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## 6.4

### Motives for medical training

Hope Malleon, *A Woman Doctor. Mary Murdoch of Hull* (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1919), pp. 16–17, 36–7.

Mary Murdoch was one of the first woman doctors, qualifying in 1892 from the London Medical School for Women. She then worked in hospitals until her own poor health encouraged her to set up her own practice in Kingston upon Hull in East Yorkshire in 1896. She remained there until her death in 1916. She had a strong Catholic

faith. She supported the feminist movement and drove a car at a time when women drivers were a rarity (to the peril of local pedestrians). Her biography provides details of her radical views and public opinions.

[In] 1883, Mary Murdoch finally left school and returned to Elgin. . . . [C]hanges had taken place in her home. Her two sisters had married, and the three brothers had scattered to different parts of the world. One was a doctor, another a planter in Ceylon, the third . . . a naval surgeon.

There followed four uneventful years, but Mary Murdoch made the best of them. She read much, she practised singing, the piano, and the violin. She made friends and shared in the interests of the town; she indulged in her favourite amusements of fishing and dancing. Occasionally she and her mother journeyed south to Moffat to visit her married sister. But her letters grew infrequent, and showed that 'her spirit was chafing at the limitations of her home life and at the small activities of the country town'. Afterward she would refer to this time as 'wasted years'.

In 1885, the youngest son died in Malta of malaria. Mrs. Murdoch never recovered from the shock; her health began to fail, and she grew to need her daughter's constant care. Eighteen months later she died, and the family home was broken up.

The idea of studying medicine seems to have been suggested to Mary Murdoch by an article in one of the 'monthlies',<sup>10</sup> on the need for women doctors in India; but whether this was before or after her mother's death is uncertain. It was through the old family physician, Dr. Adams, that the idea took definite shape. He had seen Mary Murdoch grow up, and with rare penetration recognised her aptitude for the work. It was by his advice that she decided to devote the small legacy her mother left her to her medical training.

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The following extract from a letter . . . shows Mary Murdoch's attitude towards her profession:

'When I first took the great love of my life – Medicine – to my heart, I said to her: "You shall change what you like; you shall take everything the world calls pleasure from me; you shall take real joys from me, and still I shall love and serve you." She has been an exacting mistress, and has taken thing after thing from me; tethered me down, taken my

<sup>10</sup> Monthly magazines.

freedom and liberty; upset my own and everyone else's plans a thousand times a year, and yet I love her and serve her with the same passion as I did twenty years ago.'

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