



Etowah (The)

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The Etowah County (Ala.) Medical Society

vs.

Dr. William Thomas Coggin.

Dr. William Thomas Coggin, of Athens, Ga., who Claims the Honor of doing the first Symphyseotomy, in this Country, is Denounced by the Etowah County (Ala.) Medical Society as an Imposter and a Fraud.

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DOCTOR WILLIAM THOMAS COGGIN, OF ATHENS, GA.,
WHO CLAIMS THE HONOR OF DOING THE FIRST SYMPHYSEOTOMY IN
THIS COUNTRY, IS DENOUNCED BY THE ETOWAH COUNTY (ALA.)
MEDICAL SOCIETY AS AN IMPOSTER AND A FRAUD.

[We publish the following communication by request of the Etowah County Medical Society. This Society also requests that all medical journals which have given publication to Dr. Coggin's claim to the distinguished honor publish this communication. We shall hear from Dr. Coggin before making editorial comment.—ED. AGE]:

Editor Alabama Medical and Surgical Age:

In the April number of your journal there is an extract from the *New Orleans Medical Journal*, from the pen of Dr. Robert P. Harris, of Philadelphia.

In the above article the very distinguished honor of performing the first symphyseotomy on the American continent is bestowed upon one William Thomas Coggin, A. M., M. D., Ph. D., Gc., now of Athens, Ga., but late of Keener, Etowah, county, Ala. Until the above article appeared in your journal, the medical profession of this county had never heard of the wonderful feat of Dr. Coggin, and feeling that it is a duty we owe to our profession in general, and other claimants for the same honor in particular, we determined to make a thorough investigation as to the facts in Dr. Coggin's claims, as we are on the grounds where he claims to have done the work; hence we think this should be satisfactory to



all feair-minded men. We recognize the fact that "honor should be given to whom honor is due."

To accomplish our purpose in a satisfactory way the matter was brought before our county medical society at the regular meeting in May. A committee of three was appointed by the president to make a thorough investigation as to the facts in Dr. Coggin's claims, and report to the society at the regular meeting on the first Tuesday in June.

From the report of this committee, after a thorough investigation of the case, together with correspondence from Dr. Coggin with different persons on the subject, what is here stated is based. We will first notice what Dr. Coggin says as to the facts: He states that on March 12th, 1892, he delivered one Mrs. Cary Hughs, the wife of a miner, of a living child by pubic section, and that his patient resided at the time of the operation at Freedman, Northeast Alabama, and that one Dr. Charles Slaughter assisted him in doing the operation. In a letter dated April 2, 1894, to Dr. C. J. Slaughter, of Aurora, Ala., Dr. Coggin says that "Mr. Cary Hughs lived on the Freedman place, near the rocky ford on Wills creek, before he went to the mines."

Diligent search has been made of the postoffice directory and other sources, and no such place as Freedman in Alabama can be found. A large number of the most prominent men in the vicinity in which Dr. Coggin lived and claimed to have done this operation have been interviewed, both as to Freedman and the operation, but not a single individual has been found who ever heard of freedman or the operation. All the men in

the immediate vicinity of the rocky ford have been interviewed with reference to Cary Hughs, but not one of them ever knew or heard of such a person in that locality. The books and managers of the mines in that locality have been consulted, and no trace of Cary Hughs ever having been in that locality can be found. The merchants and postmaster in that section of country have never known or heard of such an individual. Dr. C. J. Slaughter is the only Dr. Slaughter who has ever been heard of in that entire section of Alabama, and he says he never assisted in or heard of any such operation by Dr. Coggin or any one else.

In Dr. Coggin's report to the county health officer, of the births and deaths in his practice, he makes no report of delivering Mrs. Cary Hughs, although he makes a report of other cases in the same month he claims to have done the operation. In all the search and investigation that has been made, not a shadow of evidence has been found supporting Dr. Coggin's claim.

Under date of May 18, 1894, the president of our society invited Dr. Coggin to meet our society at the June meeting, and to exhibit his patient, and such other evidence as he might have to establish his claims. He was assured he should have a fair and square hearing, and if he produced the evidence he claimed to have, in a card to the president of this society, dated May 17, 1894, our society would take pleasure in confirming his claims; and doing him the honor he was claiming. He was urged to appear before us, but he failed to put in his appearance. Hence it is clear to any unbiased mind that there is not a shadow of evidence tending to cor-

roborate Coggin's claim, and the whole matter hinges on his own assertion. If we are not laboring under a false impression, it is not the policy of the medical profession of this country to accept statements or assertions of this kind without some proof to verify such statements, although he may be ever so reputable. This being the case, we think it perfectly legitimate and equitable to investigate the record of Dr. Coggin.

We are fully aware that it is no small or insignificant matter to undertake to impeach a brother physician (if he is entitled to such honor), but we feel the gravity of the case justifies the means; therefore we will take a retrospective view of Dr. Coggin's career during his sojourn in Alabama.

During the early part of the year 1888 Dr. Coggin came to Gadsden, Alabama, and made application to the Etowah County Examining Board for an examination to obtain a license preparatory to entering the practice of medicine, in compliance with the laws of the State.

Before an applicant is eligible for examination before a county medical examining board in Alabama, he must first exhibit a diploma from some reliable medical college; this Dr. Coggin was not able to do, but he set about to convince the board that he was a graduate in medicine, but he had been unfortunate by having his diploma burned, together with a drug store in Athens, Ga., a short time previous; and to convince the board of the correctness of his statement he exhibited letters to that effect, one of which was from the dean of the faculty of the medical department of the University of

the State of Georgia, located at Augusta, Ga. Dr. Coggin claimed to have graduated from that school in 1882, and from the literary department of the University at Athens he claims to have received the degree of A. M. He also exhibited letters verifying his statement as to the burning of his drug store.

This evidence had its desired effect on the part of Dr. Coggin and an examination was granted him. The board claim he was given a fair examination, but he failed to come up to the requirements of the law, and a certificate was refused.

For a while Dr. Coggin was nonplussed, but soon rallied and came with renewed force and vigor. He appealed to our Senior Censor, Dr. Jerome Cochran, and by the mighty force of that magic pen of his, which he has wielded so successfully on more occasions than this, he touched the tender cord of sympathy in the noble heart of Dr. Cochran, and actuated by the advice and recommendation of Dr. Cochran, which was the only possible available way by which a re-examination could be granted him under twelve months before a county examining board. In his appeals to Dr. Cochran he brought to bear upon him that, in his first examination, he was sick and his eyes were inflamed to such an extent that he was not able to see to read or write, and that his means were exhausted, and he felt confident if he was given a fair showing he could pass a successful examination.

It is claimed, on good authority, that he, although but a short time in the community, soon found valuable friends who came to his rescue, and by their aid and

some leniency on the part of the board a certificate was granted him.

This healed the Doctor, so far as the law was concerned, to practice medicine in Alabama, and so he proceeded at once and was soon located at the famous and historic spot, where he says he soon succeeded in establishing a satisfactory practice; but whether or not when he located at this place he ever dreamed that away back in the lonely hills and mountains of Etowah county a favorable opportunity should offer itself to bring forth the latent skill and ingenuity that was lurking in the posterior portion of his cranium—be this as it may—but, according to his statement, that favorable opportunity came at last, and he was on the alert to avail himself of the opportunity that presents itself to but few men with similar environments, and thus bound at one gigantic leap into world-wide fame!

Soon after Dr. Coggin located in our county, as he was in the midst of an agricultural people, he seems to have decided it would be the proper thing for him to attach himself to the Farmers Alliance, which, at that time, was sweeping over this country at high tide, and by this soon ingratiate himself into the good graces of the yeomanry of his section. The Doctor it seems was not slow in arising to no small eminence in that organization, and was gaining, by his craft, the confidence of the community as a physician; and in the meantime he had become an active member of our county medical society.

So far as we were aware, everything was smooth sailing with the Doctor, until in the early part of the

year 1889, when, it appears, a brother Allianceman and doctor as well, who is of rather an investigative turn of mind, and not at all disposed to keep silent and submit to any man coming within his domain and relieving him of the burdens, and sharing the profits and luxuries of a country practice, without first satisfying himself that such individual was *legally* authorized to carry on such a business, was not slow to investigate, and his efforts were crowned with success. It was not long until the biography of Dr. Coggin was rather current news for the community; and, I may add, this biographical sketch was not *altogether* as flattering to Dr. Coggin as the one given in the April number of your journal. He denounced him in unmistakable terms as a fraud, a forger and an imposition on the people, and heavily assailed our examining board for granting him a certificate to practice medicine, claiming he had no diploma and that he had duped the board.

The examining board had acted in good faith, and this charge put it on the defensive, and an investigation was at once instituted with reference to Dr. Coggin's claims of graduation. The dean of the faculty of the medical department of the University of Georgia was written to with reference to Dr. Coggin's graduation from that school, and also as to having written a letter to that effect, in reply to which he stated Dr. Coggin was not a graduate of that school, and if Dr. Coggin had exhibited any letter with his signature to that effect it was forged. He went on to state that Dr. Coggin had matriculated in that school, but had left there under a cloud. The postmaster at Athens, Ga.,

was written to concerning the burning of the drug store, and in reply he stated he had been a citizen of Athens, Ga., for a number of years, and no such man as William Thomas Coggin had ever engaged in the drug business or the practice of medicine in that place, and that there had not been a drug store burned there for a number of years.

After his little scheme had been shown to be false about graduating at Augusta, he then claimed he had graduated from the Medical College of South Carolina, at Charleston. An investigation of this claim proved it to be as false as the previous one.

After these facts were shown up, charges were preferred against him and he was notified to appear before our county medical society to answer to them, but he did not so much as appear to offer any defense, and he was expelled from and put under the ban of the society.

After this Dr. Coggin quieted down for a while and nothing more was heard from him by our society until in 1891, when he made complaint to Dr. Jerome Cochran, our Senior Censor of the State, that he had been misrepresented by our society, as shown in the transactions of the State Medical Association. In making our report to the State Association, we had reported him as an undergraduate. Dr. Cochran called the attention of our society to the matter, and Dr. Coggin was notified to appear before our society at its next regular meeting, which was in August, and show cause why he should not be so reported. Dr. Coggin promptly appeared before our society, and to the utter surprise and astonishment of every one he exhibited a diploma, coming this

time from the "Western Reserve University," of Cleveland, Ohio, and was an adendum degree. Our society is in possession of a letter from one H. H. Powell, register of the Western Reserve University, of Cleveland, Ohio, and in that letter, which is dated July 8th, 1891, he says that a man by the name of Wm. Thos. Coggin graduated a few years ago from what was then known as "Charity Hospital College," and all such are entitled to the adendum of the University. He registered from Keener, Ala. It should be borne in mind that Dr. Coggin now claims to have graduated from the Charity Hospital College, of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1882, and that Dr. H. H. Powell, register of the Western Reserve University, of Cleveland, Ohio, stated that he matriculated from Keener, Ala.

It can be clearly shown that Wm. Thos. Coggin was never heard of in Etowah county until in 1888. How and when Dr. Coggin obtained these diplomas we are not able to state. It seems remarkably strange, however, that if Dr. Coggin was a graduate in 1882 from the Charity Hospital College, of Cleveland, Ohio, as he now claims,—why, in 1888, when he made application to our county examining board, he did not exhibit his diploma from that school. It seems to us this would have been much easier than to go to all the trouble he did in getting up the proof about graduating in Augusta, Georgia. Dr. Coggin alone, we presume, can explain this. It would be quite a gratification to our society to have an explanation from the doctor on this subject. The burden of proof is thrown upon him to show how and when he obtained these diplomas, as well

as the rights to some of the titles he has swung on to his autograph. When he shall have done this in a satisfactory way, then he can ask decent people to give credence to what he says about his symphyseotomy. Until he does this or produces his patient, with reliable evidence to corroborate it, the Etowah County Medical Society brands his claims as utterly false, without a particle of foundation.

The Etowah County Medical Society has the proofs on file to verify every statement made in this article, and we stand ready and are anxious to establish and maintain every word of it. We challenge William Thomas Coggin to successfully contradict it.

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Pres't Etowah Co. Med. Society, Gadsden, Ala.

