involved, as well as adding a few fictional ones for good measure. At one point he allocates two and a half sides of print to a fictional account of how he believes certain representatives of society would have reacted. Gamgee first calls upon the 'artizan' to speak; a man, whom he says is 'the sinew of Birmingham's glory.' The artizan has, according to Gamgee, 'laid down the sledge hammer, wiped from his begrimed manly face the down-trickling sweat, and crossed his arms to listen to the facts,..' (7) The artizan says that he's not sure that justice has been done. If it has, he trembles for his own son. Gamgee warms to the tale and gives his 'artizan' more to say "He's a good and clever lad, and he goes to Mr Miller's Ragged School in Well Lane. I'd lay a wager there's not a boy that's cleaner and does more credit to his mother....I'm in hope as he gets on I'll be able to send him to the College, in Bath Row, where he may get the wisdom which Solomon tells us is better than gold; and who knows but that one day he may be trying to be a Surgeon to the Queen's." (8)

Gamgee even ascribes a text to his opponent, James West, starting with the quote, " 'My heart shall not reprove me so long as I live.' " In Gamgee's address, West conveniently sees reason. He admits he's young and somewhat lazy, saying, " 'I am young. I have certainly suffered no

hardships for my profession, as have done Laken and Moore, (9) in India, Persia, and the Crimea - I have not ransacked libraries, grown pale in dead-houses, traversed, without resting, the countries of Europe... I have not gained more than good repute for diligence as a student, and moral character as a man. I will not be the instrument, even though the passive one, of an injustice. I will work, in the hope of acquiring esteem as a labourer in the vineyard of science; I am happy in the success of right - let right be done.' " (10)

Gamgee certainly alienated *The Birmingham Journal*, as a result of this, and other tirades. He was accused of insulting the Reverend Dr Miller, the governors and Mr West, and of brow-beating the Council. One letter which Gamgee wrote to the paper on 14th November, claimed a status for Birmingham more elevated than most of the capital cities of Europe and was printed by the *Birmingham Journal* purely for the pleasure it afforded in making fun of West's rival. The paper accuses Gamgee of 'flunkeyism' and invites its readers to judge for themselves with the words 'As a specimen of fustian and inconsequential nonsense, read this.' (11)

The professors were both more subtle and more cunning than Gamgee. They point out that they have already been misunderstood by the public, saying they have suffered 'malicious and utterly unfounded interpretation which has been affixed to every part of their conduct...' (12) The professors know they tread a delicate path and are careful to portray themselves as reasonable men. They speak as though they are above the sort of row which has broken out over the election, and actively avoid the denigration of West. They stress that they only have the best interests of the institution at heart. They claim they want to act according to the laws of the college and uphold the principles behind meritocratic election, as any reasonable person would expect. They insist they only have the rights and interests of the sick and injured of Birmingham at heart. It is only in phrases like 'The deed was scarcely done' and in referring to the election of West as 'one of those

disasters which annihilate hope' (13) that the professors reveal their true feelings.

The incident was finally resolved in a compromise, with both Gamgee and West being appointed on equal terms. Dr Heslop, who had distanced himself from Cox and Davies during the course of the dispute, became one of West's closest friends, and the evidence suggests that the two rivals in the dispute learnt to respect, and even like each other. In a paper written by West in 1875 (14), West refers to Gamgee as an, 'esteemed colleague,' and when West died in May, 1883, Gamgee was among the mourners at his funeral (15). There is also an envelope dated 1872 which is addressed to West at 22, Broad Street, the home of Joseph Sampson Gamgee. Why West's letter was addressed to Gamgee's house is not known, but West moved from Acocks Green, near Solihull to Birmingham's most salubrious suburb, Edgbaston, in 1872 and he may have stayed with Gamgee during the removal.

Gamgee certainly proved an asset to Queen's Hospital and medicine in general over the years. Historians who have studied Birmingham's hospitals will know that before he died in 1886, Gamgee worked tirelessly for the town's hospitals, being the chief driving force behind both the new extension at Queen's in the early 1870s, and the Hospital Saturday Fund. And the dressings he designed even earned him a place in Bailey and Bishop's *Notable Names in Medicine and Surgery*.

We do not know what West's views were on the rights and wrongs of electing surgeons on merit in 1857, but he does say in 1873 (16) that the French method of electing surgeons, using merit alone, is superior to the methods used in England where, he says, influence is still common. In any case, West's opponents never did manage to substantiate their claim that he had been guilty of canvassing. Gamgee, on the other hand, turned out to be less committed to meritocracy than he led his supporters to believe in 1857. Comments made by Priestley Smith in 1873 suggest Gamgee was quite

prepared to abandon the principle when it suited him. In a paper entitled 'Notes from the Tent Hospitals of the Franco-German War' Smith writes 'In consequence of the exertions and influence of my kind friend Mr. Gamgee, I obtained an appointment as assistant to a large tent-hospital....' (17).

And was Gamgee justified in portraying West as lazy? The evidence suggests that he was not. West made regular contributions to the leading medical journals (18), visited hospitals and medical schools on the Continent, and was in regular attendance at medical society and association meetings both locally and nationally. Before he died in 1883, West had been Vice-President of the Birmingham Medical Institute, Senior Surgeon to Queen's Hospital, Consulting Surgeon to the Dental Hospital, Professor of Anatomy at Queen's College, President of the Clinical Board and of the Midland Medical Society, Director of the Clinical Section of the local branch of the British Medical Association, President of the Birmingham and Midland Counties branch of the BMA Pathological Section and President to the Shakespeare Dramatic Club. He was an avid reader, and owned a substantial library. None of this would suggest that West deserved a place among the ranks of the work-shy.

The behaviour and attitudes of William Sands Cox, remained a source of dismay to many of those with whom he was involved professionally. In their book *The History of the Birmingham School of Medicine, 1825 - 1925* the authors declare that at the time of the election of West in 1857 'Mr Sands Cox was not on very good terms with the majority of the Council.' (19). The situation after the election was no better. Only two years after the election row, Cox's conduct and mismanagement of the college provoked fourteen members of staff to join forces and demand his resignation. West and Gamgee were among them. The fourteen pointed out that the differences between Cox and others interested in the college threatened the very existence of the institution. They are reported as saying 'We cannot conceal from ourselves the fact

that in these differences you are on one side and the professors and other officers of the college on the other.' Coxes withdrawal for a period of two or three years, would, they hoped, enable the college to regain a degree of popularity and financial success, to which, they say 'it has long been a stranger.' (20). The fourteen were not alone in expressing their dissatisfaction either. Criticisms made by two other Queen's men, Thomas Heslop and Furneaux Jordan, can be found in the Charity Commission's Report of 1863 (21). Heslop is reported as saying that 'Mr Cox grossly insulted him. ... saying that he was capable of doing anything,' while Dr Jordan complained of Mr Cox's rudeness.

Historians agree that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, disputes between medics were commonplace and that their loyalties were towards their patients and not each other. Medical bodies and institutes themselves were prone to unprofessional behaviour and the disciplining of members could only be addressed after their own conduct had improved. Fortunately, disputes like the election row of 1857 became unacceptable as the professionalisation of medical practitioners was accomplished. Memories of the old tripartite system, in which physicians occupied top place, apothecaries the bottom and surgeons the middle, were beginning to fade by the middle of Queen Victoria's reign and the old antipathies, jealousies and snobberies were gradually abandoned.

As we might expect, the medical men of Queen's were not the only Birmingham doctors to become involved in disputes. Thomas Gutteridge (d. 1880) was another undisciplined medic, and was probably the most vile. A four centimetre thick printed volume of vindictive letters and statements produced by him can be found in Birmingham Central Library. No doubt there were more. His victims included the surgeons, Dickenson Crompton and Alfred Baker, who were given appointments at The General Hospital in preference to Gutteridge, the Reverend James Prince Lee, Headmaster of King Edward's School and hospital governor to The General and Queen's,

Mr Yorke, Rector of St Philips and the Catholic Convent in Hunter's Lane..

Another man capable of obnoxious behaviour was the surgeon, and father of William Sands Cox, Edward Townsend Cox (d.1863). He narrowly escaped death when he and Dr Lys confronted each other in fields near Birmingham in order to settle a dispute over library books in a duel. Fortunately, the pair were intercepted by the authorities, and all that remained to remind the townsfolk of the incident, was a display of the pistols Cox had hired in a New Street gunshop, with a label

" 'Birmingham Duelling Pistols. Out twelve times, but, as yet unfired.' " (22).

Another issue which fuelled heated debate and inflamed tempers in medical circles during the mid-Victorian period, and beyond, was Listerism. On his death in 1883, obituaries in the two leading medical journals accused James Fitzjames Fraser West of being old-fashioned and slow to embrace Listerism. The evidence suggests this was unfair. Before the adoption of high standards in hygiene and antisepsis the incidence of erysipelas, septicæmia, pyæmia and gangrene in hospitals was alarmingly high, and yet when Lister's first paper on the antiseptic treatment of wounds appeared in 1867, he found little support.

Opposition, and even hostility, towards Lister and his ideas persisted into the eighteen nineties. Lawson Tait (1854-1899), one of the greatest Birmingham surgeons of his day, was openly hostile to Lister's ideas, and he was not alone. Some were men from among the younger generation. One, Jordan Lloyd, of Queen's, took up his first appointment in 1881, some fourteen years after Lister's first paper had appeared. Some of the most entrenched views of all, though, were to be found among the London elites. Lindsay Patricia Granshaw (23) highlights the reluctance of some members of the medical staff at St Thomas's Hospital, London to embrace Listerism. She states that by 1877, the year Lister took up a post at King's College Hospital, London, opposition to his methods had hardened in some quarters.

A glance at papers written by West reveals that he was, in fact, a staunch advocate of Listerism. Four papers - 'Value of the Antiseptic Treatment in Herniotomy' (24); 'On the Surgical Cases in which Lister's Plan of Treating Wounds is Preferable to Any Other Method of Dressing' (25); 'Wound over the Patella, with a Small Piece Chipped out of the Patella; Listerism; Recovery' (26); and 'Compound Comminuted Fracture of the Humerus; Listerism; Recovery' (27) - all refer quite specifically to his own use of Lister's methods. In any case, papers written before these show he was already convinced of the value of antiseptic dressings. Carbolised paste, carbolic acid lotion, Condy's fluid, stypium, setons (28), and salicylic acid are all mentioned, as is carbolised catgut, which he used for sutures.

A paper read before the Midland Medical Society shows that West was taking a keen interest in Lister's methods of treating wounds in the early 1870s. The paper 'On some points of Contrast between French and English Surgery' (29) was based on his own observations of French practice during a visit to France in 1872 and describes both a lamentable lack of attention to simple hygiene and an ignorance of Lister's method of treating wounds. He compares French practice unfavourably with that in Swiss and German hospitals where, he tells us, Lister's treatment was commonplace.

West wrote a translation of Baron von Langenbeck's 'Surgical Observations on Gun-shot Wounds of the Hip-joint' (30) in 1874. That did not stop him from singling Langenbeck out as one who remained unconvinced of Listerism in a paper he published shortly after his return from the continent later that year. In it, West points out that the majority of German and Austrian surgeons were in favour of Lister's methods, while in other papers on Continental surgery from the same decade, he makes numerous references to Listerism, and comments on how effective his Continental colleagues have been in eliminating wound infection. The paper on German surgery even contains a league table in which he compares

the success rates of hospitals in the treatment of infected wounds. West mentions a number of surgeons as devotees of Lister's treatment - two, are Bardeleben of Berlin and Busch of Bonn. He cites Bardeleben as a man who operates under the carbolic spray (31) and carries out Lister's antiseptic treatment of wounds 'with perfect thoroughness and fidelity to his principles' (32) while Busch, he says, applies 'Lister's antiseptic dressing in its entirety.' (33) West is no less attentive to the subject of Listerism in his paper 'Jottings from a Surgeon's Holiday Note Book.' (34). He says the antiseptic treatment of wounds is largely carried out in Amsterdam, and that in the Julius Hospital in Wurzburg where, he says, operations are performed under the carbolic spray, erysipelas has been eradicated as a result of Lister's treatment of wounds.

James West went to the Continent with an open mind. In his introduction to 'Impressions of German Surgery' he says 'I went to the continent as a student, and with as much eagerness for knowledge as any alumnus on first entering the portals of his alma mater.' (35). West's own published output, and his attendance at various medical society meetings and congresses, suggest that he continued to look upon himself as a student right up until his death in 1883. When he published his first paper on his own use of Lister's methods in 1877, he was not a new convert to the ideas. He would not have reported the favourable results which were being achieved as a result of Listerism on the Continent in the early 1870s with enthusiasm, while at the same time turning his own back on the principles. Five successful cases resulting from his own use of Lister's methods were recorded by West in his paper on the antiseptic treatment of herniotomy, although he says he could have cited more. One patient, he says, was transferred to him by Gamgee precisely because of his interest in the antiseptic treatment of herniotomy. West left nothing to chance - he operated under the carbolic spray, used a drainage tube and applied dressings according to the rigorous regime advocated by Lister (36). He expressed the wish to hear about any failures

which surgeons had encountered in the use of Lister's methods and said he hoped that his own successes would help to convince others.

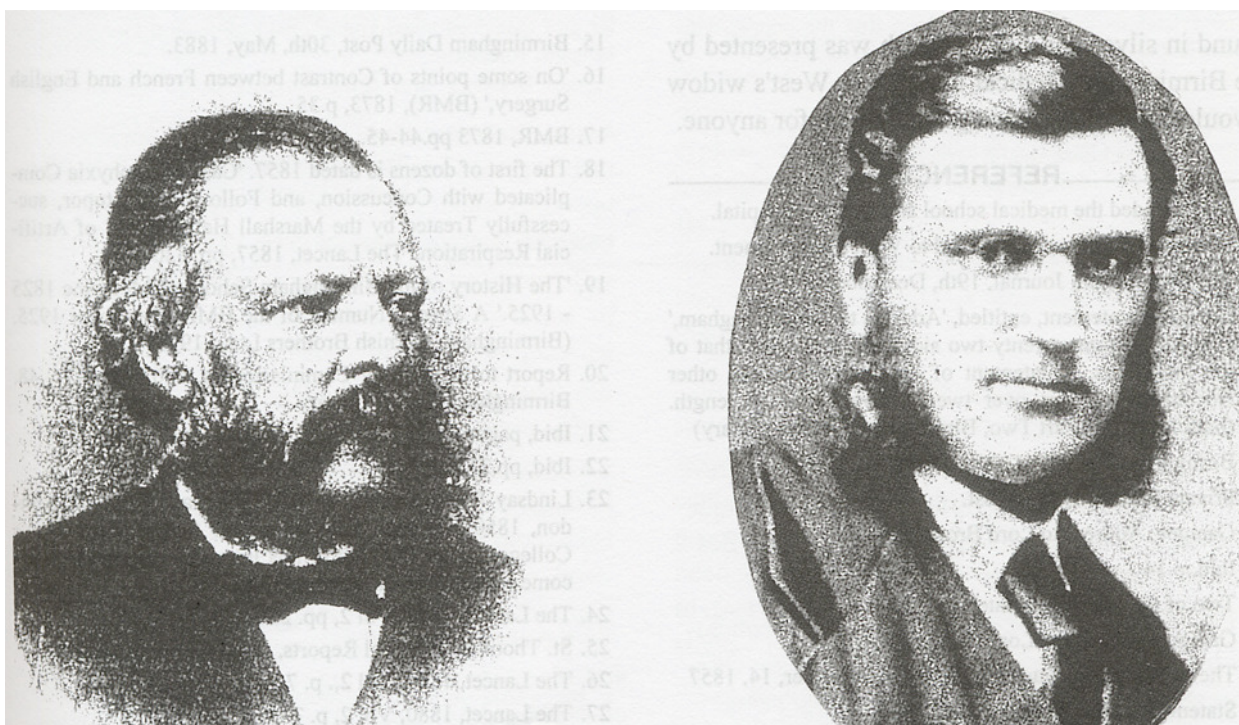
The paper West read in support of Listerism to the Birmingham Medical Society on December, 3rd, 1879, and which was published in *The St. Thomas's Hospital Reports*, is highly persuasive. He says that his own mind is fully made up about the efficacy of Lister's methods, and he challenges those die-hards who are still resistant directly and, by name. Granshaw says that the paper by West was the only paper to date on the subject to appear in *The St. Thomas's Hospital Reports*. She believes West's paper may have appeared in *The St. Thomas's Hospital Reports* at the instigation of William McCormac, a St. Thomas's man, who had been committed to Listerism since 1869. Granshaw claims it was ambitious provincial colleagues who brought Lister's methods to the notice of the London elites, and in such a way as 'only fools would ignore it.' (37). West certainly does make his case vehemently. After openly attacking the die-hard, Mr Savory, West gives evidence gathered by both himself and others. Dr Nussbaum of Munich, West informs the sceptics, had a very high incidence of pyæmia, erysipelas and hospital gangrene in his hospital prior to the introduction of Lister's treatment. Physicians, he says, had questioned the wisdom of performing operations in the stricken hospital. West spells out the facts - pyæmia striking down all compound fractures and nearly all amputations, gangrene attacking 80% of cases by 1874 and erysipelas in nearly every bed. The rare cases of amputation which were not fatal, West writes, succumbed to two or three attacks of erysipelas. He says that the introduction of Lister's antiseptic methods transformed the hospital, and points out that without change to wards, nursing, diet or the surroundings, hospital gangrene, pyæmia, and erysipelas had been completely eliminated.

Debates on Lister's treatment continued both in Birmingham and elsewhere. Those who sought to reject the argument for Lister's methods had to convince others that their alternatives were equally effective. The resulting attention to hygiene and

cleanliness meant hospitals really did become safer places for the sick and injured. West's colleague, Lawson Tait, opened a debate on the subject in Birmingham in November, 1881 (38). West seldom missed these meetings, and was present at this one. West again argued for Listerism, saying he had tried alternatives and had found them flawed. He cited the successes of Dr. Keith in ovariectomies, which, he said, were the result of that surgeon's use of Lister's methods. Tait, unconvinced, argued that the improvements were probably the result of Keith's own growing expertise. Alternatives to Lister's own methods had been devised by two of West's colleagues - Joseph Sampson Gamgee and Mr Furneaux Jordan. West acknowledged the efficacy of Gamgee's dressings for minor wounds, but claimed that they were inadequate in cases of amputation. Of the thirteen who contributed to the debate that day, West, and seven others, were fully in support of Listerism. Of those who remained, only Tait was opposed to it in its entirety. Tait's argument amounts to some five sides of print in the journal, but the one who made

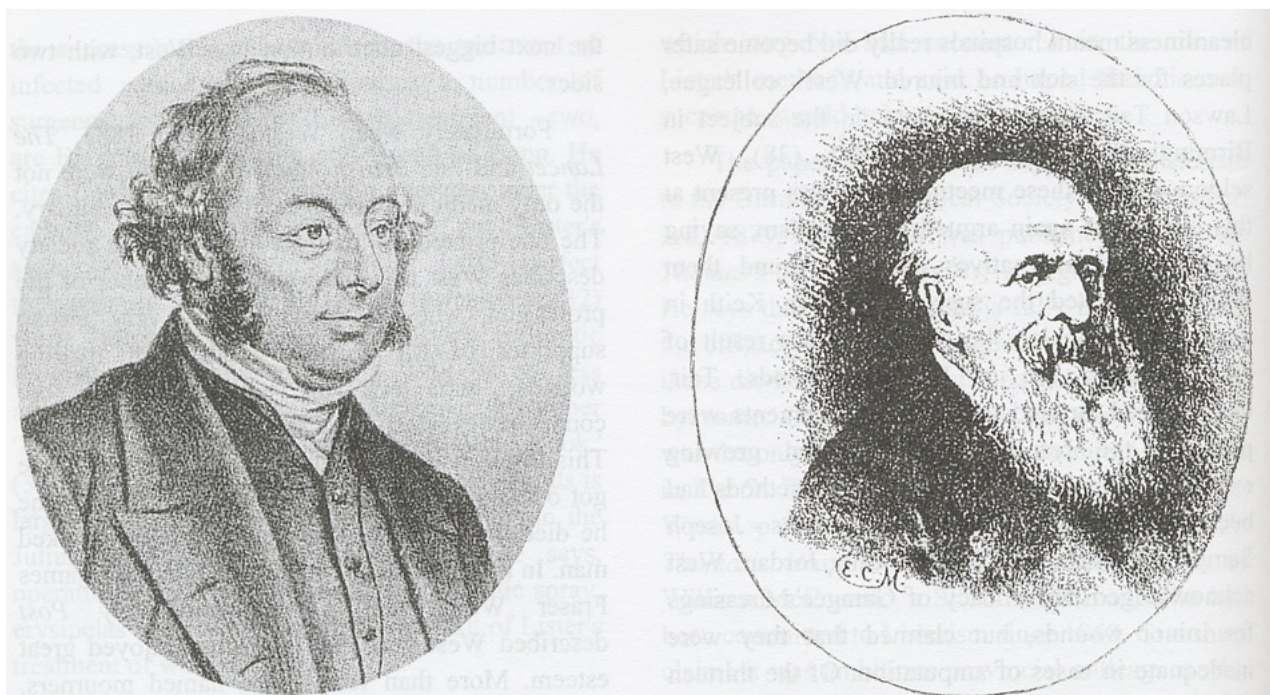
the next biggest contribution was West, with two sides.

Fortunately when West died in 1883, *The Lancet* and *The British Medical Journal* were not the only medical journals to give him an obituary. The one printed by his own local medical society describes West as a hard-working member of the profession who, it says 'was a very strong supporter of Mr. Lister's method of treating wounds, and took an active part in the controversies which have arisen respecting it.' (39). This is surely a more fitting tribute. He may have got off to a difficult start in 1857, but by the time he died, he was a well respected and much liked man. In its report on the funeral of James Fitzjames Fraser West, *The Birmingham Daily Post* described West as a man who had enjoyed great esteem. More than forty-seven named mourners, most of them medics, formed the cortege at the funeral on 29th, May, 1883 and a warm account of his life appeared some two months later in the local magazine, *Edgbastonia*. That - plus an address of condolence, emblazoned on vellum and



**Figure 1.** The two surgeons in the election row of 1857/8. Above left, Joseph Sampson Gamgee. Above right, James Fitzjames Fraser West.





**Figure 2.** The two Queen's professors at the centre of the election dispute of 1857/8. Above left: William Sands Cox. Above right: John Birt Davies.

bound in silver and black, which was presented by the Birmingham Medical Institute to West's widow - would surely have been good enough for anyone.

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16. 'On some points of Contrast between French and English Surgery,' (BMR), 1873, p 35.
17. BMR, 1873 pp.44-45.
18. The first of dozens is dated 1857. 'Case of Asphyxia Complicated with Concussion, and Followed by Stupor, successfully Treated by the Marshall Hall Method of Artificial Respiration,' The Lancet, 1857, pp. 530-531.
19. 'The History of the Birmingham School of Medicine 1825 - 1925.' A Special Number of the BMR, December 1925. (Birmingham, Cornish Brothers Ltd, , 1925)
20. Report to the Charity Commissioners, 1863, pp. 47 - 48. Birmingham Central Library.
21. Ibid, pages 62 and 74 respectively.
22. Ibid, pp.23 -24.
23. Lindsay Patricia Granshaw, St. Thomas's Hospital, London, 1850 - 1900. Unpublished PhD thesis, (Bryn Mawr College, University Microfilms International,1981). Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.
24. The Lancet, 1877, Vol 2, pp. 230-232.
25. St. Thomas's Hospital Reports, 1879, Vol X, pp. 73-83.
26. The Lancet, 1880, Vol 2., p. 769.
27. The Lancet, 1880, Vol 2, p. 768..
28. Thread which acts as a wick to draw off fluid, especially pus.
29. BMR, 1873, pp. 31 - 44.
30. Ibid, 1876, pp. 29 - 45; 88 - 108 and 166 - 188.

31. A device designed by Lister which administered a fine antiseptic spray over the patient during surgery.
  32. 'Impressions of German Surgery,' BMR, 1875, p.52.
  33. 'Impressions of German Surgery,' BMR, 1875, p. 47.
  34. BMR, 1879, pp. 161 - 175.
  35. 'Impressions of German Surgery,' BMR, 1875, p. 42.
  36. A strip of protective was placed over the entire length of the wound, and then two or three small pads of carbolic gauze which had been saturated with carbolic water, and on top of that, the eight layers of gauze, with a sheet of protective between the seventh and eighth folds. West goes on to say that the wounds were dressed again if any discolouration at the edges of the dressing was present within twenty-four hours. If no discolouration occurred, the dressings were changed daily for the first few days and after that, every other day.
  37. Granshaw, St. Thomas's Hospital, London, 1850 - 1900, p. 251.
  38. 'Debate on the Clinical Results Obtained by the Listerian Method of Performing Operations and Dressing Wounds,' BMR, 1881, Vol 10, pp.79 - 92.
  39. BMR, 1883, Vol. 14, p.47.
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