DEATH OF A DOCTOR:

Dr James Turnbull and the Hilson Inquest of 1862 in Christchurch, NZ

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INTRODUCTION

The sad story of Peter Brown Hilson is worth remembering because it illuminates several significant themes in the early medical history of settler society in nineteenth century New Zealand. His brief career is inextricably entwined with that of his friend and medical partner, James Somerville Turnbull, who went on to become a leading citizen of Christchurch, involved with politics and education as well as medicine. The Hilson inquest came close to blighting Turnbull's reputation, and ended his key source of income as a druggist. The adverse publicity, and his spirited response, may have helped to make him better known to the public, but it probably delayed his appointment to the staff of Christchurch Hospital by at least two years.

Hilson's career in Christchurch began with bright prospects. His partnership with Turnbull gave him financial security and they were able to build their own pharmacy with consulting rooms in 1859, the Apothecary's Hall. General practice was not easy in a frontier town with an over-supply of former ship's doctors from immigrant ships: Turnbull had been surgeon-superintendent on the *Indiana*, the ship that brought him and Hilson to New Zealand in 1858. Turnbull married in 1861, but Hilson remained a bachelor, enjoying the company of other single young men whose main pursuits were shooting, hunting and drinking.

Heavy drinking and alcohol addiction were all too common in colonial New Zealand. Spirits were imported in large quantities, even after local breweries were established, and doctors prescribed 'stimulants' for a wide range of afflictions, from pain to 'weak heart'. Medical men were well aware of the addictive risks from taking laudanum (tincture of opium) as a painkiller, and prescribed brandy as a less addictive palliative, but frequent and excessive drinking could lead just as quickly to addiction. Christchurch had no hospital before 1862 and no lunatic asylum before 1863. Before then there was nowhere for alcoholics with *delirium tremens* to go other than the Lyttelton Gaol.

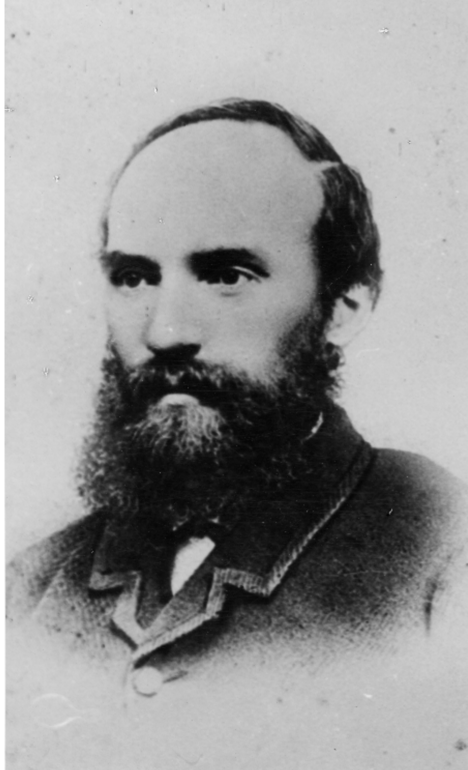
Peter Hilson became an alcoholic, probably before November 1861, when Turnbull dissolved their medical partnership. Deprived of his rooms at the Apothecary's Hall, he appears to have lived in a succession of hotels where his condition worsened during 1862. He was admitted to Christchurch Hospital on 15 December 1862 with *delirium tremens* and died there on 19 December after being attended by Drs Turnbull and Stedman. He was buried the very next day. No death certificate was issued. Rumours began to circulate that he had been mistreated or had been put out of his misery by Turnbull. It was known that Turnbull and Stedman had disagreed over his treatment. The Coroner, Dr John Coward, ordered the body to be exhumed for examination and an inquest was held on 23 December. This established that death had been from natural causes, with no foul play, but Turnbull resigned his practice on 25 December, claiming that the scurrilous rumours had damaged his reputation as a medical man. A

meeting of over fifty leading citizens on 30 December begged him to reconsider, and on 3 January 1863 he agreed to resume practice. He then sold the Apothecary's Hall to his pharmacists, John Valentine Ross and his partner Charles Cook. Turnbull also sold his Armagh Street house and furniture, acquired stables in Cathedral Square, and later moved to Madras Street. The Hilson affair had been a major upheaval for a newly-married doctor trying to get established in a colonial town. As we shall see, it was also a major upheaval for the newly-opened Christchurch Hospital.

The Hilson affair illustrates a number of themes: the close relationship between doctors and pharmacy in early Christchurch (they made more money from drugs than from consultations), the importance of reputation in making a medical career in a highly competitive market, the risk of addiction in a hard-drinking colonial society, disagreements over the treatment of alcohol addiction and *delirium tremens*, the role of the Coroner in a new settlement, and the inadequacies of early colonial hospitals.

What follows is based almost entirely on newspaper evidence, which is surprisingly rich for this period in New Zealand, thanks to the digitisation of early papers by the National Library of New Zealand and its website *Papers Past*. No personal letters or papers have survived from any of the main players in this story. Probate papers in Archives NZ have added some useful details about Hilson (he died intestate), but the surviving early records of Christchurch Hospital are extremely sparse and only begin in January 1863, after Hilson's death. The hospital's historian in the 1950s rescued them from a damp basement, and some records were beyond saving.

This account is as much about Turnbull as Hilson, indeed, much more is known about Turnbull than Hilson. It may therefore serve as a first chapter in the biography of Dr James Somerville Turnbull, that talkative, generous, querulous, argumentative, contradictory, radical, fearless and energetic character who became the unofficial dean of the medical profession in nineteenth century Christchurch.



Dr James Somerville Turnbull (1829-90)

Canterbury Museum 19XX.2.5290

No photo of Dr Hilson was located.

Dr Turnbull and Daughter *Deans family*

The Apothecary's Hall, corner of Armagh and Colombo Streets, Christchurch, built in 1859 for Turnbull and Hilson. This photo taken in 1878 by William Ferrier.

Canterbury Museum 8215

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Chapter One

TWO NEW DOCTORS IN A NEW TOWN

Peter Brown Hilson was born in Scotland in 1833.[1] He was the son of Gavin Hilson, a doctor in Jedburgh, a market town in South Central Roxburgh. Hilson had served as an army doctor during the Peninsular War, and was something of a local hero, as his grave is marked by a tall obelisk.[2] Peter Hilson was the second of four sons: William was born in 1831, Archibald in 1835 and James in 1838.[3] Peter and Archibald both followed their father's profession and became doctors.

Four years earlier James Somerville Turnbull had been born in Edinburgh, but he grew up in Jedburgh, where he went to school and was apprenticed to a doctor.[4] It is possible that the doctor was Dr Hilson, for James and Peter became friends and went together to study medicine in Edinburgh. Turnbull walked the wards at Heriot's Hospital and Edinburgh Hospital, and qualified LRCS (Ed) in 1855. Hilson qualified LRCS (Ed) in 1856. Turnbull went on to complete his MD by thesis 'On the Fibrous Tissues' at Edinburgh in 1857. He then studied surgery at Guy's Hospital in London. [5]

Both young men were Lowland Scots, from the Borders, that much-fought-over zone of rolling hills between Scotland and England. Jedburgh was an ancient town with one of the most famous of the Border abbeys, founded in 1118 by monks from Beauvais in France. Ruinous since the sixteenth century dissolution of the monasteries, the red sandstone remains of Jedburgh Abbey are well-preserved, with detailed carving in the nave and a fine rose-window. Hilson and Turnbull would have been familiar with the town's three-arched sixteenth century bridge, and the house where Mary Queen of Scots once stayed. The former castle, once a residence of Scottish kings, had vanished, and a jail was built on the site in 1823, which is now known as the Castle. The town has associations with Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Wordsworth and Prince Charles Edward Stuart. The young men may have rambled on Dunian Hill to the south-west or Lanton Moor to the north-west, where there are ancient earthworks and the ruined tower of Timpendean.[6] Turnbull was very proud of his Scots ancestry and in New Zealand he was a strong supporter of the Presbyterian Church.

Turnbull's parents were Adam Ogilvie Turnbull and Margaret Somerville (hence his second name). The origin of his surname can be traced back to c.1300 when one William Roule was in the service of King Robert the Bruce. A wild bull charged at the royal party, but Roule threw it to the ground and broke its neck. Robert dubbed him William Turn-e-Bull and granted him the manor of Bedrule. In 1315 the king granted him further lands in Phillipshaugh and named him Sir William Turnebull. The family motto was 'I saved the king'.[7]

After qualifying, James Turnbull made several voyages to India as a ship's surgeon in the 1850s. One source suggests that he had relatives serving in India. He was on the

Maid of Londonderry in 1856, and left India just before the Mutiny. He had many stories to tell from his time in India. It was probably on one of these trips, or earlier, that he suffered an accident and lost his right foot. He was fitted with a peg leg and a cork tip, and walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He had a high-pitched voice and a strong Scots accent. [8]

Nothing is known of Hilson's youth or schooling, but it seems likely that he and Turnbull studied together in Edinburgh. What Hilson did while Turnbull was in London, or on his voyages to India, is likewise unknown. Nor do we have any evidence for their reasons for emigrating together to New Zealand. Like some colonists venturing to the most remote part of the globe, they may not have intended to settle permanently. It all depended on how well they got on, and whether they liked their new surroundings and the friends they made in the new land.

The Canterbury settlement was the last of the British colonisation projects in New Zealand planned according to the theory of 'systematic colonisation' devised by Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Earlier settlements had been established in the 1840s in Nelson and New Plymouth, where shortage of land and conflict with the indigenous Māori inhabitants had slowed growth. Governor George Grey and Bishop Selwyn favoured the Wairarapa for a new settlement, near to Wellington (established by the New Zealand Company in 1840) but the surveyors for a Scottish church settlement chose Otago instead, and Dunedin (the ancient Gaelic name for Edinburgh) was founded in 1848. That was also the year of revolutions in Europe, where socialism challenged monarchies and bourgeois societies. Colonisation was seen as a solution to unemployment, poverty and dangerous ideas.

The Canterbury Association first met in London on 27 March 1848. The meeting had been called by John Robert Godley, a young Anglo-Irish landowner from Killegar, County Leitrim. Godley had been influenced by Wakefield's ideas, and was anxious to relieve the poverty of Irish peasants following the Potato Famine of 1845. Godley had written about colonial reform and had many influential friends in England. Wakefield persuaded him to choose New Zealand for a new Anglican church settlement. The Canterbury Association attracted high-level support: its first members included the Archbishops of Canterbury and Dublin, eight present or future bishops, eleven present or future peers, and various baronets, deans and members of Parliament. Fourteen were fellow alumni with Godley of Christ Church College, Oxford, and ten were graduates of Cambridge University. Most had been influenced by the Oxford Movement, and would be regarded as High Anglicans. Godley and Wakefield envisaged a compact agricultural settlement with sufficient funds from land sales to build schools and churches. The surveyor sent out by the Canterbury Association, Captain Joseph Thomas, chose a site on the edge of the great alluvial plain that stretched from the Southern Alps to Pegasus Bay in the South Island of New Zealand.

The reality turned out rather differently from the theory. Emigrants recruited in 1850 for the first four ships were not exclusively Anglican: numbers of Methodists, Presbyterians and Wesleyans had to be included to make up the required numbers.

Land sales never reached the heights anticipated by Wakefield, and the numerous clergy who accompanied the emigrants found there were no churches ready for them. But on the whole the experiment worked far better than in previous Wakefield settlements. The 'Canterbury Pilgrims' as they called themselves had high hopes of establishing an orderly and law-abiding hierarchical society in a new land. But most of the migrants wanted the freedom to establish themselves as farmers and small businessmen rather than provide a docile workforce for a landowning elite. Agriculture was not enough: the economy was to be based on sheep, brought in by experienced Australians known derisively as 'Shagroons'. Wool exports soon made Canterbury the wealthiest of the New Zealand provinces after Otago, which was to be enriched by the gold-rush of the 1860s.

The capital of the Canterbury settlement was situated on dry grassland between the two small rivers known to Māori as the Otākaro and Opāwaho, renamed by the settlers the Avon and Heathcote rivers. Godley later claimed that the town was named Christ Church after his Oxford College, but that was also the original name of Canterbury Cathedral, whose archbishop led the Canterbury Association. Unfortunately, the site was surrounded by swamps, and drainage was to be a major problem for the fledgling township. The earliest buildings were wooden, and they tended to be cold and draughty in the winters. While it was a generally youthful and healthy population of pioneers, fevers became common in Christchurch in the 1860s. Householders dug wells for water, and then cesspits for human waste, not realising that cross-contamination would pollute their drinking water. Typhoid, diphtheria and other fevers became all too common in Christchurch in the 1860s.

By 1858 Canterbury had a population of nearly 9,000. About 3,000 were in Christchurch, and 2,000 in the port of Lyttelton. The rest were scattered in small farms and large sheep stations across the plains and foothills. Since 1852 New Zealand had enjoyed a federal system of government, with a central administration and General Assembly in Wellington looking after taxation, defence, lighthouses and postal services, and six provincial councils, responsible for nearly everything else, including immigration, public works, roads and bridges. Each province was headed by a Superintendent who had extensive powers but had to govern with an elected council.

Emigration propaganda painted a rosy picture of conditions in New Zealand, and may have helped persuade Turnbull and Hilson to emigrate. It is a puzzle that they chose Canterbury rather than the largely Presbyterian province of Otago, but Otago was in the doldrums before gold was discovered, and the choice may have been dictated by the available ships. The province's first Superintendent, James Edward FitzGerald, had been actively recruiting in England, and sent several shiploads of migrants during 1858.

Turnbull was appointed surgeon-superintendent to the last of the ships departing that year. The 852 ton barque *Indiana* was a fairly new sailing ship, built in Quebec in 1856. It left Gravesend in London under Captain J. McKirdy on 5 August with over 300 steerage passengers and fourteen cabin or first-class passengers. Hilson and Turnbull

were cabin passengers. Most of the migrants were artisans or labourers, some with young children. There were 278 adults on board including the crew. Turnbull's duties as surgeon-superintendent were to supervise the distribution of food, ensure general cleanliness, and treat any cases of sickness or injury that might arise. He would have appointed several 'constables' from the more reliable older men to help maintain order, and he had Hilson to assist him in the small hospital on board. Having had several trips to India, he would have been regarded as an experienced surgeon-superintendent.

The *Indiana* had a fairly slow and uneventful voyage, in contrast to some other migrant ships that suffered from storms and sickness. There were only seven deaths, all but one of infants or small children. There were six births during the voyage, so the total muster remained much the same. The ship arrived at Lyttelton on 23 November 1858.[9]

As was customary, before the ship was unloaded, the passengers signed testimonials to the Captain and the Surgeon. They thanked Turnbull for 'his care and attention and his patience' as surgeon-superintendent. The testimonial referred to his 'untiring zeal, energy and decision of character … in devising and effecting sanitary measures'. The passengers thanked him for his 'unremitting exertions' and the fact that he had attended to their needs 'at all hours of the day and night'.

Turnbull responded to this testimonial with his own thanks to the passengers. He explained that he had been required by the regulations of the Emigration Commissioners to enforce certain standards of cleanliness and order. His position on board had been almost that of a magistrate in resolving disputes and differences. He wrote that he had been actuated:

> not by a desire to satisfy his employer, or to gain the good opinion of the passengers, but by the same principles which had actuated him since he commenced to practise as a physician, namely, that those entrusted to his care had an imperative claim upon his daily and hourly attention.
>
> He wished them every happiness in the land of their adoption, and he hoped that whether or not he stayed in Canterbury, they would still sometimes kindly remember the Doctor in spite of his physic and his iron.

Presumably the reporter or the typesetter left off the last word, which would have been 'discipline'. The passengers gave 'rousing cheers' for the Captain and the Doctor.[10]

Turnbull's reply to the passengers suggests that he was not fully committed to staying in New Zealand, but the two young doctors presented their diplomas to the local Registrar and were added to the Medical Register under the 1849 New Munster Ordinance on the same day, 21 December 1858. Turnbull was aged 29 and Hilson was 25.

Their first need was for somewhere to live and start their medical practice. They found a house in Cashel Street East, that is, on the east side of Colombo Street, the main street of town. Buildings were thin on the ground in this part of Christchurch in 1858. Most of the early commercial buildings were either around the Market Place, north of the Square designated for a future cathedral, or between Cashel and Hereford streets, , on the west side of Colombo Street south of Cathedral Square. Presumably, like Dr Alfred Barker, the first general practitioner in Christchurch in 1850, they hung a brass plaque on the gate or front door. (His was attached to his tent in Hagley Park until he built his house on Worcester Street.) Alert readers will have guessed that the streets in Christchurch were named after the dioceses of the British Empire: the most famous had already been used in the port town of Lyttelton.

Unlike Dr Barker, however, they inserted a notice in the *Lyttelton Times*, which simply stated: 'James S. Turnbull MD & Peter B. Hilson, Surgeons and Accoucheurs, Cashel Street East, Christchurch'.[11] Much to Dr Barker's annoyance, this ad was repeated almost every week for the next two years. He regarded advertising as being beneath the dignity of a medical gentleman, and contrary to English medical etiquette. It is amusing to reflect that Turnbull many years later condemned Dr Townend for advertising in the newspapers, 'after the manner of a small tradesman', when he had done the same thing himself to get started in Christchurch.

Advertising was necessary, however, for the two young doctors had landed themselves in a town already well-supplied with medical men and pharmacists: there were no fewer than 23 names on the register ahead of them in 1858. Some had moved on: William Butler and John Parker were practising at Akaroa, the French village on the other side of Banks Peninsula established in 1840. They had been joined there in 1852 by Daniel Watkins. Several ships' doctors had decided not to stay: Frederick Wilkinson, J. B. Haylock and J. R. Phillip had sailed on. Henry Richards had never completed his qualifications, though he claimed to have been a dresser for the famous surgeon Robert Liston. Dr Barker warned people away from an unqualified man, so he settled in the Malvern district and became a highly-respected country GP. In contrast, Thomas Moore was highly-qualified but gave up medicine to farm at Charteris Bay on Lyttelton Harbour. Dr William Donald had preceded all of them as the Port Medical Officer for Lyttelton in 1849, and had a busy career as magistrate and mayor of the port town. He had competition from Thomas McCheane until McCheane moved to Christchurch in 1852, from Robert Welch until he moved to the North Island in 1854, and from Charles Dudley until he moved to Kaiapoi in North Canterbury in 1857.

That left eleven doctors in practice in Christchurch in 1858: Drs Barker, James Earle at Heathcote, Patrick Willis at Opawa, John Gundry, Ben Moorhouse, Samuel Beswick, Thomas Rayner, Burrell Parkerson, Thomas Fisher, James Martin and John Coward. Five more were to arrive in 1859: John Murphy, Henry Fleetwood, George Gregson, Henry Prins and John Young. However, Fleetwood committed suicide at the White Hart Hotel in September 1859 and Gregson fled, having dissolved their partnership amid rumours of fraud. Yet more doctors were to arrive in the 1860s, at least 25 of

them. But by then the population had grown considerably, reaching 12,466 in city and suburbs by the 1871 Census.[12]

For poorer people, the first place to seek medical advice or medicine was at a pharmacy, and there were several druggists already in Lyttelton and Christchurch. Arthur Bayfield was the first in Lyttelton, having brought enough stock with him in the *Randolph* to set up shop straight away in January 1851. He built his first premises in Canterbury Street. Competition appeared in August 1851 when George Mallam opened his chemist's shop in London Street, but as Christchurch grew Bayfield opened a branch in High Street next to the first Town Hall, which he named 'The Dispensary'. In 1855 he sold this business to Edward Hillborne who may have been his assistant in High Street, but Hillborne died in 1860 and the shop was sold. When Bayfield died in 1861 his widow carried on for a while but then sold the business to H. Lawrence MPS, who became Lyttelton's leading pharmacist. (This business survived under various owners until 1943.) Edward Ellisdon opened a rival pharmacy in London Street in 1864.[13]

In Christchurch, apart from Bayfield's Dispensary, the first druggist was Dr John Seager Gundry MRCS, LSA, who advertised himself in August 1851 as 'Mr Gundry, Chemist and Druggist, Cashel Street, Christchurch'. But his ads ceased in September when he had enough patients to rely on his medical practice. He returned to England in 1858. Another doctor, Dr William Chapman MRCS, opened his 'Christchurch Dispensary' in Cathedral Square in August 1852, and advertised for two months, but then disappeared, only to return in 1859 as the proprietor of a homeopathic clinic. He advertised every few days throughout 1860, but then moved away for good.

Chapter Two

THE APOTHECARY'S HALL

Christchurch was therefore somewhat lacking in pharmacies when Hilson and Turnbull arrived in 1858. They appear to have pooled their capital and purchased the corner section TS 587 on the corner of Armagh and Colombo Streets and commenced building a two-storey wooden pharmacy which was opened in 1859 as 'The Apothecary's Hall'. Turnbull continued to practise from the house in Cashel Street East, but Hilson appears to have lived on the premises and had his consulting rooms behind the shop. He was probably the pharmacist of the partnership. When Edward Hillborne died in 1860, they bought his druggist's shop in High Street, but running two businesses seems to have stretched their resources too far and they sold this shop in 1862.

Another reason for selling may have been the appearance of competition on Colombo Street in 1861. This was a venture by George Gould, the likeable and utterly honest first storekeeper in the Market Place. He built Cookham House, an imposing two-storey brick building, as a boot and clothing emporium, and added the pharmacy as a sideline. However, it was almost opposite the Apothecary's Hall, and competition may have been brisk. The name of his first pharmacist is unknown, but from 1866 it was Austin Fussell, who became one of the city's most respected pharmacists until his accidental death in 1875. (He fell from a ladder in his warehouse.) It was probably in response to Gould's new pharmacy that Turnbull and Hilson began to advertise 'The Apothecary's Hall' in the *Lyttelton Times* from March 1861.[14]

Hilson and Turnbull were young Scots in a new and predominantly Anglican settlement. How did they get established? The answer probably lies in the fact that there were a large number of other Scots in Christchurch by 1858. Indeed, long before the arrival of the Canterbury Association's migrants, the Deans brothers from Ayrshire had been pioneering farmers on the Canterbury Plains. Their original 1843 cottage is still preserved, beside Riccarton House, at Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush. It was the Deans brothers who renamed the Otākaro as the Avon River, after a stream on their father's farm back in Scotland. It is said that it was the size of their carrots and their thriving fruit trees that convinced Captain Thomas when he visited in 1848 that the plains could support an agricultural settlement.[15]

Several prominent citizens in early Christchurch were Scots. John Anderson was a blacksmith-engineer who set up his forge in Cashel Street and soon became the settlement's leading metalworker. When the iron girders for the Papanui Bridge arrived from England in the 1860s some had been cracked and damaged in transit: he repaired them, and the repairs are still visible today. William Wilson, better known as 'Cabbage' Wilson, was one of the town's first nurserymen, importing seeds and seedling plants and shrubs, especially vegetables (hence his nickname). Wilson was to be the first mayor of Christchurch in 1868, followed by John Anderson in 1869.

By 1854 there were 324 Scots in Christchurch and its environs, and a committee was formed to establish the first 'Scotch Church'. William Wilson was their secretary, and he helped obtain a triangular block of land opposite the hospital site between Oxford Terrace and St Asaph Street West. He then wrote to the Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland and asked that a minister be sent to Canterbury to minister to the Scots who were there. He asked for someone special, 'a really clever minister', a good preacher, well-educated, and capable of lecturing on natural history, geology and astronomy.

What they got was the Reverend Charles Fraser, a 33-year old graduate of Marischal College in Aberdeen and Edinburgh University who arrived in April 1856. He was an exceptionally able preacher, with a young wife, Jane, 13 years his junior. The Scots community welcomed him with a purse of 50 sovereigns as an advance on his stipend, and then contributed generously to building the first Presbyterian Church in Christchurch, which was named by Fraser as St Andrew's. When he preached the first sermon there in February 1857 the collection amounted to over £74, far more than any Anglican church had ever collected in Canterbury.[16]

Fraser went on to establish churches in Akaroa (where he preached in French), Lyttelton, Kaiapoi, Timaru and Hokitika, and eight Presbyterian primary schools. In June 1859 he helped establish the Mechanics' Institute in Christchurch, where he lectured on history and literature. He later helped found the Canterbury Museum, the Collegiate Union (which became Canterbury College and then Canterbury University), and the Christchurch YMCA. In 1867 he was elected a fellow of the Geological Society of London.

Anderson, Wilson and Fraser would have welcomed the arrival of two young Scots doctors in 1858. Dr Donald in Lyttelton, though born in London, had Scottish parents, but there were no Scots medical men in Christchurch until Turnbull and Hilson arrived. They would naturally attend Sunday services at the new St Andrew's Church, and would do their utmost to be polite and friendly in the hope of attracting Scottish patients to their practice.

Fraser and Turnbull were both on the committee that set up the Mechanics' Institute in Christchurch in June 1859. John Hall, runholder and politician, was in the chair, and Turnbull proposed the resolution to accept the report of the provisional committee.[17] The first Mechanics' Institute in Britain was formed in Edinburgh in 1821, soon followed by others in Glasgow, Liverpool and London. Their aim was to provide adult education for workers, especially in the arts, technical subjects and chemistry, and they were often funded by businessmen who saw value in having well-educated workers and artisans. The institutes usually founded a library and reading room where men could extend their self-education. The Christchurch Institute later became the Canterbury Public Library.

Later that year Turnbull was briefly consulted in a notorious court case, which happened to involve fellow Scots. Christina Gregg was charged with the murder by

poison of her much older husband James, who (she claimed) had been drinking to excess and wasting his money at the pub. They had settled on a small farm on Riccarton Road and employed one Edmund Langstreth as a farm labourer. Dr Thomas Fisher was called in October 1859 when James Gregg became violently ill. He prescribed some medicine, but Gregg died without tasting it. As the death had been sudden and unexplained, the Coroner, Dr Donald, ordered a post mortem examination and Dr Fisher asked Turnbull to assist him. They conducted a chemical analysis of the stomach contents and found enough arsenic to cause death. Gregg's body was otherwise perfectly healthy. Christina Gregg and Edmund Langstreth were arrested on suspicion of conspiring to murder James Gregg. Langstreth admitted to having had 'a criminal intimacy' with Mrs Gregg, but denied any involvement with her husband's death.

The Riccarton poisoning trial opened on 5 December 1859 and was the first heard by the new judge, Mr Justice Gresson. Drs Fisher and Turnbull gave their evidence about the arsenic, but the police had failed to find anyone who had sold arsenic to either of the accused. The defence suggested that Gregg had wanted to commit suicide, and the jury accepted this possibility, returning a not guilty verdict. Despite all the publicity, Christina continued to live on the farm and three years later she married her lover Langstreth. He was twenty years her junior and he left her in 1880 to return to England. She died in 1882. Either they were innocent of Gregg's death, or an exceptionally strong-minded and brazen pair of conspirators.[18]

In November 1859 Turnbull was on a large committee of the St Andrew's Society with Mark Stoddart as president and the lawyer Thomas Duncan as vice-president to plan a dinner at the Royal Hotel to mark St Andrew's Day (30 November).[19] Also on the committee was one Allan McLean. He and his brother John had come from Australia in 1852 to take up the Athfield run in mid-Canterbury, having done well as shepherds and runholders in Victoria, supplying the goldfields. They were shrewd and frugal Scots who also bought properties in Otago and South Canterbury, most notably Waikakahi, where Allan created a very profitable estate. He never married, and sold Waikakahi to the New Zealand Government in 1899 for £320,000. He retired to Christchurch where he built an enormous three-storey mansion named 'Holly Lea'. In his will he left £300,000 in trust to form the McLean Institute, and after his death in 1907 the house was used as a home for 'women of refinement and education in reduced or straitened circumstances'. The house survives as McLean's Mansion.[20]

Turnbull's friendship with the McLean brothers indicates that he was choosing his new friends carefully. Another new arrival at Lyttelton in October 1859 was a potential rival, another doctor, but he and Turnbull became firm friends from the start. This was Henry Horsford Prins ((1835-1897), a dark-skinned slim young man of Dutch ancestry who had been born in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He had a medical degree from Calcutta, but it was not recognised by the British Medical Register. Having also studied in London he had added the MRCS qualification. He was a quiet and charming man who quickly built up a large practice, especially among women, who found his

bedside manner reassuring. In the 1860s he was to emerge as Christchurch's leading surgeon, with pioneering craniotomy and lithotomy operations.

Turnbull was involved in another sudden death from poisoning early in 1860, but this time there was no suspicion of foul play. He was called to the Cashmere estate of Sir John Cracroft Wilson, a retired soldier and magistrate who had brought some of his servants with him from India in 1859. Wilson had displayed remarkable courage during the Indian Mutiny and had been decorated for saving hundreds of English lives. One of his servants at the Cashmere estate, a Bengalese woman named Narain, had vomited violently. Chewed leaves in the vomit were identified as being from the poisonous native shrub tutu ('the dreaded toot'). Wilson gave her an emetic and other medicine, before sending for Turnbull. By the time he arrived the unhappy woman was in a comatose state, cold with convulsive breathing and a weak rapid pulse. She died within half an hour of his arrival.

At the inquest Turnbull said he had never before seen a case of tutu poisoning, so could not be certain of the cause of death. The woman's brother-in-law said they had all been warned about tutu, which was fatal to animals and humans alike. Wilson said he had found plants near the house with the heads nipped off, and presumed she had nibbled them out of ignorance or curiosity, or perhaps to end her life. The jury returned a verdict of death from poison, but with no evidence for motive.[21]

When war broke out between settlers and the local Māori in Taranaki in 1860, Turnbull contributed 5 guineas to the relief fund.[22] Most people gave only one guinea or ten shillings, apart from the wealthier citizens and merchants. This suggests that Turnbull was doing well, or was being frugal with his savings, but it also points to a characteristic that marked his entire adult life: his generosity. Tributes at his death from his medical colleagues mention his geniality and generosity. Dr George Palmer recalled Turnbull as 'a fine chap, tall, and very Scotch'.[23]

Also in August 1860 Turnbull was asked to examine a prisoner at the police cells in the Market Place to establish his fitness to stand trial for larceny. James Sullivan was charged with stealing a swag from James Rudge at the Royal Oak Hotel. The swag contained clothing and an opossum rug together worth about £5. Sullivan was well-known as a drunkard, but had never been known as a thief. Turnbull testified that Sullivan had been hardly able to walk, from excessive drinking, but was capable of being tried when he sobered up. The Magistrate committed him for trial in the Supreme Court.[24] There he pleaded that he was so drunk at the time that he had no recollection of stealing anything. The property had been recovered, and the judge discharged him without conviction.[25] However, he was back in the lock-up a fortnight later, this time charged with drunkenness.[26]

James Sullivan, 'of considerable notoriety', was typical of the habitual drunkards who were to be found in every colonial town in New Zealand. In April 1862 he was back in court, charged with drunkenness and stealing four bottles of ale from the White Hart Hotel. He denied the charges, but was sentenced to three months in jail.

Having done his time, he was arrested in Kaiapoi in October. When he came before the Magistrate, he was also charged with damaging police property, namely, one bucket. He had refused entry to his cell to Constable Restell, and had threatened him with part of the bucket, until Restell 'rushed in on him and secured him'.[27]

Respectable people in colonial Christchurch avoided people like Sullivan, not wishing to be tainted by the behaviour associated with the lower classes. Drunkenness occurred in respectable households, too, but families did their utmost to keep such problems private and secret. Some people concealed their weaknesses for a very long time. It was only in 1878 that a court case made public the fact that William 'Cabbage' Wilson had been a drunkard and a wife-beater for the whole of his married life.[28] So Turnbull had to be careful about making new friends.

Turnbull had known a young dispenser in Jedburgh named John Valentine Ross, and offered to pay his fare if he was willing to come out to New Zealand and manage the Apothecary's Hall for them. Ross had studied medicine at Aberdeen University but poor health made him abandon his studies. He then moved to Jedburgh where he was assistant to a doctor. Turnbull's letter must have come as something of a surprise, but Ross was attracted by the prospect of a fresh start in a new colony and accepted the offer. On his arrival in July 1861 Ross formed a partnership with another druggist named Charles Cook, and they remained partners until March 1868.[29] As we shall see, together they ran the Apothecary's Hall for Turnbull until 1863, when he sold the business to them.

It was a significant testament to Turnbull's acceptance by the Christchurch elite that he was elected to membership of the Christchurch Club in 1861. (Hilson was not, but we do not know if he applied.) The Christchurch Club was established in 1856 by a group of runholders who needed somewhere better than a hotel to stay at when they visited town to consult their bank manager or stock and station agent. They wanted good meals, comfortable beds, agreeable company, and somewhere to stable their horses. Some of the Christchurch hotels at this time were little better than grog shops, and could get rather rowdy in the evenings. The twelve founding members were all English and Anglican, apart from one Inverness Scot, Macdonald. Three were sons of clergy, and two (Acland and Congreve) were from titled families. Familiar with gentlemen's clubs in London, they adopted similar rules and customs. Election was by secret ballot, and one black ball was enough to exclude a prospective member. At first the club restricted new members to just four at each meeting.[30]

Turnbull was the club's first medical member. Dr William Donald, Canterbury's first medical practitioner, applied in 1856 but was not one of the four chosen by lot: he was so irked by this that he did not reapply until 1867. The club quickly outgrew its original premises on Peterborough Street and in 1858 land was purchased beside Latimer Square on the corner of Worcester Street. Benjamin Mountfort and Isaac Luck were the chosen architects and tenders were called in May 1860 for a large building. The new club was really two buildings with a central tower, Italianate in design, and a ball was held there even before it was finished. From the start it was nicknamed 'The

Shagroon's Palace', reflecting its largely runholder membership, which had reached nearly 100 by the end of 1861. However, many of the Christchurch professional and mercantile elite were also accepted for membership, especially the lawyers. Turnbull could expect to make many new friends here, such as the provincial geologist, Julius Haast, who actually lived at the club until his marriage in 1862, and the brilliant young English novelist Samuel Butler, who arrived in 1860 and took up the Mesopotamia run. He doubled his capital in four years and returned to England, and increasing fame.

Turnbull's new friends were not confined to his own sex. On 26 June 1861 James Turnbull was married by Reverend Fraser to Elizabeth Higgie Mudie from Kirkaldy, Scotland, but not at St Andrew's Church. The ceremony took place at the house of Allan and John McLean in Cambridge Terrace. The witnesses were Peter Brown Hilson, his partner, and Helen Mudie, presumably the bride's sister. Elizabeth was aged 21 and Turnbull was then 32. She was to outlive him, dying in 1918 at the age of 78. They were to have two sons and a daughter.[31]

Apart from the occasional accident case, next to nothing is known of either Turnbull or Hilson during 1860 and 1861, but their brief advertisements continued to appear in the *Lyttelton Times* throughout these two years. In June 1861 a carpenter fell from the roof of a new house and broke his leg: 'Dr Turnbull was fortunately passing at the time and rendered every assistance'.[32]

Christchurch had a new newspaper from 25 May 1861. *The Press* was established by Canterbury's first Superintendent, James Edward FitzGerald, who had returned from England appalled by the extravagance of Moorhouse's railway tunnel project, which he feared would bankrupt the province. With financial backing from the wealthy John Charles Watts Russell and the practical help of the Reverend John Raven, who organised the printing plant with George Watson, FitzGerald used *The Press* as his platform to attack Moorhouse and the *Lyttelton Times,* the newspaper he had edited from 1851 to 1853. The Classical scholar George Samuel Sale was the first *Press* editor, but his successor Joseph Colborne Veel really established the newspaper's tone and style from 1861 to 1878. *The Press* became a worthy conservative rival of the more liberal *Lyttelton Times* and is still published to this day.[33]

Turnbull's first mentions in the *Press* were in the imports section of the shipping notices. In July Turnbull and Hilson received a basket of drugs, in August some hogsheads of oil, and then two cases of drugs.[34] The July consignment arrived on the *Chrysolite,* which also brought John Valentine Ross to New Zealand He started immediately at the Apothecary's Hall, and was soon advertising what could be bought there: fine Colza oil, castor oil, volatile salts, cream of tartar, tartaric acid, carbonate of soda, sulphur, blue vitriol, alum, amber rosin, soft soap, purified Epsom Salts, saltpetre, and fine Bermuda arrowroot. The last item was much in demand for infant feeding, and in another list the Apothecary's Hall offered glass feeding bottles, along with fancy soaps, child's night lights, fine sponges, violet powder and 'Perfumery in great variety'.[35]

Occasionally Turnbull was asked to assist in the examination of patients suspected of mental illness. In September 1861 he assisted Dr Parkerson in the examination of one Mary Kennedy, who was declared unfit to be at large and was committed to the Lyttelton Gaol for safe custody as a lunatic.[36]

In October 1861 'a beautiful specimen' of Chatham Island Forget-me-not in flower was displayed in the window of the Apothecary's Hall, premises of Turnbull and Hilson. It had six spikes of blue and white waxy flowers. This specimen had been given by Mr Ballard, and had been grown from one of 13 plants obtained from the islands by the nurseryman William Wilson.[37]

Though Hilson was still Turnbull's partner at the time of his wedding, their medical partnership was dissolved in November that same year, 'by mutual consent'. The solicitor Thomas Duncan was their witness. The newspaper notice assured patients that Dr Turnbull would continue the practice as physician and surgeon 'in Town and Country' as before, and that their business as druggists would still be carried on under the firm of Turnbull and Hilson.[38]

What had gone wrong? With the arrival of Ross and Cook, Hilson was no longer needed by the business as a pharmacist, and his own medical practice may have been small. Had he started drinking heavily before this time? If so, Turnbull would not have wanted a drunkard as his partner. Presumably Hilson was asked to vacate his rooms at the Apothecary's Hall, as he spent the next year living in a succession of hotels. Living above a bar probably hastened his slide into alcoholism.

Turnbull sought a new medical partner, and approached Dr Edward Batt, who had completed his MRCS at Edinburgh in 1848. He was not a Scot, however, but came from a long line of doctors at Witney, Oxfordshire. He had trained at King's College Hospital, London, and had completed his LSA there. He was registered in Lyttelton on 11 February 1862, but inserted a notice in the *Lyttelton Times* in April announcing that his negotiations for a partnership with Dr Turnbull, started in February, had been broken off. He was ready to see patients at his own residence in Cathedral Square.[39] Batt was appointed surgeon to the Canterbury Rifle Volunteers in June 1862, but resigned in 1864 to return to London. He then completed his MD at Aberdeen in 1865.[40]

Though he had not succeeded in finding a partner, Turnbull's life gained another dimension in April 1862 when his wife presented him with his first son, Halbert Glendinning Turnbull.[41] Despite the handicap of such an unusual name, he survived Christ's College in 1876 and went farming, spending most of his adult life as a station manager in Queensland. He died in 1924.[42]

Turnbull's devotion to the Presbyterian Church was never in doubt, but he also gave his support to broader initiatives to promote Christianity. In May 1862 he joined the committee of the Canterbury branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, together with Dr Prins, George Gould, Thomas Duncan, Edward Latter and the aspiring politician and newspaper editor Joseph Brittan.[43] The Society dated from 1804

when a group of dedicated Christians including the anti-slavery reformer William Wilberforce decided to set up a non-denominational charity that would translate the Bible into other languages and print large numbers for distribution around the world. It still operates to this day.

Chapter Three

TURNBULL THE POLITICIAN

Christchurch Hospital started its long and interesting history in June 1862, and as an institution with which Turnbull was to be closely associated for most of his adult life we should pause to notice its founding. Lyttelton had had a small cottage hospital since the early 1850s, but as Christchurch outstripped the port town in population after 1856 the Provincial Council came under increasing public pressure to provide Christchurch with its own hospital. The first site selected, on the corner of Durham and Armagh streets, was then appropriated by the provincial council for its own offices, claiming the site was too small for a hospital. A bill was passed in 1858 empowering the Superintendent to sell reserves and raise £1,500 to build a hospital, but this was disallowed by the Colonial Government in Auckland. A public petition in 1859 kept up the pressure, and a new site was chosen in Hagley Park, in the Domain reserve. This provoked great debate – the first 'hands off Hagley Park' controversy – but the bill passed by one vote and condemned Christchurch Hospital to a cramped and unsuitable site. It was then on the edge of the built-up area of the city.

Building was delayed a year by lack of finance but local architects were instructed and tenders called in 1861. The hospital was opened on 1 June 1862 without ceremony: 'the staff went in as the builders went out'. This was a two-storey wooden building with four attached wards and beds for 56 patients. The joint superintendents were the highly-qualified ophthalmologist Dr Silas Stedman, as physician, and the elderly Dr Burrell Parkerson as surgeon. John Dalgleish was the dispenser, though he had no medical or pharmacy qualifications, while Mr and Mrs Bunting were the Master and Matron respectively. There were two nurses, a laundry-maid and a porter. The government expected the hospital to run itself on fees from patients, but this income soon proved inadequate. The hospital had no operating theatre and a very small kitchen: the government had to make expensive additions in 1864. As we shall see, Turnbull finally joined the staff in 1866.[44]

In August 1862 Turnbull chaired a meeting of investors to form the Kowai Coal Fields Company after the Provincial Geologist Dr Julius Haast discovered considerable reserves of coal on Mr Sheath's property. The meeting comprised 50 or more of the 'leading men' of Christchurch. Capital of £25,000 was required, and most of the shares were taken up at this meeting.[45] Here was another demonstration that Turnbull had been accepted by the Canterbury elite. This was not the last of his investment ventures, though for most of his life he tended to prefer property to shares.

In the following month Turnbull was elected a vice-president of the newly-formed Canterbury Philosophical Society, which was soon renamed the Philosophical Institute.[46] This was a brain-child of Dr Haast, who was later to be the first director of the Canterbury Museum. The Canterbury settlement had several highly-qualified engineers and scientists who had broad interests in science and philosophy. Among

the doctors, Dr Barker was well-known as an enthusiastic amateur architect, botanist, and geologist, but Haast was the prime mover of the new Institute. He was a big hearty man, a German who had contacts with leading European museums. He also played the violin and had married the daughter of the Provincial Engineer, Edward Dobson.[47] Turnbull remained an active member of the Philosophical Institute, occasionally presenting papers, until the early 1870s when other interests took greater claims on his time.

Turnbull started his long political career in 1862, in a bid to replace Joseph Brittan, who had been top of the poll in the May 1862 election but resigned suddenly in September. His beloved son Arthur had been drowned in the Avon the year before and Brittan's health was failing. He had been a prominent member of the council since 1855, when he founded the *Canterbury Standard* newspaper, but he had been defeated by Moorhouse in his bid to be Superintendent in 1857. Turnbull had backing from a large committee for his nomination. Joseph Brittan and his printer James Willis headed the list. William Wilson was there, alongside John Ollivier, the 'Kingmaker' of Canterbury provincial politics, and Samuel Bealey, who was to be elected Superintendent in 1863. They obviously saw in Turnbull a forceful speaker who would keep the council on its toes.[48] Turnbull's reply to their requisition to stand is worth quoting in full:

> I owe much to the uniform courtesy and kindness of my fellow citizens during the past four years, and in consequence I feel that I can work in their service with a very sincere, a very earnest desire to repay a portion of that kindness.
>
> For a young and untried politician to enter the Provincial Council with your proved and experienced members is sufficiently difficult, but to repair the loss which you now sustain by the resignation of an old and faithful representative is a portion of the task I would now assume which I can never hope fully to achieve. Should you, however, return me, I will strive to merit your approval by discharging the duties of your representative faithfully and energetically.

Written like a born politician!

With a month to wait until the election, Turnbull stayed in the public eye in September as a referee with the Reverend James Buller for a new boys' boarding school being established by C. L. Wiggins.[49] He derived much greater prominence later that month on a committee for the relief of distress in Lancashire. The American Civil War had disrupted supplies of cotton and many mills had fallen idle, throwing hundreds out of work. This committee raised £500 from subscriptions and concerts at the Theatre Royal to send to Lancashire relief organisations. Several of Turnbull's backers for his nomination were also on this committee, along with Reverend Fraser, Dr Barker, George Gould, Fred Banks and John Hall.[50] Turnbull was now firmly part of the Christchurch elite.

He was on yet another committee with Superintendent Moorhouse and several other prominent citizens to promote a Town Hall concert on 27 September by Madame Vitelli and Charles Thatcher, the celebrated Australian goldfields balladeer.[51]

In the October 1862 election Turnbull was returned unopposed as the new member for Christchurch City on the Canterbury Provincial Council. William Wilson made the nomination speech, and in reply Turnbull promised to support the Government Education Bill as a temporary measure, reserving his opinion on the whole subject until it had been further debated.[52] He took his seat at the council table on 14 October 'amid slight applause'.[53]

The Press editor thought that 'He will no doubt make a valuable member, but the Council has sustained a severe loss in the retirement of its oldest member, Mr Brittan'.[54] Brittan had been the best speaker in the Council, and from his long experience in government knew the way business should be handled. His was a hard act to follow.

Later that month Turnbull proposed one of the toasts at a dinner following the annual show of the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association. The show had been held in Latimer Square and the dinner was at the Town Hall in High Street. In his speech Turnbull said that Canterbury needed better horses, and offered to award silver medals for the first and second best hacks at the next show. His offer was warmly applauded.[55] At the November meeting of the Philosophical Institute he took part in a discussion about the commercial potential for New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax).*[56]

In his first speech before the Provincial Council on 28 October, Turnbull moved that a return be made comparing spending on municipal as against provincial spending, reflecting widespread public feeling that the council was short-changing Christchurch in favour of roads and bridges elsewhere in the province. He also urged the exploitation of the 'timbered country' around Little River on Banks Peninsula and its conversion to farming.[57] He next spoke in a debate on education, but his remarks were not reported by either newspaper.

However, his next speech was reported in full, as it was on the Hospital Bill. Since the Provincial Council had refused to fund the hospital out of the land fund, the bill proposed to place the hospital and its funds in the care of trustees and directors, as a corporate body. Turnbull objected to this, as 'life corporations led to corruptions'; the directing body should be elected and the most popular that could be secured. The Lyttelton Hospital would not be included as a matter of geography: this bill was for a hospital for Christchurch. Turnbull said he would not object to making it a Public Hospital Bill. He was supported in this by Peacock and Davis, though FitzGerald laughed at the idea. Turnbull asked for leave to amend the title of the bill, and this was granted. The first reading was agreed to.[58] The bill went into committee in November, and 'after a tedious scrutiny' was passed with no material alterations.[59]

The Provincial Council had voted £41,953 for increased immigration, but Turnbull made a complaint about the lack of medical supplies and 'comforts' for the passengers on some of the recently arrived vessels. An editorial in the *Lyttelton Times,* however, noted that these provisions were no doubt as niggardly as the law allowed, to save money, but so far no complaints had been received by the Immigration Commissioners from either migrants or officials. On the whole, 'a general spirit of satisfaction' had prevailed.[60]

This provoked a letter to the editor from George Toblin, a shopkeeper in the Market Place, who thought Turnbull's complaint was fully justified. From his own experience, a niggardly captain and an unprincipled surgeon could conspire to keep the migrants on short rations. The surgeon was the key officer on a migrant ship: he had heard many stories from recent migrants of surgeons who behaved with 'great brutality ... or disgusting immorality'. Even when ample in quantity, the quality of provisions could be bad: 'the beef being as tough and devoid of juices as the sole of an old shoe'. He knew of one ship where two-thirds of the salt beef had to be thrown overboard. Water kept in wooden casks was always nauseous, while the cabin passengers had the best quality water from iron tanks. Though the raisins were of poor quality, they were 'much praised', as they could be made into puddings. Women with small children needed far more 'medical comforts' than were usually provided.[61]

Turnbull lost a patient in tragic circumstances in mid-November 1862. He had been treating one Mrs Ellen Ellman, wife of a surveyor who had arrived at Lyttelton only a month before. She had suffered severe sea-sickness, as well as morning sickness from being pregnant. She was very unwell, restless and disturbed, and said that she thought she should be in the asylum. She had suffered depression some years before when she thought she was going insane. Turnbull saw no sign of insanity in her, but lack of sleep was affecting her health. Then one morning in November she jumped out of an upstairs window and ran towards the Avon River. The neighbour's son saw her, and called his father. Dr Turnbull heard their shouts and was on the spot immediately, but when they pulled her from the river she was already dead, and could not be revived. The inquest jury concluded that she had drowned herself whilst labouring under a fit of temporary insanity.[62]

Turnbull's relationship with his business partner Peter Hilson had by now deteriorated beyond repair. Hilson's drinking problem was worse, and he owed money to several hoteliers for unpaid lodgings and bar bills. Finally, on 8 November, with Thomas Joynt as witness, he formally dissolved his business partnership with Hilson as chemists and druggists. Turnbull would carry on the business, and would discharge all liabilities.[63] The Apothecary's Hall was, of course, being managed very successfully by John V. Ross, with his partner Charles Cook. But Turnbull was now the sole owner. In his sober moments, Hilson must have felt that his life had been an utter failure, which realisation seems to have driven him to drown his sorrows in yet more drink.

November 1862 was a busy month for Turnbull. Besides speaking about acclimatisation, education and the railway loan at the Provincial Council, he was also a

co-founder of the Gas Company. A large meeting of 'influential residents' had agreed to set up the Christchurch Gas Company, after tests had found that Kowai coal was very suitable for gas manufacture. The engineer George Wright had tested it against samples of Newcastle coal and lignite coal from the West Coast. He predicted that sales of coke and tar would pay for the 600 tons of coal a year needed to provide lighting for 170 premises in Christchurch. The setting up costs, with tanks, gas-holders, pipes, retorts and so forth would be about £5,000. As the population grew, so too would the demand for gas. The city council had already expressed interest in street lighting with gas.[64] By 22 November, Turnbull had been appointed one of the 16 directors, indicating that he had money to invest in the new company.[65]

Early in December, Turnbull had his first notable success as a member of the Provincial Council. In the debates over education grants, he moved that the council place £2,000 on the Estimates for new schools and the enlargement of existing ones. Christ's College had recently been given a grant, and it was only fair that other leading schools should also receive assistance from the public purse. He claimed that the Presbyterian High School started by Reverend Fraser stood in the same position as Christ's College. The quality of instruction at the Presbyterian school was every bit as good as that of Christ's College, and entitled it to rank as a classical academy, on the same level as Eton or Rugby in England. If the Wesleyans had a good high school he would support their claim as well. He was supported by Cr Beswick, who thought that a commercial school giving useful instruction to a large number might have equal claim to a classical school with a small number of students. Turnbull's motion was agreed to.[66]

Chapter Four

THE DEATH OF DR HILSON

From evidence given under oath at the inquest after Hilson's death, it is possible to reconstruct the last days of this unfortunate young man, who was only 29 when he died.

Turnbull testified that about 6 pm on Monday 15 December 1862 he had received a note from Dr Henry Richards asking him to come and see Hilson at the Papanui Hotel. As he was reading the note, young Master Meddings, the son of the hotelier, came up on horseback and asked Turnbull to come at once, as Hilson was 'alarmingly ill'. Turnbull's groom got his dogcart ready and they followed young Meddings to the Papanui Hotel. He found Hilson in a small bedroom. On the floor was an ordinary chamber pot filled with fresh blood, vitiated blood, bile and fluid. Hilson was in a tremor and complained that he could not get warm. He was sick in front of Turnbull, and threw up vomit similar to what was already in the chamber pot.

Turnbull asked him what he had been taking, and Hilson showed him a bottle of medicine prescribed by Dr Richards. He had taken three doses, and had suffered a convulsion after the first dose. Turnbull asked young Meddings if he knew what was in it, and he gave Turnbull the prescription. Turnbull said he was sorry he had taken it, as opium had never agreed with Hilson. [It was probably laudanum.]

Turnbull then said to Hilson, 'You are very uncomfortable here, whilst so seriously ill; will you come home to my house?' Hilson agreed at once, and they carried him out to the dogcart. He was exhausted and unable to stand. After they had gone about a mile, Hilson had another severe convulsion. His feet were pressed against the splash board and his head was against the iron bar at the back. He remained quite stiff for some time. Turnbull had not the strength to hold him, so the groom stopped the cart and they changed places.

As they carried on into town, Hilson recovered sufficiently to sit up, 'but looked so wild and delirious' that Turnbull decided to take him to Dr Stedman's house. Stedman advised taking Hilson to the hospital at once, which they did.

Peter Hilson was admitted to Christchurch Hospital on 15 December 1862 suffering from a severe attack of *delirium tremens*. He was violent and delusional, and likely to disturb other patients. Turnbull asked the dispenser where they could put him and Dalgleish replied that he did not know: every ward was occupied. Turnbull suggested that as Hilson was 'his most intimate friend' he might put him in his own bed for that night and make other arrangements as quickly as possible, in case of another attack of *delirium tremens*. Dalgleish agreed, but as soon as Hilson was taken upstairs he vomited a quantity of fluid, in which Turnbull saw blood. Hilson was then placed in Dalgleish's sitting room. Drs Stedman and Morris were also present. The doctors held a consultation and on Turnbull's advice some arrowroot was mixed with water and

administered to him, along with some sherry. Hilson retched several times but did not vomit. They then put him into Dalgleish's bed, where he slept through the night. (Dalgleish presumably spent the night on his sofa.)

Next morning Bunting found him in Dalgleish's sitting room reading a newspaper. When asked how he was feeling, Hilson said he was better. Bunting did not see him again that day, but Turnbull returned about ten-thirty and found Hilson 'much improved'. The sickness had ceased after the first dose of arrowroot. Hilson complained of pain and stiffness at the back of his neck, and of a deep laceration on the left side of his tongue, which he had bitten while convulsed. Turnbull thought Hilson was 'so much composed' that he was able to leave him, instructing the nurse to give him as many soups, egg-flips and wine as he could take.

In the evening Hilson seemed calm enough for Dalgleish to go out and watch a cricket match. However, Dalgleish then sent a note to Turnbull saying that Hilson was worse, and impatient to see Turnbull. On the Wednesday morning Turnbull visited him at six-thirty and found him sitting at the bedside, excited, perspiring profusely and distressed about something. According to Bunting, Hilson appeared to be rather 'trembly' and complained that he had something under his tongue. He was spitting a good deal, and said that his mouth was full of leeches. He told Turnbull that he had an obstinate leech on his tongue, then said 'Fortunately, I have just succeeded in removing it, and have thrown it away'.

Turnbull looked inside his mouth and found the laceration caused by the bite, and an old scar, raw and bleeding. Hilson then jumped up and swore that another leech had laid hold of his tongue, and asked Turnbull to remove it. Turnbull pretended to examine his mouth (there were no leeches) and calmed him by saying it was just the lingering sensation of the leech he had removed.

Turnbull then told Dalgleish that a very serious attack of *delirium tremens* was coming on and that it could be dangerous, given Hilson's long-standing drunkenness. He wrote out a new prescription and gave it to Dalgleish to prepare and administer it. Turnbull then went home, and on the way called at the surgery of Drs Parkerson and Stedman. The latter was out and the former not yet up, so he left a note stating his fears about Hilson. He wrote down the formula he had prescribed and asked them to meet him at ten-thirty.

When he returned at that time Dr Parkerson said he approved of Turnbull's prescription, putting his finger on the paper saying 'This treatment is exactly my own'. Turnbull asked him to come to the hospital but Parkerson declined, saying that he did not agree with Dr Stedman's treatment of *delirium tremens* cases. Hilson was Stedman's patient, not his.

Stedman then arrived and they discussed the case. Stedman wanted to use a strait-jacket, and both Turnbull and Parkerson objected. Stedman said he would normally approve of a sedative treatment, but Hilson was violent and could harm himself.

Turnbull said he strongly disagreed; he had never seen a patient with the DTs put in a straitjacket.

Turnbull and Stedman then proceeded to the hospital. Turnbull showed him his prescription for Hilson. Turnbull had prescribed an aperient – four pills – each to contain one grain calomel, the third of a drop of croton oil, and four grains of colocynth, to be given periodically. This treatment was because Hilson's bowels had not moved for three days and Turnbull knew that he was prone to constipation. Stedman agreed with this part of the prescription, but objected to the second part: a contra-stimulant comprising tartrate of antimony, digitalis, sugar and water.

Turnbull gave way, as Stedman was the physician in charge of the case, and said he would not interfere any further except to use his influence to calm his friend and former partner. Turnbull left the hospital about 11 and intended to return at 2, but was delayed until nearly 5 pm. Again he found Hilson excited and impatient for his arrival. Bunting suggested moving him to a lower ward, where the nurses could more easily keep an eye on him. Bunting told the inquest that his reason for moving Hilson was that he was afraid he might jump out of the upstairs window. When he mentioned this to Dalgleish the dispenser replied words to the effect that it didn't matter if he did, or 'it would be a damned good job if he did'. Bunting put Hilson in a room where he could be watched.

Turnbull then gave authority to employ an attendant to sit with Hilson, at his own expense. The man suggested was an old soldier accustomed to this work. At 10 pm Turnbull sent his groom out to buy oranges, and told him to take them to the hospital. Dalgleish sent Turnbull a note saying he feared Hilson would have a bad night.

Turnbull returned on the Thursday afternoon, and found Hilson much worse. He did not ask about the medical treatment, but urged that careful attention should be paid to supporting the patient's strength by administering soups, jellies and sherry. Turnbull then spoke to Stedman about Hilson's treatment. Stedman thought he would persist with his own treatment, but did not expect Hilson to live for much longer.

Bunting the master told the inquest that Hilson was having delusions by this time, seeing figures on the wall. Hilson laughed and said, 'I shall have some fine fun with these gentlemen tonight!' He took a large basin of arrowroot and water that night. Stedman told Bunting that Hilson was Turnbull's patient, but Bunting thought this odd: 'It is a new thing for a private medical man to prescribe for a patient in the hospital'.

Bunting said that he heard Turnbull warn Stedman against using a strait-jacket, because he had heard of a case where a patient recovered from his condition and then prosecuted the doctor for false imprisonment. He heard Turnbull say, 'Mind what you are about'.

Turnbull returned that night and found Hilson very delirious and excited. He asked Dalgleish if he was still administering the medicine he had prescribed. Dalgleish said

he had not, as he hoped to calm the patient enough for him to sleep through the night. Turnbull told the inquest that at this point he thought Hilson's chances of survival stood at ten to one against recovery.

On the Friday morning Bunting found Hilson looking suspiciously under his pillow, and said to him, 'Come, none of that; do you know what is the matter with you?' Hilson had replied, 'Yes, it is a slight attack of *delirium tremens*'. Stedman then asked Bunting to find a straitjacket and left him and the German attendant to strap Hilson into it. Hilson offered no resistance, except to say, 'What do you mean by this?' Dalgleish soothed him by saying, 'It is for your good'.

When Turnbull came to the hospital at 6 am on the Friday morning he found Hilson lying on his bed in a straitjacket. He was very delirious, rambling and talking continually. A nurse told Turnbull, 'Your friend has passed a dreadful night. The poor women in the next ward have not slept a wink'. Turnbull asked Hilson if he knew who he was, and Hilson mentioned Turnbull's name, but then resumed his delirious rambling. As he left the hospital, Turnbull said to Dalgleish that he did not think Hilson would last much longer, and wished he could have the straitjacket removed.

Nurse Margaret Todd told the inquest that she thought the straitjacket had been strapped on too tightly, as Hilson's ears and hands turned a dark colour and his chest was 'much swelled'. Below the line of the jacket the body was discoloured. She saw nothing to warrant the use of the straitjacket: 'I have been a nurse in England, and have attended persons much more violent' [than Hilson].

About six hours after the straitjacket had been put on, Bunting came into the room and found Hilson kneeling by the bedside. It looked as if he had got up to use the chamber pot. Bunting asked the German attendant how his patient was, and he replied that he was now a little quieter. Bunting put his hand on Hilson's shoulder, and found that he was dead. The tips of his ears were black, and his feet were doubled under him, 'of a bluish colour'.

Dalgleish went with Captain McLean to tell Turnbull that his friend was dead. They talked about his funeral. Turnbull suggested the Sunday, but McLean had to travel south to take up a run he had bought, and asked if it could be the next day, Saturday. Turnbull agreed, and asked for Hilson's body to be brought to his house, 'that the feelings of the deceased's relatives might be spared the pain' of learning how he had died. Having lived in India, Turnbull was accustomed to burials taking place soon after death, and it did not occur to him that this might be regarded as unusual by people accustomed to colder countries.

Turnbull then went with Dalgleish to view the body at the hospital, and clipped off some locks of hair to give to Hilson's other college friends. He instructed the undertaker Johnston and left the whole management of the burial at the Barbadoes Street Cemetery to him. Johnston asked, 'What about the certificate?' Turnbull said he could not give a certificate himself, as the death had occurred in the hospital, but he

would ask Dr Stedman for one. Turnbull admitted that he had omitted to ask Stedman to issue a certificate.

Dr Barker, the Registrar for Births, Deaths and Marriages, received verbal notice on Saturday morning that Peter Brown Hilson had died. His informant, Bunting, asked if he should allow the body to be removed from the hospital. Barker replied that he had nothing to do with such a decision; that was up to the hospital authorities. He could not make an entry in the Register of Deaths without a proper medical certificate. Barker went to the hospital and spoke to Stedman, who said he would sign a death certificate if someone brought it to him. He believed Hilson had died from *delirium tremens* and would give that as the cause of death. But there was no registration of Hilson's death.

Hilson was buried at the Barbadoes Street Cemetery on Saturday 20 December 1862. However, rumours began to circulate in Christchurch that such a quick burial without a death certificate was highly suspicious. Some said that he had died because his treatment in the hospital had been unnecessarily harsh: others insinuated that Turnbull might have given him something to put him out of his misery.

Sergeant-Major Pender of the Christchurch Police was at an inquest on 22 December where one of the jurors asked if he had heard of Hilson's death. Pender said that he had. The juror then said he had been talking to another juror and they agreed that there was far more need for an inquest in Hilson's case than in the inquest they had just attended. He then repeated to Pender some of the strange rumours circulating, and asked if the police should make some enquiries.

Pender was then visited by 'a respectable citizen' who also said he had heard 'many curious reports' about Hilson's death, that he had not been treated properly in the hospital. He could not say who was blamed, but Dalgleish and Turnbull were spoken of as having buried the body 'suddenly'. Pender made more enquiries and found that these and other rumours were widespread. The Coroner, Dr Coward, agreed that an inquest would be advisable. Pender therefore got a warrant for the disinterment of the body and had it removed to the police station, where two doctors made a *post mortem* examination.

Chapter Five

THE INQUEST

The inquest was held on 23 and 24 December 1862, just before Christmas. Dr Henry Prins and Dr James Earle had conducted the *post mortem* and said that there were no visible external injuries, apart from some marks of friction on both sides of the chest, from the strait-jacket, and a slight bruise on the left leg. Putrefaction was advancing rapidly in the head, neck and back of the chest. The lungs were gorged with dark blood and the air cells were obscured by the serous part of the blood. The heart was loose and flabby, but the valves appeared to be sound. Two ounces of brown fluid and mucous were found in the stomach, whose surface was sound. There was no trace of any poison. The liver was considerably enlarged and like the lungs its structure was obscured by the serous part of the blood. The intestines were full of air, with nothing remarkable. The kidneys were enlarged and gorged with dark blood. The brain was too far advanced in putrefaction to show anything: it was a mere semi-fluid pulp.

Dr Earle said, 'We saw nothing to suppose other than a natural death' Dr Prins concurred in this statement. Earle added that in the case of a person dying from excessive drinking there was never any evidence in the bodily structures to show the cause of death.

Bunting was the first witness to give evidence, most of which has already been noted. He had not registered the death as that was not his responsibility. He usually took the certificate to the Registrar, but nobody gave him a certificate in this case. Dalgleish had taken charge of Hilson's personal effects. Hilson had left a ring on the mantelpiece when he washed his hands, and Bunting took this into his care. The body was removed on the night of death and taken to Dr Turnbull's house.

Dr Barker then explained the law relating to registration of deaths. One clause of the ordinance required that notice of death should be given within a specified time, but the Registrar had no power to enforce this. By another clause there was a penalty of £10 if registration of a burial was not made within two months.

Dr Stedman next gave his evidence, some of which has been given above. Stedman told the inquest that he had remarked to Dalgleish on the Thursday that if Hilson did not get some sleep soon he would die. He had ordered the strait-jacket to stop the patient from harming himself. Hilson had died of *delirium tremens* and Stedman said he would have issued a certificate to the affect if he had been asked to. The discolouration of the body was 'natural under the circumstances'. The attendant should not have allowed Hilson to get up without assistance. The corpse presented 'no unusual appearance', according to Stedman. Turnbull was Hilson's intimate friend, 'and we were glad to have his assistance'.

The two nurses next gave their evidence, noted above, followed by Dr Turnbull's lengthy testimony.

At the end of his narrative, Turnbull was asked if he thought an inquest had been necessary, and he replied that he saw no necessity whatever:

> The only reason I can assign for this inquiry is the over-officiousness of the police [and] the laxity of the Commissioner in allowing an examination such as this to be managed by a subordinate and inexperienced officer of police. And perhaps malice on the part of the house steward of the hospital.

Inspector Guinness asked Turnbull to name the officer of whom he had spoken in such strong terms, but the Coroner intervened and said that this was not evidence relating to the death of Hilson and he must therefore stop such remarks. Instead the Inspector asked if Turnbull thought the deceased had been neglected by his attendant. Turnbull said he had been satisfied with the treatment Hilson received, except for the matter of the straitjacket.

The Coroner then asked why he had not called in another doctor if he disapproved of the treatment he was being given? Turnbull said that Stedman's treatment was taught in all the colleges ('though I disapprove of it'), and [Stedman] was a medical man of deserved eminence and senior physician at the hospital: 'how then could another medical man in courtesy interfere with his patient?'

The Coroner said that Turnbull could have removed Hilson to his own house and treated him there according his own methods, or called in another medical man such as Dr Prins. Turnbull's reply was interesting:

> I have a high opinion of Dr Prins as a general practitioner, but his want of experience in *delirium tremens* was an objection to his being called in this case. I should have considered it indecent to have treated the case on my own responsibility, on principles ignored by Dr Stedman; and Dr Parkerson having declined to see the case, there was not another medical man in Christchurch whose opinion was worth having.

The Coroner, Dr Coward, himself a practitioner of many years' experience, asked: 'You, Dr Stedman and Dr Parkerson have then a monopoly of medical talent?'

Turnbull replied: 'I say that in my opinion, with the exceptions I have named, there is no medical man in Christchurch whose opinion is of any value'.

This was an astonishing claim, and an insult to Drs Barker, Donald, Dudley, Fisher, Earle, Beswick, Coward, Tripe and Moorhouse, who were all respected and successful Canterbury practitioners. Stedman and Turnbull were the only ones with MD degrees in Christchurch, but Tripe had an MD from Edinburgh (same year as Turnbull), and Moore also had an MD but was not practising. Parkerson had only the MRCS and LSA.

Turnbull went on to make some general remarks about the whole affair, and observed that Hilson, 'despite his sad excesses, had left many friends to whom he was endeared by excellences of which the world knew nothing'. Turnbull and his friends

had been anxious to conceal the extent of Hilson's 'recent terrible dissipation' so as to leave undisturbed the affections of his relatives and friends at Home:

> That good wish would have been realised but for the foolish officiousness of busy-bodies, aided it might be said by malice; the publication to the world of these shocking details had been secured, and idle curiosity had been satisfied'.

The Coroner expressed regret that the inquest had been considered necessary, but he had no other option, given the rumours of criminal neglect 'and hints of an even darker nature'. The rumours could not be traced to their source, and no doubt the first had been rolled along 'and snow-ball like had gathered force'. When the police asked Coward for an inquest he thought the charges in themselves were flimsy, but it was desirable to hold an inquest so that the slander might be checked while the circumstances were fresh. He had then spoken to the medical gentlemen concerned and they had agreed that an inquest should be held.

Coward thought that the jury could have no difficulty in this case. It was quite clear from the *post mortem* that the deceased had died from *delirium tremens* and that as nobody was accused of any wrongdoing a verdict that Dr Hilson had died from natural causes would silence the scandal that had been raised. The jury, after a few minutes' deliberation, returned a verdict as directed.

Chapter Six

THE AFTERMATH

Editorial comment from *The Press* was in full agreement with Turnbull: the inquest was quite unnecessary and 'a wanton insult to the memory of the man, and to the feelings of his friends'. The police had acted on mere rumour, without any firm evidence or any complaint of wrongdoing. The Coroner was very much to blame for accepting the police request for a *post mortem* examination:

> Dr Coward has already committed some grave mistakes as Coroner; he held an inquest not long ago with closed doors, the only effect of which would have been to deprive the jury of evidence which might have been forthcoming to establish a presumption of foul play.
>
> He has now taken the very strong measure of disinterring a body after Christian burial, without the faintest shadow of evidence that the death had been other than natural, and when the death had taken place under the medical treatment of the most respected men in the place, one being the public medical attendant at the Hospital.

The editor went on at length about the credulity of the police force, the impertinence of the Coroner's queries, and the unfairness of a person's infirmities being made 'the sport of public curiosity' after death: 'A great abuse of official authority has been committed which the public will not at all like to see repeated'.[67]

The *Lyttelton Times* was more inclined to sympathise with the Coroner and the police, who felt that they could not ignore rumours that vitally affected the character and reputation of a professional man.[68]

Full reports of the inquest appeared on Saturday 27 December. (The newspapers appeared only twice-weekly before 1863.) In that same issue of the *Lyttelton Times*, Turnbull announced his retirement from medical practice, in a letter written on 25 December:

> Sir, It was only this evening that I learned definitely that the action of the police in the inquest on the remains of the late Dr Hilson was aimed at me, as having been criminally concerned in his death. I ask permission to intimate, through your columns, to my friends and patients, that so gross a slur upon my character compels me to relinquish at once my practice as a physician and surgeon. My mind cannot realise this affliction in all its cruelty, but does seem hard indeed that four years of incessant labour should be thus brought to an end.
>
> I cannot now enjoy the same position in the confidence of my patients, and I cannot consent to occupy an inferior one; nothing, therefore, remains for me

> but to utter my thanks with a warmth prompted by a deep sense of the kindness and affection which I have so largely met with.
>
> I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully, J. Somerville Turnbull MD.

The accompanying editorial comment began thus: 'On no former occasion can we recollect having to perform a more painful duty than that imposed on us today'. Dr Turnbull announces his retirement on account of various scurrilous rumours about the death of Dr Hilson. The Editor hopes he will reconsider: 'No man, however pure and innocent of wrong, is at all times safe from the breath of slander or suspicion. History affords many instances where malice or even accident have cast a shadow … over the fair fame of the truly virtuous'. After reading the evidence presented at the inquest, most people would agree that 'the Doctor has been deeply aggrieved'. Dr Turnbull is described as 'one of our most eminent medical practitioners; a gentleman deservedly standing high in public estimation; the late partner of the deceased; his dear friend, and, we believe, foster-brother'. Were the police justified in listening to mere rumours?[69]

Most of Turnbull's friends thought not, and over the Christmas holiday invitations were sent out for a meeting of his friends at the Town Hall on 30 December, 'to consider what steps should be taken to reassure him of the public confidence in the face of the recent uncalled for inquest on Dr Hilson'. Those who attended comprised a roll-call of the Christchurch elite: Reverends Jacobs, Fraser, Wilson and Cotterill; former and future Superintendents FitzGerald and Bealey; politicians and JPs Christopher Bowen, Joseph Brittan, Thomas Cass, Alfred Creyke, Richard Harman, Charles Innes, James Lance, Joseph Palmer and Robert Rhodes. Lawyers, merchants and landowners included John Anderson, Fred Banks, Michael Burke, Sir John Cracroft Wilson, Thomas Duncan, John Caverhill, Edward Stevens, William Wilson, Dr Back and the theologian Dr John Lillie. The medical men were not named, but some must have been present in the crowd of about fifty who attended the meeting. FitzGerald moved the address, seconded by Bealey, expressing regret at Turnbull's resignation from practice, and urging him to reconsider.[70]

Turnbull took only a day to respond. At the start of the New Year he wrote:

> Gentlemen, the prompt and affectionate request conveyed by you from so many valued friends comes to me as a command which I feel obliged to obey … I will gladly continue my work as a medical practitioner in Christchurch.
>
> I may be permitted to indicate the reasons which, apart from any strong feeling, induced me to relinquish the active pursuit of the profession. The personal influence of a physician cannot be ignored in the treatment of disease: whatever therefore tends to diminish that idea of kindness and integrity which ought to be associated with the name of the medical attendant materially injures his curative powers.

Believing this to be true in practice, I felt that the rude attack made upon me as a member of the medical profession struck deeply also at the vital interests of the community. It not only pointed me out as one capable of using the whole staff of a public institution to hasten the end of a friend for pecuniary gain, but it lessened confidence in public institutions by promulgating the suspicion that the public hospital could be made the scene of iniquitous proceedings; it tended to accustom the mind of the community to think that professional public servants, such as the skilful physician at the hospital, could entertain or shield evil doings; and generally, unless boldly dealt with, detracted from the tone and standing of the medical profession in this community.

Therefore I deemed it right, in justice to the profession, to the community, and to myself, to retire, so that the public might take such steps as would re-establish mutual confidence. I need not say that the request so kindly conveyed to me by you this day enables me to reoccupy the position which I have striven by many days of hard labor [sic] to obtain. I trust that strength may be granted to me to repay the generous movement of today by a closer and more determined pursuit of my most useful profession.

I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant, J. S. Turnbull.[71]

Turnbull's vindication seemed to be complete, as the schoolmaster Charles Alabaster observed in a letter to the *Lyttelton Times* on 7 January 1863. But he had also cast a slur on the Coroner, Dr Coward, and the police, for simply doing their public duty, and Alabaster thought that an apology was in order:

Dr Coward was my father's friend, and busy with his profession before I was four years old. Thus his experience dates from the time when Dr Turnbull and myself were learning our ABC … Dr Turnbull enjoys a high reputation, and deservedly so … [but] it becomes him as a gentleman to recall those hasty words.[72]

Whether or not Turnbull apologised is not known, but the Hilson inquest had clearly thrown his life into turmoil, for a few days later the auctioneers Aikman and Wilson advertised the sale of 'The excellent Drug Business, known as the Apothecary's Hall', in the Market Place, as well as a dwelling house and furniture in Armagh Street.[73] It looks as if Turnbull, at his lowest point before Christmas, had decided to sell up and leave town, if not New Zealand.

He soon found buyers for the Apothecary's Hall: his assistant John V. Ross and his partner Charles Cook. The transfer of business was announced on 7 February, with this statement from Turnbull:

I have this day disposed of all interest in the drug business carried on at the Apothecary's Hall to Messrs Cook and Ross. Mr Cook's credentials are such as to give me perfect confidence that he will conduct the business, jointly with his partner, to the entire satisfaction of the public.

> Eighteen months' experience of Mr Ross as manager enables me to recommend him to the public as a most efficient druggist and a man of strict integrity.
>
> I can, therefore, most conscientiously recommend Messrs Cook and Ross, as in every way deserving public confidence and support.

Cook and Ross inserted their own reassuring statement:

> In reference to the above intimation, we are, from personal experience, enabled to state that the late firm of Turnbull and Hilson made it their study to import from the best English houses drugs of the first quality. This connexion having been transferred to us, we can confidently assure the public that our drugs will continue to be of the same high quality hitherto dispensed at 'the Hall'.[74]

The statement by Cook and Ross was dated 23 January 1863, so the transfer must have occurred before then.

A small advertisement on 28 January 1863 suggests that Turnbull changed his mind about selling his Armagh Street house, for it simply reminded the public that 'Dr Turnbull, Consulting Physician and Surgeon', could be found at Armagh Street, Christchurch.[75]

Turnbull was busily calling in all debts owed to his business before the transfer to Cook and Ross, and one uncovered the sad story of a Kaiapoi pharmacist whose business and marriage were both apparently wrecked by his misconduct. Thomas Griffiths Rowley had been Dr Fisher's pharmacist-assistant for four years until Fisher's retirement from practice. He and his wife Jane had a daughter in November 1861. In June 1862 Rowley announced that he was opening his own pharmacy in Kaiapoi, near the Northern Hotel, and his notice was accompanied by a glowing reference from Dr Fisher, that he had always found Rowley 'a careful dispenser and well worthy any confidence that might be placed in him'.[76]

When Rowley opened his shop in Kaiapoi, he named it 'The Dispensary', and advertised various remedies – toothache remedy, pomade for preventing baldness, and soothing ointment for children cutting their teeth – devised by Dr Fisher and prepared by T. G. Rowley.[77] The rest of his stock was apparently bought from Turnbull's 'Apothecary's Hall'.

All went well, it seems, until December 1862 when Thomas Griffiths Rowley appeared in the Supreme Court in Christchurch on a charge of assault and attempted rape laid by Mrs Jane Gregson. He pleaded not guilty. The newspaper said, 'The details are, of course, unfit for publication'. The jury found him guilty of common assault. But the judge in passing sentence said that he had been convicted 'on the clearest evidence of a gross outrage', and sentenced him to 18 months with hard labour in the Lyttelton Gaol.[78]

That was the end of Rowley's Dispensary in Kaiapoi. But he still owed money to Turnbull for the stock he had bought, and when the stock and shop fittings were

offered for sale, Turnbull sought a Writ of Fi. Fa. (*fieri facias*) from the court, laying first claim on the proceeds.[79] The auction sale was postponed until March, and in that month a Mrs Rowley and child departed for Wellington on the *Airedale*.[80]

Hilson died intestate, leaving no will, and the Registrar of the Supreme Court in Christchurch, Christopher Alderson Calvert, administered what was left of his affairs. Hilson's horse was sold for £16.18s.3d and his other effects, books, clothing and boots, were sold for £41.17s.0d. Funeral expenses amounted to £9.12s.6d, and Hilson died owing money to a farrier and Money's stables. His largest debt was to Barrett's Hotel for £8.14s.2d., presumably for accommodation. His bill from the Papanui Hotel was a mere eleven shillings. These debts were paid in full out of funds sent by his brother, A. Hilson MD. The total estate was under £100.[81]

Despite the great upheaval in Turnbull's life caused by the death of his friend Peter Hilson and the subsequent inquest, his life seems to have returned to normal during 1863, with appearances at the Philosophical Institute, speeches in the Provincial Council, statements about quarantine regulations, and horse-breeding at his stables in Cathedral Square. His stud draught horse Vanderbilt won a prize at the A & P Show in October. But that is all part of another story.

This present study should end with some reflections on Hilson's treatment and what it reveals about medical etiquette and practice in the 1860s.

At the Papanui Hotel, Dr Richards had prescribed medicine for Hilson that contained opium. It was probably laudanum (tincture of opium), the most commonly used pain reliever of the nineteenth century. Turnbull observed that opium had never agreed with Hilson. It may have increased his hallucinations from *delirium tremens*.

When they reached the hospital, Turnbull prescribed arrowroot and sherry to settle his stomach, and this proved effective. Arrowroot is a starch derived from the powdered rhizomes of various tropical plants. Also used as a thickener in cooking, it has more dietary fibre than corn starch. In the nineteenth century mothers often gave arrowroot in water to infants as a substitute for breast milk. Alcohol was commonly used in the nineteenth century to accompany medicine as a stimulant to a patient who was feeling weak.

Turnbull also advised the nurses to give Hilson as many egg-flips, soup and wine as he could take, to build up his strength. It seems likely that he had not been eating properly for some time, for alcoholics reach a point where they prefer alcohol to food.

Turnbull's next prescription for Hilson was aimed at relieving his three-day constipation, with an aperient consisting of calomel, croton oil and colocynth. This was the part of his prescription approved by Dr Stedman.

Calomel is a mineral, mercurous chloride, the most popular of cathartics or laxatives since the sixteenth century. In large doses it is toxic, and its use was abandoned after the 1890s when safer emetics were developed.

Croton oil is pressed from Croton tiglium, the seeds of a Euphorbiales tree, common in India and South East Asia. It is another emetic, which causes diarrhoea.

Colocynth is a herb also known as 'bitter apple', used to treat diabetes and constipation. Like calomel, it can be toxic in large doses, but Turnbull's prescription was cautious, and used only small quantities.

The second part of Turnbull's prescription was the part objected to by Stedman.

Tartrate of antimony is a chemical compound, antimony potassium tartrate, another powerful emetic which can be corrosive when taken in large quantities.

Digitalis is the herb better known as Foxglove, a type of cardiac glycoside which increases blood flow and vasodilation. It has been used as a preventive of heart failure since the seventeenth century. When combined with the calomel, this would have depressed the central nervous system.

Dr Stedman's medicine was not reported, if indeed he prescribed anything at all. Alcoholics suffering from the hallucinations of *delirium tremens* were often given a calming sedative to help them sleep. Laudanum would have been the first choice, but Turnbull probably warned Stedman that it did not agree with Hilson.

Stedman then resorted to a straitjacket as a way to prevent Hilson from doing himself harm. He had previously been pulling at his tongue, causing lacerations and bleeding. However, on the testimony of the two nurses, it seems probable that the German attendant pulled the straps too tightly, making it difficult for Hilson to breathe. The fact that the tips of his ears were black and his feet a bluish colour suggests a drastically lowered blood-oxygen level. These are symptoms of cyanosis.

Though Turnbull had obviously been treating his friend for some time beforehand, once in the hospital he deferred to Stedman as the physician in charge, and even though he disapproved of the strait-jacket he chose not to interfere, as that would have contravened medical etiquette.

The attending doctors all saw little hope of recovery. Turnbull gave him odds of ten to one against recovery. Hilson had been drinking to excess for a long period, and the autopsy found his liver and kidneys were enlarged. Failure of these organs, or heart failure, is the usual cause of death for alcoholics with *delirium tremens*. But in Hilson's case it seems likely that lack of oxygen contributed to his death.

Hilson was not the only medical man to die from addiction in nineteenth century Christchurch. The most notorious example was that of Dr John Frankish (1842-1913). He was a major public figure in the 1870s and 1880s, often appearing on committees and election platforms. He made by far the best speech in support of the proposed West Coast railway at a massive public demonstration in Hagley Park in 1885. He was highly regarded by his medical colleagues, and was treasurer and president of the Canterbury Medical Society. However, in 1891 he caught influenza from his patients in the so-called 'Russian' influenza pandemic, and it kept recurring, leaving him with

severe back and joint pain. He avoided laudanum, but found relief from whisky or brandy. He was soon a helpless alcoholic, imprisoned for disorderly behaviour and then committed to Sunnyside Lunatic Asylum. He lost his wife and family, his house and his practice, and spent the rest of his life in mental hospitals.[82]

Alcoholism was a major problem in nineteenth century Christchurch. In 1866 the city had 56 hotels to cater for a population of only about 7,000 people, and in 1869 a large public meeting was held to discuss ways to reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol in the city. It is therefore not surprising that Christchurch was the home of the Temperance movement in New Zealand, with dedicated campaigners like the Reverend Leonard Isitt and the politician Tommy Taylor, whose newspaper *The Prohibitionist* was at one time the best-selling paper in New Zealand. In 1894 they managed to get enough campaigners on the Licensing Committee to close nine Christchurch hotels that had become little more than grog-shops. But some were reopened with a change of committee. The serious alcoholics with *delirium tremens* mostly ended their days in the Sunnyside Lunatic Asylum. Hilson's sad fate carries a lesson that each new generation seems to have to learn for itself again and again.

ENDNOTES

[1] MyHeritage.com for the birth date. The entry in Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biography, H 597, incorrectly gives his first name as Patrick.
[2] George Tancred, *Annals of a Border Club (the Jedforest) and Biographical Notices of the Families Connected Therewith* (London, 1899), p.56: 'Dr Alexander Anderson settled in Jedburgh in 1847, succeeding Dr Gavin Hilson, who died suddenly while attending a patient'.
[3] Ancestry.com website.
[4] Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, T 439, gives his birth year as 1828 when it was in fact 1829.
[5] Rex Wright-St Clair, *Historia Nunc Vivat: Medical Practitioners in New Zealand, 1840 to 1930* (2003), pp. 184, 377.
[6] *Illustrated Road Book of Scotland* (London, Automobile Association, 1960), p.184.
[7] Turnbull Clan Association website.
[8] Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, T 439.
[9] *Lyttelton Times* (hereafter *LT*), 24 November 1858, p.4.
[10] *LT*, 1 December 1858, p.4.
[11] *LT*, 26 January 1859, p.5.
[12] Details on all of these doctors may be found in Wright-St Clair (2003), with further information about some of them in David Macmillan, *By-Ways of History and Medicine* (Christchurch. 1946).

[13] For references see G. W. Rice, *Chemists and Druggists in Early Christchurch and Lyttelton, New Zealand, 1850s to 1880s* (Christchurch, Hawthorne Press & The Cotter Medical History Trust, 2020).
[14] *LT*, 23 March 1861, p.5.
[15] See Gordon Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains: The Deans of Canterbury* (Christchurch, Shoal Bay Press, 1996).
[16] On Fraser see *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*,
[17] *LT*, 11 June 1859, p.4.
[18] For a full account, see G. W. Rice, *Christchurch Crime s: Scandal and Skulduggery in Port and Town* (Canterbury University Press, 2012), pp.49-56.
[19] *LT*, 26 November 1859, p.6.
[20] Noel Crawford, 'Allan McLean", in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.
[21] *LT*, 18 January 1860, p.4.
[22] *LT*, 4 August 1860, p.6.
[23] David Macmillan, *By-Ways of History and Medicine* (Christchurch, 1946), pp.341, 375.
[24] *LT*, 11 August 1860, p.4.
[25] *LT*, 5 September 1860, p.4.
[26] *LT*, 19 September 1860, p.4.
[27] *LT*, 8 October 1862, p.9 Supplement.
[28] *LT*, 16 December 1878, p.3.
[29] Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, R 374.
[30] See Gordon Ogilvie, *The Shagroons' Palace: A History of the Christchurch Club, 1856-2006* (Christchurch, 2005).
[31] *LT*, 29 June 1861, p.4; Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, T 439.
[32] *LT*, 15 June 1861, p.4.
[33] See R. B. O'Neill, *The Press, 1861-1961: the story of a newspaper*(Christchurch, 1961).
[34] *Press*, 20 July 1861, p.6; 3 August 1861, p.5; 31 August 1861, p.6.
[35] *Press*, 23 November 1861, p.8.
[36] *LT*, 14 September 1861, p.4.
[37] *LT*, 16 October 1861, p.4.
[38] *LT*, 23 November 1861, p.6.
[39] *LT*, 12 April 1862, p.5.
[40] Wright St-Clair, *Historia Nunc Vivat,* p.48.
[41] *Press*, 5 April 1862, p.4. Canterbury Museum, Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, T 439 has the name Hulbert.
[42] *Christ's College School List, 1850-1935* (Christchurch, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1935), p.100, as Halbert. Confirmed by the *Register*, April 1924.
[43] *LT*, 21 May 1862, p.3.
[44] F. O. Bennett, *Hospital on the Avon: the History of the Christchurch Hospital, 1862-1962* (Christchurch, 1962), pp.24-6.
[45] *LT*, 2 August 1862, p.4.
[46] *LT*, 3 September 1862, p.4.
[47] See Peter B. Maling, *The Philosophical Institute of Canterbury: a survey of the first 100 years* (Christchurch, Royal Society of NZ, 1962).
[48] *LT*, 17 September 1862, p.5.

[49] *LT*, 20 September 1862, p.5.
[50] *LT*, 27 September 1862, p.5.
[51] *LT*, 24 September 1862, p.5.
[52] *LT*, 11 October 1862, p.4.
[53] *LT*, 18 October 1862, p.3.
[54] *Press*, 18 October 1862, p.4.
[55] *LT*, 25 October 1862, p.3.
[56] *LT*, 5 November 1862, p.4.
[57] *LT*, 29 October 1862, p.3.
[58] *LT*, 8 November 1862, p.3.
[59] *LT*, 26 November 1862, p.3.
[60] *LT*, 8 November 1862, p.4.
[61] *LT*, 15 November 1862, p.4.
[62] *LT*, 19 November 1862, p.5.
[63] *Press*, 15 November 1862, p.6.
[64] *Press*, 1 November 1862, p.6.
[65] *LT*, 22 November 1862, p.6.
[66] *LT*, 10 December 1862, p.3.
[67] *Press*, 27 December 1862, p.3.
[68] *LT*, 27 December 1862, p.4.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *LT*, 31 December 1862, p.5.
[71] *LT*, 3 January 1863, p.4.
[72] *LT*, 7 January 1863, p.5.
[73] *LT*, 10 January 1863, p.6.
[74] *LT*, 7 February 1863, p.5.
[75] *LT*, 28 January 1863, p.8.
[76] *LT*, 4 January 1862, p.3; 7 June 1862, p.5.
[77] *LT*, 28 June 1862, p.6.
[78] *LT*, 3 December 1862, p.5.
[79] *LT*, 31 January 1863, p.7.
[80] *LT*, 11 March 1863, p.4.
[81] Archives NZ, Christchurch Office, Probate Records, R22387763 (1863).
[82] See my forthcoming biography, *Frankish: the rise and fall of a prominent Christchurch physician.*

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