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Sketches from the history of psychiatry

This letter from Dr Richard Asher was received by Dr Irving Shribman when one of Dr Asher's patients was referred to him shortly before Dr Asher died.

Friday

DR. RICHARD ASHER

May 14th 1965

WELBECK 3325

re an irrelevant flight of ideas

57, WIMPOLE STREET,
W.1. (CONSULTING ROOMS & RESIDENCE)

Dear Dr Shribman

Your gracious letter stimulates me to make further comments. If either of us went from one shop to another asking for a pen and we were only offered pencils, we would regard them as pretty poor shops and continue to try others till we were successful

Mrs will continue her attempts to purchase the opinion she has chosen as a suitable one for her son, and reasonably enough may regard us as most ill equipped shops judged by the goods we purvey

What prevents us, other than pigheadedness, from selling the goods we're asked for and so acquiring a vast fortune and a feeble reputation is presumably the avidity for a reasonable rating from those capable of valid estimates. It's not for the patients' sakes for – in such cases – the words of the Pears soap advert apply She won't be happy till she gets it – and there are always

-2.

a few soap makers around such as the crammers who said this boy was brilliant

A similar motive based on aggrandisement made me persist with $x^{\frac{1}{3}} - 3x^{-\frac{1}{3}} = 2$ but, though I finally succeeded I am aware it is only because the faculty of doggedness & the desire to feel intelligent do not atrophy, even long after the intelligence has atrophied a good deal. I had to start thus with Revision. As you add indices in multiplying – as in $x^2 \times x^2 = x^4$ it must be that $x^{\frac{1}{3}} = \sqrt[3]{x}$ to make $x^{\frac{1}{3}} \times x^{\frac{1}{3}} \times x^{\frac{1}{3}} = x$ similarly $x^{-\frac{1}{3}}$ must be $\frac{1}{\sqrt[3]{x}}$. Now translate $x^{\frac{1}{3}} - 3x^{-\frac{1}{3}} = 2$ becomes $\sqrt[3]{x} - \frac{3}{\sqrt[3]{x}} = 2$ To eliminate fractions multiply by $\sqrt[3]{x}$ and get $(\sqrt[3]{x})^2 - 2\sqrt[3]{x} = 3$ frightened by squared cubes I called $\sqrt[3]{x}$ by the sobriquet 'a' for a while $a^2 - 2a = 3$ less awe inspiring evoked recollection that $a^2 - 2ab + b^2$ was $(a-b)^2$ and so $(a-1)^2$ would be $a^2 - 2a + 1$, so I added 1 both sides $a^2 - 2a + 1 = 3 + 1$ $(a-1)^2 = 4$ $a - 1 = \sqrt{4} = 2$ $a = 3$ ✓

So $\sqrt[3]{x}$ is 3 and $x = 27$ ANSWER HURRAH

Check $\sqrt[3]{27} - \frac{3}{\sqrt[3]{27}} = 3 - (3 \times \frac{1}{3}) = 2$ ✓

Yours triumphant Richard Asher

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