AN

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

DELIVERED AT THE

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

OF THE

CITY OF NEW YORK,

NOVEMBER 6, 1829.

BY JOHN B. BECK, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF MATERIA MEDICA AND MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK.

NEW YORK:

CHARLES S. FRANCIS, 252 BROADWAY.

1829.

Sleight & Robinson, Printers,
Corner of Exchange Place and William Street.

NOTICE.

The following discourse was prepared and delivered in the discharge of an ordinary duty, devolving upon the different Professors of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to open their annual courses of lectures with public introductories. The precise object which the author had in view was to guard the minds of those who might hear him against the infection of a species of radicalism, unfortunately too prevalent, in this city at least, the design of which seems to be to sweep away every existing institution, whether in the shape of a medical college, or of a law to regulate and control the practice of the profession. By the friends of the institution to which the author is attached, it has been decided that the discourse might be of more permanent utility, and it is in entire submission to their judgment that he has consented to its publication.

New York, November, 1829.

New York, November 14, 1829.

SIR,

The undersigned, having been appointed a committee for that purpose, take pleasure in communicating to you the wishes of the board of trustees, contained in the following extract from their minutes:

"A communication having been received from the students of the college, unanimously requesting the publication of the introductory lecture of Professor J. B. Beck, delivered on the 6th instant, and the trustees believing that the publication of said lecture would promote the interests of medical education—Therefore, Resolved, That a committee of the board be appointed to solicit of Professor Beck a copy of that lecture for the press."

We add our solicitations, individually, for your compliance with the request of the board of trustees, and are, respectfully, yours.

NICOLL H. DERING,
F. U. JOHNSTON,
J. KEARNY RODGERS,
} COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

PROFESSOR J. B. BECK.

New York, November 16, 1829.

GENTLEMEN,

The request to furnish for publication a copy of the lecture recently delivered, comes before me in such a shape as to render it, almost a matter of duty on my part, to comply with it. In doing so, let me ask you to assure the board of trustees that I am most deeply sensible of this very flattering testimonial of their approbation.

With sentiments of the highest respect for the board of trustees, as well as yourselves individually, I am very respectfully, yours, &c.

JOHN B. BECK.

TO NICOLL H. DERING, M. D.
FRANCIS U. JOHNSTON, M. D.
J. KEARNY RODGERS, M. D.
} Committee of the Board of Trustees of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

LECTURE.

THE occasion of commencing an annual course of medical instruction is one of interest and importance. It is then the pupil enters upon a series of studies which is to lay the basis of his future character, and according as he improves or neglects the advantages which he enjoys, may his name, in after time, be honoured or contemned. And it is then the teacher finds himself assuming the high and impressive responsibility of guiding the opinions and directing the practice of those who hear him, in relation to subjects which involve, to a certain extent, the lives and comfort of a large portion of mankind. In this country, and in this city especially, such occasions are surrounded with a peculiar interest. A little more than half a century ago, the first medical school was established in this city. It was then only the second one in our country. And now there is scarcely a state in the Union which does not boast of one or more colleges, supplied with native instructors of talents and learning, annually sending forth a body of well educated physicians and surgeons, devoting their powers and attainments to the service of the community. To analyze the causes which have exerted an agency

in bringing about results so flattering to our national pride, would be a task at once pleasing and instructive. Such, however, is not my purpose at the present time; and I shall content myself with making some general observations on the subject of education, with the view of illustrating more especially the admirable system which has been adopted, and at present exists, in the state of New York, and of which this college forms a part.

The advantages of education are too well and generally appreciated to need any demonstration. To nations as well as individuals, they are conceded to be the surest basis of enduring greatness and permanent glory. Notwithstanding this, it is a fact proved by all experience, that these advantages are never justly appreciated unless they have been actually enjoyed. The savage knows nothing of them, and does not feel the want of them. He accordingly makes no effort for their attainment—and history establishes the fact, that every nation which has burst the chains of ignorance, and made any advance in the career of knowledge and improvement, has done so through the agency of a power extrinsic to itself. As far as our knowledge extends, we know of no nation which ever yet civilized itself. On the contrary, this result has always been brought about either by forced attempts at civilization, or by accidental commerce with nations more enlightened. In these ways, letters and the arts have progressively urged their course from nation to nation, and from clime to clime. Cradled in Assyria, they travelled from thence to Egypt. From Egypt they were carried to Greece. Greece gave them to Rome, and from

Rome they spread over the whole of Europe. If this be true of whole nations, it is no less so of portions of nations. Hence, by the lower and uninformed orders, even of civilized communities, no attempts are ever made to enlighten themselves beyond the narrow circle which has been marked out by those who have preceded them; and any great improvement which may be made in their intellectual condition, is always effected by the instrumentality of those who have already enjoyed, and are therefore capable of duly estimating, the blessings of superior knowledge. As we advance through the different gradations of society, the influence of the same general fact will be observed—and thus, by the operation of the superior grades upon those below them, it comes to pass, that the taste for knowledge is progressively created and diffused. Of the truth of this position, illustrations are profusely scattered around us in the multiplied efforts which are making to improve the intellectual condition of the poorer classes of society. In no one instance have these originated in any endeavour on the part of the poor themselves, to be supplied with the means of instruction. On the contrary, they have always been the result of the benevolence and zeal of the intelligent and instructed portions of the community.

Now the known existence and constant operation of such a law as the one I have been alluding to, is a sort of security that in all civilized and free countries, knowledge of a certain kind, and to a certain extent, will be perpetuated. As a matter of course, however, it can never go beyond that which is actually enjoyed and appreciated by the mass

of community. It is, therefore, limited in its agency to elementary knowledge, or at any rate to such kinds of it as may be rendered immediately and practically useful. So far as the higher departments of knowledge are concerned, this law must accordingly be exceedingly inoperative. The lower orders, as a matter of course, have no sort of idea of their nature and importance. The upper spheres of knowledge are removed at too great a distance to be clearly seen by the dim vision of ignorance—and even of the intelligent and ordinarily well educated portion of society, very few indeed are capable of estimating their value. Unless science and learning are rendered glaring to the senses, as it were, by their practical utility, they are very apt to be scorned even by men in other respects sensible and intelligent. Frequent and striking illustrations of this are met with in the contempt which is so often expressed for classical learning—for the higher branches of mathematical science—and for that minute, exact, and profound professional knowledge, which it is the peculiar business of such an institution as this to cultivate and to teach.

There being, therefore, no special demand for the higher and more refined kinds of knowledge, either in the immediate wants or general taste of the community at large, and therefore no adequate compensation offered for their cultivation, it has been necessary to supply this deficiency by other aids and helps; and these have been found in the bounty and patronage of enlightened governments and individuals, by whom universities, and colleges, and professorships have been established and endowed in such way as to ena-

ble, a few at least, of the learned men of a country, to push their researches into the regions of science, far beyond, what, under other circumstances, they would be enabled to do.

Such being the necessary dependence of mankind generally, upon external aids, for advancement in knowledge, the business of education, especially the higher departments of it, has always been an object of special interest with every government that has felt any generous concern for its real glory. It is to this is owing the existence of those noble universities in different countries, which for ages have shed so bright and steady a light over the paths of learning; and if the records of science be consulted, it will be found that among her greatest benefactors have been men who have been fostered by these institutions—men, who, placed in comparative independence as teachers or students, have been enabled, under the influence of a pure ambition, to sound the depths of knowledge, and, by their learned labours, not merely to secure renown to themselves and to their country, but to exalt the character of the race itself.

If the statement which has been made be founded in truth, it would seem very fairly to meet an opinion which has gained some currency, and which in this country appears in such just accordance with the general genius of our institutions, as to meet with a ready acquiescence in the minds of a very large and influential portion of society. The opinion to which I allude, is, that education, as well of the higher order as elementary, should be left to regulate itself, like every other article which may be called for by the taste or necessities of the public, If such were the case,

it is urged, that a wider field of competition would be thrown open, and that nothing in the shape of education would be offered in the market, which did not suit the popular taste. Systems and doctrines accordingly unaccommodated to the public appetite, or opposed to the prevailing fashion of the day, would not be taught, for the simple reason that they would not be paid for; and thus education would be brought home to the business and practical wants of life.

Such is the argument which is urged by many against all established institutions, and it is the same argument, which, under a different guise, is so diligently protruded in favour of so multiplying them, as, in fact, to do away all the character which they possess as privileged institutions. It was by so distinguished a man as Adam Smith, in his Wealth of Nations, that this doctrine was first broached; and it is to him, as their leader, that all the chorus singers of the present day, on this subject, are indebted for their music.

As the subject is important, and the argument offers a great show of plausibility, I shall detain you with a few brief remarks upon it.

Specious and plausible as the argument confessedly is, it requires but little penetration to perceive that it is principally reared upon a false analogy. Learning is considered as a thing perfectly analogous to articles of ordinary traffic. This is assumed in the argument, and the reasoning applicable to the latter is unceremoniously transferred to the former. Now this is a great error, and it is one which is fatal to the whole argument. There is no just analogy between articles of trade and learning. The one is addressed

to our *physical wants*, while the other has reference to our *intellectual wants*—two classes of wants differing altogether from one another, in the desire which men experience to have them supplied. In the case of physical wants, instinct and the necessities of our nature compel us to their use. The more, for instance, the physical wants of hunger and thirst are excited, the greater will be the desire for food and drink. In the case of intellectual wants, there is no natural craving for supplying them. On the contrary, the greater the want, the more blunted is the feeling of the want itself, and the feebler is the desire to have it remedied. For instance, the more ignorant we are, the less are we conscious of the degradation of which it is the badge, and the less do we desire to be enlightened and instructed. There is, then, an essential and a radical dissimilarity between learning and the commodities of ordinary traffic. Any argument, therefore, which may be just and true in relation to the latter, is not necessarily so in relation to the former.

But it is urged, that if education were left to take its own course, without patronage—without endowments—without privileges—in short, left solely to individual enterprise, unaided and unprotected by authority—the character of it would be better accommodated to the prevailing taste of the age and community. Now all this may be granted at once—indeed, it seems to be a necessary result of such a system. But it remains to be proved that all this would be advantageous to the general interests of learning, or of the community. I speak not now of common elementary education—what I have to say has reference to the higher de-

partments of learning; and so far as these are concerned, if experience and history can serve us as guides, it will be found proven beyond a question, that a few well endowed and privileged universities and colleges, are infinitely better calculated to sustain the cause and extend the blessings of science, than the multitudinous institutions which may start into hasty existence under the urgency of the vanity and ambition, or even worthier motives of individual projectors. The reason is sufficiently obvious. Institutions established by the proper authorities of the country in which they are located, from their very nature are enabled at once to commence, and afterwards to enforce, a high and elevated standard of education which would be perfect ruin to those, which are dependent solely upon the whim or caprice of the popular voice. And this it is not less their duty to do than it is their interest. The permanent renown of an institution established by law, depends not so much upon her crowded halls or upon her sounding pretensions, as it does upon the high tone of literary and seientific feeling which it inspires in the minds of her pupils—the pure ambition which it encourages—and the industrious labour which it inculcates. Of such a system, the effects are perhaps not so immediate and apparent. The superficial and empty is always more noisy and obtrusive than the solid and the profound. The shallow rivulet urges its fretful current into foam and noise, while the majestic river rolls its deep and swelling tide in solemn stillness, bearing on its bosom the labours of industry and the riches of commerce. It is with learning as with every thing else. It is an ordinance of nature, that what-

ever is designed to be strong and vigorous shall be slow in coming to its maturity. The insect is mature almost at the moment of its birth—while man, designed eventually to control all creation, struggles through a helpless infancy and a tedious minority, before he attains the physical powers suited to his illustrious destiny. And so with learning. To be really good, it must be the result of laborious, protracted, and reiterated efforts—and this is the true reason why a sound and exalted system of education does not so immediately flash upon the public eye. In the end, however, its results are as glorious as its progress has been slow. It is only under such a system that the bone and muscle of science can be properly elaborated; and if, in the course of a whole generation, it shall give to the world only one man of surpassing power like Newton or Bacon, or, in our own profession, like Haller, or Harvey, or Boerhaave, or Sydenham, it does more for the real advancement of knowledge, than could be effected by whole legions of the forced productions of the literary and scientific hot-houses of the day.

Notwithstanding all this, it is very evident that a system which exacts so much labour, and is of such slow growth, can never be so immediately popular; and hence it is utterly impossible for institutions, depending altogether for their very existence upon the breath of popular favour, to adopt such a system. On the contrary, they are obliged to cut down the stern requisitions of learning to suit the false taste and empirical notions of their patrons, for in nothing is there so much empiricism as in the opinions which people entertain on the subject of education. And hence it will be found

that in institutions of this sort, there is always some compromise between duty and interest. This is the premium which they must pay to secure popularity. It is only in institutions established by authority, and protected by law, that a high system of education can be enforced. In the sacred retreats of such institutions, the professor feels a proud consciousness that he can devote himself to the noblest of purposes, without being obliged to barter away the rights and honours of science; while the student, knowing that all his privileges are secured to him by competent authority, is inspired solely with the love of science, and bends all his energies to the acquisition of knowledge. In such an institution, he feels that he really is a student, and nothing else. On the other hand, in institutions got up unaided by public law, and perhaps in direct opposition to it, it is too much the case that the student looks upon himself as a kind of citizen soldier, one of whose principal businesses is to stand upon guard and do duty in defence of works incessantly threatened with assault and destruction.

But it is urged against established institutions, that they have a tendency to repress competition. As this is a very common place and popular argument against them, and in the minds of not a few appears to be conclusive, it may not be inappropriate briefly to consider it. The objects of competition may be two-fold—either to improve the quality of an article, or to cheapen the price. These are its objects in matters of ordinary traffic, and when both these are gained at the same time that the producer of the article makes his fair profit, competition becomes of the greatest benefit

to the community. It encourages ingenuity and laudable enterprize. Individuals thrive and prosper, and the public reap substantial advantage. If, however, competition be carried so far as to compel the competitors simply to cheapen the article, without any regard to the quality, it is very evident that the public, instead of being the gainer, may actually be the loser. And if it be carried still further, so as to involve in ruin those engaged, the effect is still more injurious, not only to the individuals themselves, but to the community at large. The truth is, there are, and necessarily must be, certain limits, beyond which competition cannot be pushed without producing mischief.

Certi sunt denique fines
Quos ultra nequit consistere rectum.

The mass of mankind, however, are too apt, unfortunately, to consider that the great design of competition is gained when the article, whatever it may be, is *nominally* cheapened; and hence it is, that this is the mark aimed at whenever competition becomes excessive. Now this is no less true of competition in education, than it is in matters of ordinary trade. And whenever it is carried beyond a certain point, the necessary result is that the quality of the article is impaired. Education is made a matter of traffic, and its texture and quality suited accordingly for the market. Then comes the season of speculators and jobbers. Colleges are got up by stock companies, and annual dividends declared upon the number of graduates. Against all such competition, it must be confessed, that institutions established

and protected by the authority of the land are decidedly hostile. But so far from this being an argument against them, it is one of the most triumphant which can be brought in their favour. During the floods and whirlwinds of such unholy competition, a few institutions of this kind may save the general bankruptcy of learning in a country.

If, however, the legitimate object of competition in education be not to cheapen the article, but to improve it—to elevate its character—to establish and sustain a high standard—then institutions such as these, instead of repressing, are the very means of encouraging emulation, and rousing competition. In fact, they are the only ones which can do it. They alone can create the highest standards—can hold out the strongest inducements to exertion, by the distinctions which they confer, and by the high offices of honour and emolument in their gift. In all these ways, they excite a generous emulation, and what, perhaps, is of still more importance, reward it when successful. All history proves the correctness of this statement. In looking over the literary geography of the world, it is truly gratifying to find, in all the countries in which such institutions have been located, how they have been the fortresses of knowledge, and the sanctuaries of the learned; and how, amid the anarchy of the times, they have sustained the honours of science against the rude shocks of ignorance, and the never ending revolutions of popular opinion.

But it is time to bring these general considerations to a close; and I have made them in a brief, and, I fear, somewhat imperfect manner, as preliminary to a very rapid no-

tice of the system which has been adopted in this state, more especially that department of it which relates to our profession. And I have designed to show that so far as the higher departments of learning, at least, are concerned, the only method of ensuring their proper cultivation is by the establishment of a few institutions under the immediate patronage and superintendence of the government.

From the earliest periods of our independent existence, the people of this state seem to have been fully convinced of the erroneous nature of the doctrine that education should be left to itself. This conviction had been wrought upon them no less by speculative reasoning on the subject than by having witnessed the practical effects of such a system anterior to our revolution. During the whole of our colonial existence, very little attention had been paid to the subject of education; indeed, it was not until about the middle of the last century that any thing of importance was done in the colony in the way of public provision for the instruction of youth, and the private schools were but poorly qualified to make amends for the negligence of the government. Smith, in his history of New York, mentions that towards the latter part of the seventeenth century, under the reign of James, a Latin school was set up; the teacher, however, was strongly suspected of being a Jesuit. The general disaffection to the government of this Prince, and the increasing jealousy of Catholic influence, probably prevented it from being much encouraged.* Its fate, however, is not men-

* History of New York, by William Smith, A. M., page 102.

tioned. Under the administration of Governor Cosby, the subject of education was recommended by the governor to the consideration of the assembly; and in the year 1732, a bill was passed for encouraging a public school to teach Latin, Greek, arithmetic, aud mathematics,* and certain monies appropriated for its support. The children were to be taught gratuitously. Whether this school ever went further than the paper bill which gave it birth, does not appear. At any rate, it can have gained no character, for at the time Smith wrote his history of the colony, he says: "Our schools are in the lowest order; the instructors want instruction, and through a long, shameful neglect of all the arts and sciences, our common speech is entirely corrupt; and the evidences of a bad taste, both as to thought and language, are visible in all our proceedings, public and private."†

The only effort to advance the cause of learning which was made in the Colony, was in the establishment of Kings College, now called Columbia College, a few years previous to the revolutionary war.

It thus appears that with the exception of the formation of this college, nothing was done by the government either local or foreign for supplying the means of instruction; and this was the true cause of the low condition of learning, so lamentably prevalent at that period. The mass of the population was in just such a condition as not to be sensible of the importance of knowledge, and they required powerful

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* Smith, p. 397. † Ibid. p. 324.

artificial aids not merely to furnish the means of education, but to inspire the taste for it. Immediately after the revolution, a new state of things began to appear. And one of the earliest subjects which attracted the attention of the republican government of our state was that of education. Deeply impressed with the importance of it to the general honour and prosperity, it appears to have been the object and determination not to legislate partially or imperfectly in relation to it; but to lay the foundations of a general system, the influence and effects of which might be extended to every portion of the state. The conception certainly was a great one, and altogther worthy of the wise and patriotic men with whom it originated. To carry this great project into effect, a general university for the state was created, under the title of "the University of the State of New York," the whole authority of which was vested in a Board of Regents, appointed immediately by the Legislature, and of which the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the officers of state were members ex officio. The powers granted to the Board of Regents over learning and education, were ample and supreme. They were invested with authority to establish colleges and schools in every part of the state, to visit and inspect them annually when so established, and they were required to make an annual report of their condition to the Legislature. In short, they were charged with the general superintendence of the literature of the state. These were extraordinary powers and great responsibilities. That they were so considered, is evident from the character of the men who were selected to discharge this trust. They were

the conscript fathers of the state—illustrious for their wisdom, virtues, and patriotic services. It is gratifying to find that this character the board of regents has continued to sustain to the present day, embodying in it a large proportion of all that is venerable and talented in our state. The establishment of such a board as this, and invested with such powers, was unquestionably one of the most admirable measures that could have been devised for the general and permanent advancement of learning. Uninfluenced by sectional considerations, they were enabled to view the state as one and to legislate for it as a whole; and while they offered every suitable encouragement to the multiplication of literary institutions in different parts of the state, keeping pace in this respect with our increasing wants and growing population, they were fully sensible that competition might be carried too far, and terminate in the total destruction of sound learning. With an honest and manly hand, therefore, they checked it when it showed a tendency to become excessive. A detailed account of what they have done for education in this state, literary and professional, would occupy too much space at the present time; but it is due to truth and justice to say, that such an account would furnish the most triumphant vindication of that honoured body, and would cover with confusion some of those who are so loud in their denunciations of it.

To our profession, both the legislature and the regents have been eminently kind. All civilized governments have thought it proper and necessary to regulate professional education—to establish standards of professional attainments—

and to exact certain requirements from those who offer themselves as candidates for its honours and emoluments. This is right and just. It is founded upon the principle, that every government is in duty bound to extend its protection as far as it can over the lives and properties of its citizens. Now the only way to do this is to make it obligatory upon every one who enters upon any of the learned professions, to pass through such terms of study, and to be subjected to such examinations, as shall give the public some pledge as to the competency of the persons whom they may be obliged to employ in a professional way. It is only among savage nations, and in rude and unformed societies, that such regulations do not exist; and the adoption of them may always be looked upon as one of the surest indications of progressing improvement in any community. It shows the birth of liberal sentiments and a juster appreciation of the value of professional knowledge. Without the existence of such regulations, it is impossible for a profession to become truly respectable. Knowledge not being an essential requisite, other passports to public favour are resorted to. Assurance then usurps the place of talent—gravity, of wisdom—boasting, of knowledge—cunning, of skill—and the whole practice becomes a mere play of knavery upon the weakness and credulity of mankind. You see this illustrated in every community where laws do not exist to regulate the profession. And this country forms no exception. Before the revolution, when no restraints existed, see what a picture is given of our profession by competent judges. Douglass, who was himself a physician, and wrote an account of the

North American Colonies, which was publlshed about 1753, gives the following description in his work of the practice in this country. "In general, the physical practice in our Colonies, is so perniciously bad, that, excepting in surgery, and some very acute cases, it is better to let nature, under a proper regimen, take her course, than to trust to the honesty and sagacity of the practitioner: our American practitioners are so rash and officious, the saying in the Apocrypha, (38. 15.) may with much propriety be applied to them. '*He that sinneth before his maker, let him fall into the hands of the physician.*' Frequently there is more danger from the physician than from the distemper. Our practitioners deal much in quackery and quackish medicines, as requiring no labour of thought or composition, and highly recommended in the London quack-bills, (in which all the reading of many of our practitioners consists,) inadvertently encouraged by patents for the benefit of certain fees to some offices, but to the very great damage of the subject." "In the most trifling cases, they use a routine of practice. When I first arrived in New England, I asked a noted facetious practitioner, what was their general method of practice: he told me their practice was very uniform; bleeding, vomiting, blistering, purging, anodyne, &c.; if the illness continued, there was *repetendi*, and finally, *murderandi;* nature was never to be consulted or allowed to have any concern in the affair. What Sydenham well observes, is the case with our practitioners: Æger nimia medici diligentia ad plures migret."*

* A Summary, Historical and Political, of the first planting, pro-

Smith, in his history of this state before the revolution, gives a picture, not more flattering, of the profession, and boldly assigns the cause. "Few physicians amongst us are eminent for their skill. Quacks abound like locusts in Egypt, and too many have recommended themselves to a full practice and profitable subsistence. This is the less to be wondered at as the profession is under no kind of regulation. Loud as the call is, to our shame be it remembered, we have no law to protect the lives of the king's subjects, from the malpractice of pretenders. Any man, at his pleasure, sets up for physician, apothecary, and chirurgeon. No candidates are either examined, or licensed, or even sworn to fair practice."*

It was impossible that a state of things so disreputable to the profession and injurious to the public, could long continue. The evil was too great, and came too closely home to the person of every citizen, to be long unheeded. It accordingly no sooner attracted the consideration of the legislature, than efficient measures were adopted to wipe off so foul a stain from our honour. These consisted of laws, regulating the qualifications required of those who entered the profession, and the establishment of medical societies in every county of the state, specially charged with the en-

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gressive improvements, and present state, of the British Settlements in North America. By WILLIAM DOUGLASS, M. D. Boston, Vol. 2. p. 352.

* History of New York, from the first discovery to the year 1732. By WILLIAM SMITH, A. M. with a continuation. Albany, 1814, p. 325, 6.

forcement of these laws. An organised system, embracing within the sphere of its operation every portion of the state, was thus founded by law, which already has been most salutary in its influence, and which is destined hereafter to confer still greater blessings, both upon the profession and the public. Since their first enactment, these laws have been variously modified; and as at present ratified, they require of every candidate for admission into the profession, that he should have attained the age of twenty-one years, and studied medicine four years.* They also enact, "that no person shall practice physic or surgery, unless he shall have received a license or diploma for that purpose, from one of the incorporated medical societies in this state, or the degree of doctor of medicine from the regents of the university."

From these enactments it appears, that the only legitimate titles to practice in this state are the licences of the medical societies, and the degrees of the university, of which this college is a branch.

Such are some of the laws at present regulating the admission of persons into our profession. It is useless to object that these regulations are too severe. The legislature, being the supreme authority, has seen fit to enact them, and whether severe or not, they constitute a part of the existing law of the state, and as such, must be enforced. But in reality

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* To obtain the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, it is required that the candidates should have attained the age of twenty-one years—have studied medicine three years—and have attended two full courses of lectures.

there is no severity at all in them. All laws are founded on the principle of restriction, and from their very nature must necessarily be so. There must, therefore, as a matter of course, be some abridgment of individual rights, wherever men exist, under the forms and operations of law. The very object of laws is to prevent individuals, or any number of individuals, who may conspire together, from doing as they please. Now, in the medical code of this state, there is nothing more than this necessary restriction, which runs through all other laws, and the very design of it was to remedy that most debased of all conditions into which a profession can be sunk, of suffering every one to do just as he pleases. If the law, therefore, be severe at all, it can only be so to those who prefer confusion to order,—anarchy to good government—and who choose voluntarily to expose themselves to its penalties, and such persons, of course, have no reason to complain. Its provisions are eminently calculated to elevate the character of the profession; and as such, they have been sanctioned by the voice of the profession throughout the state. But I will not dwell upon this subject, and I have merely entered upon these details for the purpose of showing how deeply indebted our profession is to the legislature for the paternal care which she has extended to it. But her watchful guardianship has not ended here. She has not merely passed laws to regulate the practice of the profession, but she has also, with a munificent liberality, supplied the amplest means of medical instruction. Governed by a just and enlightened policy, she has viewed the state as a whole, every part of which is entitled

to her care and patronage. She has accordingly established two medical colleges, as branches of the university—one in this city, and the other in a distant part of the state*—thus affording the advantages and conveniences both of a city and a country institution.

The college in this city was established twenty-three years ago by the regents of the university, in consequence of powers delegated to them by a special act of the legislature, so far back as the year 1791. Since then, her fortunes have been various. She has, however, survived not merely, but gloriously triumphed over foreign aggression and internal convulsions, and she now reposes on a basis more solid than she has done at any period since her first establishment. Compared with most of the medical institutions of our country, she is no less venerable for her duration, than distinguished for the number and respectability of the sons whom she has educated. Upwards of five hundred of her graduates are found scattered over our wide spread country, many of whom have already rendered themselves illustrious by their achievements in science. To the pupil, pursuing his career of study, it is a matter of honourable boast, that he is associating himself with all the hereditary honours of

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* The College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District. The success of this College speaks loudly in favour of the wisdom of the general policy observed by the legislature and the board of regents, in relation to medical institutions in this state, at the same time that it exhibits one among a number of proofs of the learning, ability, and zeal, of its distinguished professors.

such an institution. It acts as a stimulus to his exertions, urging him on to emulate the bright examples thus set before him.

But not merely in this respect does this college challenge an advantage. By the constituted authorities of our state, she has always been viewed with special regard, and the honours conferred upon her graduates are of a peculiar value. Her diplomas emanating from the regents of the university, are strictly university honours, and not mere college ones. And in receiving them, the name of every candidate is made known to a body of illustrious men, identified with the literary and political history of our country.

All this, however, would be of little avail, were not the honours and privileges emanating from her, of an enduring character. History, not very remote, furnishes us with the melancholy instances of colleges, struggling through a feverish existence of a few years, which, either from some defect in their corporate powers, or some other equally fatal cause, have been blotted from existence, leaving not a single memorial behind them. To the reflections of its alumni, such a fate cannot be otherwise than distressing. Every man of honourable feelings is deeply attached to the alma mater where he received his education. There he first became conscious of the extent and power of his capacities. There his mind was formed to habits of thought and study. There he received the first impulses to high and noble achievement. There he formed associations which have swayed the whole destiny of his after life. Loaded with honours, he leaves her with regret. But he can never forget

her. Amid the busy scenes of life, his purest thoughts are directed towards her; and in the wane of manhood, as years steal over him, he enjoys a melancholy pleasure in gathering up the early recollections of his collegiate career. How embittered must all these recollections be, should some untoward fortune have prostrated in the dust, the institution with which they are associated. When the Romans denounced their heaviest imprecation upon the person who should destroy the monument of his ancestors, they merely wished that he might outlive all his relatives and friends, supposing this to be the greatest curse that could befal him. Quisquis hoc sustulerit aut jusserit, *ultimus moriatur.* Something like this must be the situation of one who finds himself outliving the institution from which he received all his literary or professional honours. Such a fate can never befall the graduate of this college. She has already stood the test of time. Safe in her rights, every year but adds to her security and multiplies her triumphs. And in the successive classes which are annually resorting hither, distinguished for their talents, industry, and enthusiasm, I witness the evidence and the pledge of her present safety and her future prosperity.