

Mc Laren (J. L.)

Let us be honest







LET US BE HONEST.

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To the Editor of the American Gynæcological and Obstetrical Journal :

SIR : It is the common and ever-increasing ambition of the American physician to go abroad to study, feeling that the demands of his patients and the custom of his profession make it obligatory. He goes expecting that the men he sees and the work they do are superior to anything found at home. This feeling and belief has been a part of his education. The college lecturer quotes Europeans and refers to the Old World for proofs of his assertions ; in medical societies and meetings we are constantly confronted by "What I saw abroad," until the idea prevails that Europe is the center of all knowledge.

I know of no greater mistake that a student or physician could make than to go abroad for advanced work, before visiting the post-graduate schools of his own country, first, because he is in no position to make a comparison; second, his high opinion of himself would not permit of his doing so on his return, and, as a result, he would be always ignorant of the good work and opportunities obtainable at home, thus adding one more to the list of "What I saw in Europe." I have no doubt but that there are many men in the city of New York who have never seen their neighbors operate but cross the ocean yearly to see the same operations done by men who do them no better and, in many instances, not so well.

It is not my purpose to discourage this laudable ambition—for comparison and interchange of thought are always wholesome—but I do wish to show the relative advantages between the work in Europe and that at home from, at least, one point of view.

The European physicians are, as a rule, unusually courteous and hospitable and I shall ever remember them for their kindness. They are justly entitled to their reputation for thorough schools and teachers, for their original work and investigation but, while we give due honor to them, let us be honest enough to recognize the true worth and genius of our own surgeons and teachers.

No other country, so far as I could see or learn, offers such advantages for post-graduate work as our own, where a study has been made of the wants of the men coming, as they do, from different parts of the country. The work has been concentrated and systematized, an effort made to put reliable men on the staffs and to furnish invitations to see the best operators of the city, whether members of the staff or not. A stranger may enter any hospital in our large cities and learn, with the greatest ease, when and how he can see operations in the city ; while in Europe it is with the greatest difficulty one learns of operations and with equal difficulty that one's gets from place to place, without much loss of time, on account of lack of rapid transit.

Now, after having followed the work both at home and in Europe, I claim, without fear of contradiction, that the man who wants general surgery can see just as good at home and, for abdominal or plastic, I believe much better.

This opinion was universal among all Americans I met in Europe, but I am sorry to say the majority of them thought it policy to say nothing on their return, thus leaving that false idea that is too commonly fixed in the minds of American physicians—that all superior knowledge grows abroad.

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