



THE FIRST MEDICAL SCHOOL IN AMERICA;
AN HISTORICAL ITEM.

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IN the report of a recent meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society¹ it was noted that inquiry had been made concerning a "certain gentleman of Boston" who in 1739 liberally offered to establish a professorship of medicine "in this Province, and who deserves the honor of having been the first promoter of medical education in America," even though his plans appear at the time to have been fruitless.

By reference to the journal of the House of Representatives for July 7, 1739, one may find this record: "Information being given to the House by the Member from Worcester, that a certain gentleman of the town of Boston, well disposed for the Encouragement and Support of a Professor of Physick within this Province, and that for good Purpose would cheerfully contribute out of his own Estate a considerable Sum of Money, provided this Court will join in making a Grant of Lands, or other wise establish a good Fund for the valuable Ends aforesaid; and the same being considered:

"Ordered, That the Members of Boston, Charlestown, Roxbury, and Chelsea, be a committee to treat with the said Gentleman, hear him on his Proposals, and report their Opinion of what may be proper to be done for the encouragement of so good a Scheme."

Whether the gentleman indicated appeared before the committee cannot be ascertained; but no action was taken on his suggestion, certainly during that session of the General Court.

The learned gentleman who propounded this inquiry is in error in considering this the first attempt at a medical school in the provinces. In making investigations regarding the history of medicine in America previous to 1700, and especially in reference to biographical memoranda concerning the earliest physicians of Boston and its neighborhood, I find in the first general letter issued by the Massachusetts Bay Company to Endicott, under date of April 17, 1629, the following passage:—

"We have entertained Lambert Wilson, chirurgion, to remain with you in the service of the Plantation; with whom we are agreed that he shall serve this Company and the other planters that live in the Plantation, for three years, and in that time apply himself to cure not only of such as came from hence for the general and particular accounts, but also for the Indians, as from time to time he shall be directed by yourself or your successor and the rest of the Council. And moreover he is to educate and instruct in his art one or more youths, such as you and the said Council shall appoint, that may be helpful to him, and, if occasion serve, succeed him in the Plantation; which youth or youths, fit to learn that profession, let be placed with him; of which Mr. Hugesson's son, if his father approve thereof, may be one, the rather because he has been trained up in literature; but if not he, then such other as you shall judge fittest."

Young, in his Massachusetts Bay Chronicles,² very truly says:—

"We have here the embryo of a medical school, undoubtedly the first contemplated on the Continent of America."

No record, however, exists of the success of this school, or of that to which reference is made in the letter to the Historical Society; but as an historical fact the *attempt* to found a medical school in 1629 has the precedence of the other by one hundred and ten years.

¹ Boston Daily Advertiser, March 9, 1882.

² Page 165.

