



PHILOSOPHICAL  
TRANSACTIONS.

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I. *An Account of a Woman in the Shire of Ross living without Food or Drink.* By Dr. Mackenzie, Physician at New Tarbat. Communicated by the Right Honourable James Stewart Mackenzie, Lord Privy Seal of Scotland.

TO SIR JOHN PRINGLE, BART. P. R. S.

S I R,  
Read Nov. 7, 1776. Hill-Street,  
June 5, 1776.

**I** HERE inclose the case of the fasting woman in Ross-shire, authenticated by Mr. MAC LEOD the sheriff, and several justices of the peace of that county; that, in case you shall think it worthy to have a place in the Philosophical Transactions, it may be inserted therein. I am, with great regard, SIR,

Your most obedient humble servant,

J. S. MACKENZIE.

VOL. LXVII.

B

JANET

JANET MAC LEOD, unmarried, aged thirty-three years and some months, daughter of DONALD MAC LEOD, tenant in Croick, in the parish of Kincardine, and shire of Ross; in the fifteenth year of her age had a pretty sharp epileptic fit: she had till then been in perfect health, and continued so till about four years thereafter, when she had a second fit, which lasted a whole day and night; and a few days afterwards, she was seized with a fever of several weeks continuance, from which she had a slow and very tedious recovery of several months.

During this period she lost the natural power of her eye-lids, was under the necessity of keeping them open with the fingers of one hand, when she had any thing to do with the other, went out, or wanted to look about her; in every other respect she was in health and tolerable spirits, only here it may be fit to remark, that she never had the least appearance of the *menfes*, but periodically spit up blood in pretty large quantities, and at the same time it flowed from the nose. This vicarious discharge, according to her mother's report, happened regularly every month for several years.

About five years ago, a little before which time the abovementioned periodical discharge had disappeared, she had a short third epileptic fit, which was immediately suc-

ceeded by a fever of about a week's continuance, and of which she recovered so slowly that she had not been out of doors till six weeks after the crisis; when, without the knowledge of her parents or any of the family (who were all busied in the harvest-field) she stole out of the house, and bound the corn of a ridge before they observed her. On that same evening she took to her bed, complaining much of her heart and head; and since, she has never risen out of it except when lifted, has seldom spoken a word, and has had so little craving for food, that at first it was by downright compulsion her parents could get her to take as much as would support a sucking infant: afterwards she gradually fell off from taking even that small quantity; insomuch that, at Whitsuntide 1763, she totally refused food and drink, and her jaw became so fast locked, that it was with the greatest difficulty her father was able with a knife or other methods to open her teeth so as to admit a little thin gruel or whey, and of which so much generally run out at the corners of her mouth, that they could not be sensible that any of it had been swallowed.

Much about this time, that is, about four years ago, they got a bottle of the water from a noted medicinal spring in Brea-mar, of which they endeavoured to get her to swallow a part, by pouring some out of a spoon

between her lips (her jaws all the while fast-locked) but it all run out. With this, however, they rubbed her throat and jaws, and continued the trial to make her swallow, rubbing her throat with the water that run out of her mouth for three mornings together. On the third morning during this operation, she cried, Give me more water; when all that remained of the bottle was given her, which she swallowed with ease. These were the only words she spoke for almost a year, and she continued to mutter some more (which her parents understood) for twelve or fourteen days, after which she spoke none, and rejected, as formerly, all sorts of nourishment and drink, till some time in the month of July 1765, when a sister of hers thought, by some signs that she made, that she wanted her jaws opened; which her father, not without violence, got done, by putting the handle of a horn-spoon between her teeth. She said then intelligibly, Give me a drink; and drank with ease, and all at one draught, about an English pint of water. Her father then asked her, Why she would not make some signs, although she could not speak, when she wanted a drink? She answered, why should she when she had no desire. At this period they kept the jaws asunder with a bit of wood, imagining she got her speech by her jaws being opened, and continued them thus wedged for about twenty days,

though in the first four or five days she had wholly lost the power of utterance. At last they removed the wedge, as it gave her uneasiness, and made her lips sore. At this time she was sensible of every thing done or said about her; and when her eye-lids were opened for her, she knew every body; and when the neighbours in their visits would be bemoaning her condition, they could observe a tear stand in her eye.

In some of the attempts to open her jaws, two of the under fore-teeth were forced out; of which opening they often endeavoured to avail themselves, by putting some thin nourishing drink into her mouth; but without effect, for it always returned by the corners; and, about a twelvemonth ago, they thought of thrusting a little dough of oatmeal through this gap of the teeth, which she would retain a few seconds, and then return with something like a straining to vomit, without one particle going down: nor has the family been sensible, though observing, of any appearance like that of swallowing, for now four years, excepting the small draught of Brea-mar water and the English pint of common water; and for the last three years she has not had any evacuation by stool or urine, except that, once or twice a week, she has passed a few drops of urine, as the parents express it, about as much as would wet the surface

face of a half-penny; and even small as this quantity is, it gives her some uneasiness till she voids it: for they know all her motions, and when they see her thus uneasy, they carry her to the door of the house, where she makes these few drops. Nor have they, in all these three years, ever discovered the smallest wetting in her bed; in proof of which, notwithstanding her being so long bed-ridden, there has never been the least excoriation, though she never attempts to turn herself, or makes any motion with hand, head, or foot, but lies like a log of wood. Her pulse to-day, which with some difficulty I felt (her mother at this time having raised her, and supported her in her bed) is distinct and regular, slow, and to the extreme degree small. Her countenance is clear and pretty fresh, her features not disfigured nor sunk; her skin feels natural both as to touch and warmth; and to my astonishment, when I came to examine her body, for I expected to feel a skeleton, I found her breasts round, and prominent, like those of a healthy young woman; her legs, arms, and thighs, not at all emaciated; the *abdomen* somewhat tumid, and the muscles tense; her knees bent, and her ham-strings tight as a bow-string; her heels almost close to the *nates*. When they struggle with her, to put a little water within her lips, they observe sometimes a dewy softness on her skin;

skin; she sleeps much, and very quiet; but when awake keeps a constant whimpering like a new-born weakly infant, and sometimes makes an effort to cough. At present no degree of strength can force open her jaws. I put the point of my little finger into the gap in her teeth, and found the tongue, as far as I could reach, soft and moist; as I did with my other fingers the mouth and cheeks quite to the back teeth. She never can remain a moment on her back, but always falls to one side or to the other; and when her mother sat behind her in the bed, and supported her while I was examining her body, her head hung down, with her chin close to her breast, nor could I with any force move it backwards, the anterior muscles of the neck being rigid, like a person in the *emprostotonos*, and in this posture she constantly lies.

The above case was taken in writing this day, at the diseased woman's bed-side, from the mouths of her father and mother, who are known to be people of great veracity, and are under no temptation to deceive; for they neither ask, expect, or get any thing: their daughter's situation is a very great mortification to them, and universally known and regretted by all their neighbours. I had along with me, as interpreters<sup>(a)</sup>, Mr. Henry Robertson, a very discreet young gentleman, eldest son

(a) The family spoke only Erse,

to the minister of the parish, and David Ross, at the Craig of Strath-Carron, their neighbour and one of the elders of the parish, who verified from his own knowledge all that is above related. The present situation and appearances of the patient were carefully examined this 21st of October, 1767, by Dr. ALEXANDER MACKENZIE, physician at New Tarbat; who likewise, in the month of October, 1772, being informed that the patient was recovering and ate and drank, visited her, and found her condition to be as follows: about a year preceding this last date, her parents one day returning from their country labours (having left their daughter as for some years before fixed to her bed) were greatly surprized to find her sitting on her hams, on the side of the house opposite to her bed-place, spinning with her mother's distaff. I asked, whether she ever ate or drank? whether she had any of the natural evacuations? whether she ever spoke or attempted to speak? And was answered, that she sometimes crumbled a bit of oat or barley cake in the palm of her hand, as if to feed a chicken; that she put little crumbs of this into the gap of her teeth, rolled them about for some time in her mouth, and then sucked out of the palm of her hand a little water, whey, or milk; and this once or twice a day, and even that by compulsion: that the *egesta* were in  
 proportion



proportion to the *ingesta*; that she never attempted to speak; that her jaws were still fast-locked, her hamstrings tight as before, and her eyes shut. On my opening her eye-lids I found the eye-balls turned up under the edge of the *os frontis*, her countenance ghastly, her complexion pale, her skin shrivelled and dry, and her whole person rather emaciated; her pulse with the utmost difficulty to be felt. She seemed sensible and tractable in every thing, except in taking food; for, at my request, she went through her different exercises, spinning on the distaff, and crawling about on her hams, by the wall of the house, with the help of her hands: but when she was desired to eat, she shewed the greatest reluctance, and indeed cried before she yielded; and this was no more than, as I have said, to take a few crumbs as to feed a bird, and to suck half a spoonful of milk from the palm of her hand. On the whole, her existence was little less wonderful now than when I first saw her, when she had not swallowed the smallest particle of food for years together. I attributed her thinness and wan complexion, that is the great change of her looks from what I had first seen when fixed to her bed, to her exhausting too much of the *saliva* by spinning flax on the distaff, and therefore recommended her being totally confined to spinning wool: this she does with equal dexterity

as she did the flax. The above was her situation in October, 1772; and within these eight days I have been told by a neighbour of her father's, that she still continues in the same way, without any addition to her support, and without any additional ailment.

New Tarbat,  
April 3, 1775.

ALEX. MACKENZIE.

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At Croick, the fifteenth Day of June, 1775.

TO authenticate the history set forth in the preceding pages, DONALD MAC LEOD, of Granics esq. sheriff depute of Ross-shire, GEORGE MUNRO esq. of Cuteain, SIMON ROSS esq. of Gladfield, Captain GEORGE SUTHERLAND of Elphin, all justices of the peace; Messieurs WILLIAM SMITH preacher of the gospel, JOHN BARCLAY writer in Tain, HUGH ROSS student of divinity, and ALEXANDER MAC LEOD, did come to this place, accompanied by the above Dr. ALEXANDER MACKENZIE physician at New Tarbat, and after explaining the purport and meaning of the above history to DONALD MAC LEOD father to JANET MAC LEOD above-mentioned, and to DAVID ROSS elder in the parish of Kincardin, who lives in the close neighbourhood of this place, and was one of the doctor's original interpreters; they, to our full satisfaction, after  
a minute

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a minute examination, authenticate all the facts set forth in the above account: and, for our further satisfaction, we had JANET MAC LEOD brought out before us to the open air, when the doctor discovered a very great improvement in her looks and health since the period of his having seen her last, as now she walked tolerably upright, with a little hold by the wall. And notwithstanding her age, which, upon inquiry, we found to be exactly as set forth in the above account, her countenance and looks would have denoted her not to be above twenty years of age at most. At present, the quantity of food she uses is not above what would be necessary for the sustenance of an infant of two years of age. And we do report, from our knowledge of the above men, and the circumstances of the case, that full faith and credit is to be given to every article of the above history.

WILLIAM SMITH.

JOHN BARCLAY, N. P.

HUGH ROSS.

ALEX<sup>R</sup>. M<sup>C</sup> LEOD.

DON<sup>D</sup>. M<sup>C</sup> LEOD, SH. DEP.

GEO. MUNRO, J. P.

SIMON ROSS, J. P.

GEO. SUTHERLAND, J. P.

