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OBSERVATIONS

ON

THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF THE

COLLEGE

OF

PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

AND THE LATE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGENTS

OF

THE UNIVERSITY,

RELATIVE TO THAT INSTITUTION.

COMMUNICATED IN A

LETTER TO JAMES S. STRINGHAM, M. D.

*Professor of Chemistry in Columbia College.*

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BY DAVID HOSACK, M. D.

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NEW-YORK:

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## OBSERVATIONS, &c.

*New-York, May 4th, 1811.*

DEAR SIR,

IN a conversation which I held with you a few days since, you stated that my associates, composing the Faculty of Physic in Columbia College, have entertained and expressed opinions unfavourable to me, as far as they relate to my connection with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and my conduct in aiding and promoting the objects of that institution. That the Faculty consider me "as having for some years past approved of measures tending to oppose the interests of Columbia College;" that "I have taken an active part in that opposition;" that, "contrary to the express wishes of my colleagues, I have been instrumental in effecting the changes lately made in the College of Physicians and Surgeons:" that furthermore "I have been the mean of taking from Dr. Post an annual salary which he received from the state as the Professor of Anatomy in Columbia College:" You proceeded to add, that as it is my intention to remain attached to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and as my views and wishes are altogether distinct from the true interests of Columbia College, "I ought, in the opinion of the Faculty to resign the Professorship held by me in that institution."

To *your* candour and friendship I perceive I am indebted for the information I have received relative to the nature and extent of the charges alleged against me by my colleagues. It is true I have learned from reports in circulation, that I am considered the cause of the present discontents among the medical gentlemen of the two colleges; and that I have been the instrument in producing the revolutions which have been, or are now likely to be effected. But I can assure the gentlemen who are disposed to ascribe to me so much influence, that I am not altogether entitled either to the credit or the censure which they attach to the proceedings that have taken place on that subject. I beg leave also to observe that the Board of Regents, who are composed of some of the most respectable men of the state, and whose learning and talents would render them an honour to any state or country, are not, as those gentle-

men should know, to be dictated to by me, or any other individual.

I should, however, have been more obliged to my associate members of the Faculty, if they had been as frank in their communications with me as they have been among themselves, and with others with whom they have conversed on this subject. But although they have thus precipitately, and in the most public manner, expressed their opinions, without giving me the least previous intimation of them, or an opportunity of defending my conduct, I will not reproach them for their want of candor or friendship, for I am well assured of the honourable motives by which they have been actuated, and that they would not intentionally do me an injury which they conceived to be unmerited. I feel no less confident, that when they peruse the following statement of facts, they will as candidly acknowledge that I have not deserved their censure, as they have been free to bestow it when they supposed it to be just. I will now proceed to examine the charges of misconduct which have been alleged against me. In doing this I will frankly detail all the circumstances which led to my connection with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the measures I have lately taken to advance the interests of that institution. These details, I trust, will at the same time furnish a satisfactory refutation of the calumnies that have been circulated.

It is known that a School of Physic existed in this city as early as the year 1769, and that, at that time, a considerable number of students attended the medical lectures. Although its professors were few in number, consisting of Dr. Clossy, Dr. Peter Middleton, Dr. John Jones, and Dr. Samuel Bard, the present President of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, they were all distinguished for their abilities and learning, and reflected great credit upon the institution of that day. But their labours being interrupted, and the school destroyed by the revolutionary war, no exertions were made to restore the means of medical instruction, except by a few individuals who delivered lectures in their private capacity, until 1792, when the present Medical School of Columbia College was organized, and made an appendage to that institution.

It is true, an act was passed by the Legislature of the state of New-York, on the 24th day of March, 1791, entitled, "An act to enable the Regents of the University

to establish a College of Physicians and Surgeons within this state." But the Regents did not exercise that power vested in them by the state, until March, 1807. By the connection of the Medical School with Columbia College, which, as it regards classical and philosophical learning, stands unrivalled in the United States, it was supposed by its friends and patrons, that it would at least have recovered its former celebrity, if it did not become the most distinguished seat of medical science.

In that expectation they have been lamentably disappointed: The following documents, taken from the records of the College, from the year 1792 to the present time, will shew the very inconsiderable number of students who have resorted to this city for medical education, and the still smaller number of those who have completed their course of study, and received the medical honours of Columbia College. Similar documents which I have received, of the state of medical learning in the city of Philadelphia, for the same period of time, afford abundant evidence of the comparative success of the School of that city, and the stationary, if not retrograde condition of our own. It will be also proper to add, that prior to the year 1791, owing to similar dissensions with those at present existing in New-York, there were two distinct Medical Schools in the city of Philadelphia, viz. that of the *College of Philadelphia*, and another connected with the *University of Pennsylvania*; and that, before they became united under the University of the state, they mutually injured each other, but neither became respectable. An union was at last effected by combining the talents of both in the same institution. Since that event, the Medical School of that city has acquired such celebrity that in the number of its pupils it is at present only surpassed by the University of Edinburgh. It has not only been a source of honour and emolument to its Professors, but has also been the means of advancing the literary character of the state of Pennsylvania, and of increasing the wealth of the city of Philadelphia.

It is calculated that at least one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars are annually expended in Philadelphia by the medical students resorting to that city from different parts of the union.

*Documents taken from the records of Columbia  
College.*

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ATTENDING THE MEDICAL SCHOOL.

38	students during the session of		1792-3.
43	do.	do.	1793-4.
40	do.	do.	1794-5.
39	do.	do.	1795-6.
29	do.	do.	1796-7.
29	do.	do.	1797-8.
34	do.	do.	1798-9.
21	do.	do.	1799-1800.
34	do.	do.	1800-1.
51	do.	do.	1801-2.
40	do.	do.	1802-3.
34	do.	do.	1803-4.
48	do.	do.	1804-5.
65	do.	do.	1805-6.
55	do.	do.	1806-7.
55	do.	do.	1807-8.
50	do.	do.	1808-9.
54	do.	do.	1809-10.
64	do.	do.	1810-11.

NUMBER OF GRADUATES.

5	received the degree of doctor of medicine in		1793.
4	do.	do.	1794.
2	do.	do.	1795.
2	do.	do.	1796.
2	do.	do.	1797.
1	do.	do.	1798.
none	do.	do.	1799.
none	do.	do.	1800.
none	do.	do.	1801.
4	do.	do.	1802.
3	do.	do.	1803.
3	do.	do.	1804.
2	do.	do.	1805.
1	do.	do.	1806.
2	do.	do.	1807.
none	do.	do.	1808.
none	do.	do.	1809.
3	do.	do.	1810.

During the same period of time, the number attending the medical school of Philadelphia has been from two to four hundred; during the last year they amounted to four hundred and fifty, of those, upwards of sixty received the degree of doctor of medicine.

I will not here enter into the inquiry to what causes the failure of the medical department of Columbia College is be ascribed. Upon this subject I willingly divide with my colleagues any demerit for want of abilities, or censure for want of exertions to render it more respectable. But with the facts before me that have been detailed, and after the experience of nearly twenty years, seeing no prospect of any great accession to our number of pupils, I confess I became desirous of any change being produced by which the means of medical education in our city might be improved, but by which they certainly could not be rendered worse. I at the same time freely acknowledge, that with the hope of seeing a medical school created, and organized in such manner, as to reflect honour upon our city, and that in its advantages might be commensurate with the wealth and commercial importance of the state of New-York, I did unite with other members of the medical society of this city and county in soliciting, from the Regents of the University, a charter incorporating a college of Physicians and Surgeons agreeably to the act passed for that purpose, already referred to; for I was certain, that nothing was wanting but unanimity in the profession, to establish a Medical School in this city equal in the talents and learning of its professors, and in all the means of instruction, to any institution in this or any other country. With the view of contributing as far as my exertions might enable me, to the accomplishment of this object, I accepted a professorship in the new College. But the dissensions which arose, the circumstances or causes of which need not here be detailed, have hitherto, in a degree, interrupted the success of that establishment, and to a certain extent, disappointed its founders, the Regents of the University, as well as the legislature, from whom very liberal pecuniary patronage had been derived for its support.\* Although these feuds among the Professors of the New College had been productive of great temporary injury, still no conclu-

\* By an act of the Legislature, passed in November, 1808, 20,000 dollars were granted for the use of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

sion could be drawn unfavourable to the general principles upon which it had been established. On the contrary, its number of pupils during the first three years, exceeded the most sanguine expectations.

During the first session of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, in 1807-8, its number of pupils amounted to 53; in the second year to 72; in the third to 73; but in the last year, in consequence of a misunderstanding that had taken place in the College between the then president and the professors, the number was considerably reduced.

During the last session of the Legislature, the Regents of the University, upon receiving information of the dissensions which had taken place in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and which had nearly frustrated the liberal views by which they had been guided in the institution, appointed a committee consisting of the Honourable Chief Justice Kent, Judge Spencer and Judge Smith to inquire into the nature of the misunderstandings that had taken place in the College, and to report upon the same. The following is their report upon that subject.

*“ At a meeting of the Regents of the University, held, pursuant to adjournment, in the Senate Chamber, on the first of April, 1811 :*

The committee to whom were referred several papers relative to the state of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in the city of New-York, report, that unfortunate misunderstandings have taken place between several professors of that institution which have already materially impeded its operations, and unless something effectual be done by the regents, it will become degraded in the estimation of the public, and its usefulness will be inevitably destroyed.

The committee have forbore to trace and bring to light the conduct of individuals, because in their opinion it would be both useless and invidious.

Propositions have been made to the committee to remodel the institution, with a view of rendering its operation more simple, and of introducing into it several of the professors of the medical school in Columbia College, and other eminent and distinguished individuals; this proposition has been viewed by the committee in the most favourable light, as it may extinguish the feuds existing among the present professors of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and as

it will, in all probability, be the means of uniting the two schools.

The latter appears an object of the first importance, in as much as it will assemble, in one institution, a splendid collection of medical and surgical talents, and as it cannot fail to merit and receive the patronage and encouragement of the Legislature.

It is unnecessary for the committee to attempt to display the important advantages to the state which a well organized medical school in the city of New-York must afford; its hospital, and the subjects furnished by the state prison, without the violation of law, present a field for the acquisition of medical and surgical knowledge unrivalled in the United States, and it is only requisite to establish an institution, under the fostering care of the Legislature, in which shall be united the best talents, and to secure these advantages to the state.

Under these impressions the committee beg leave to report an alteration of the charter of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and to propose a new list of officers and professors."

At that time, the Mayor of this city, a member of the Board of Regents, communicated to me an outline of the measures, which, in his opinion, would be proper to adopt, in order to place the Medical School upon a permanent and respectable basis.

The great object proposed, was to unite, as far as was practicable, the talents of both Medical Schools, so as to include the gentlemen constituting the faculty of Physic in Columbia College, and as nearly as possible, to replace each professor in the department he had occupied in either of the two schools. The same gentleman having requested my opinion on the subject, I accordingly addressed to him a letter in which I earnestly expressed my approbation of the plan that had been proposed. That letter was shewn by me to several medical gentlemen in this city, most of whom approved of the measures that had been recommended, as they considered the union calculated to conciliate the parties concerned, and would, at least, serve as a basis upon which a valuable superstructure might be hereafter erected. In the same letter I also approved of another proposition that had been suggested by some of the members of the Board of Regents, viz. to vest the in-

ternal government of the college (that had hitherto been exercised by the Censors and Senatus Academicus,) in a board of Trustees, to be composed of the President, Vice-President, Professors and Treasurer of the College, with others of the most respectable members of the profession. This arrangement secures to the profession the chief direction of its own concerns, of which they are supposed to be the best judges, at the same time that it places the institution in common with the other colleges of the state, under the superintending and paternal care of the Regents of the University from whom its existence had been derived.

Believing each profession to be the best guardian of its own interests, I acknowledge that I also approved of this part of the plan proposed, for I should as readily expect the clergy to place their concerns at the disposal of physicians or lawyers, as that we should delegate those of the medical profession to any other body, than that which exercises a superintending care over the whole literary interests of the state, as is done by the Chancellor and the Regents of the University.

Having thus freely expressed my individual opinion upon the arrangements proposed, I also at the suggestion of Mr. Clinton, called a meeting of the Faculty of Physic of Columbia College, and communicated to them the contemplated plan of union. But, to my great surprise and mortification, they were decidedly adverse to any changes whatever, and absolutely refused to take any measures which might promote the projected union. This determination of the Faculty in the mean time did not alter my opinion of the measures proposed by the Regents, nor did it prevent me in my individual capacity, from doing what I conceived to be right, in promoting their views, as I considered them calculated to subserve the interests of the profession, and to advance the literary reputation both of the city and state. If that be an offence, I have indeed offended, and shall continue to offend; for as far as my exertions can contribute to the success of the Medical School now organised by the Regents of the University, they shall continue to be devoted to that object, without the least regard to individual interests, when those interests may come in competition with the general good. And I trust I may say, without the fear of contradiction, or of being suspected of insincerity in making the declaration, that for the purpose of restoring harmony to our profession, by which its character and the

public benefit might be promoted, I would, also, cheerfully exclude my own personal interests on this occasion.

As I have been charged with procuring for myself the present place assigned me in the University, I take this occasion to observe, that I never solicited the appointment with which I have been honoured. And for the sake of securing the talents and co-operation of other gentlemen appointed, Dr. Miller will do me the justice to acknowledge, that upon conversing with him on the appointments made by the Regents, I declared my willingness to yield to him the professorship of the practice of Physic, he having held it under the former organization of the College, and to accept any other place which might be vacated. To such arrangement, if considered expedient by the Trustees of the College, I am still ready to accede.

As far therefore as I expressed my approbation of the measures proposed by the Regents of the University, I acknowledge I have been "instrumental in effecting the changes lately made in the College of Physicians and Surgeons." But I must add, that in expressing that approbation, I did it under the full impression that most of the gentlemen appointed being desirous of promoting the general interests of learning, and of their profession, would readily make any sacrifices of their individual feelings, and accept the places to which they might be elected; at the same time, not doubting that any changes, which as a Board of Trustees they might hereafter recommend to the Regents, as important to the institution, would be adopted. For it is not to be questioned, that the Regents will always receive with respect, the recommendations of so numerous and respectable a Board as would be constituted by the Trustees of the College.—I furthermore subjoin, that I acted under the belief that the same plan would receive the approbation of the Trustees of Columbia College, and that as far as it might be in their power to contribute to that object, they would cheerfully co-operate with the Regents in completing the establishment of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Although the arrangements made have excited some discontent, as was naturally to be expected, it gives me pleasure to learn that they have received the approbation of the greater number of the professors appointed in the new institution, at the same time that they will receive the support of the majority of the profession, both in this city and throughout the state; while to the

students of medicine, who are most interested in the success of this change, they are generally acceptable.

Another charge which calls for a reply is, that "of having been the mean of taking from Dr. Post the annual salary of 500 dollars, granted him by the state as the professor of anatomy in Columbia College." This charge is both indecorous and untrue. Indecorous, because it implies an undue influence exercised by me over the opinions of the whole legislative assembly of the state; and untrue, as I have taken no concern whatever either directly or indirectly, in procuring the act of the legislature relative to this subject. Nor can it be said that the legislature have absolutely taken from Dr. Post the above mentioned salary. It has only been transferred from the professorship of anatomy in *Columbia College* to the same professorship to which he had been previously appointed in the *new institution*. The Legislature, doubtless confiding in the liberal views of Dr. Post on this subject, and that he would not resist or endeavour to defeat a measure that both his patrons the Legislature, and the Regents of the University are endeavouring to support, and presuming that he would not decline his new appointment as joint Professor of Anatomy, Surgery and Physiology, did not hesitate to transfer the same salary to the Professorship of Anatomy in the new institution, under the direction of the Regents. Nor could the Legislature have consistently done otherwise without appearing to counteract the views of the Regents. For it would have been perfectly absurd to suppose that they would continue a salary to Dr. Post, as Professor of Anatomy in Columbia College at the very time in which the Regents were endeavouring to establish a Medical School that should supersede the necessity of such Professorship.

I cannot say with certainty, that by a subsequent arrangement of the Trustees of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and a division of the duties of the Professorship held jointly by Dr. Post and Dr. Smith, the anatomical department would have been surrendered exclusively to Dr. Post, and with it the whole amount of the salary. But of this I am certain, that the additional emoluments, arising from the union of the two Schools, would abundantly remunerate Dr. Post for any loss he might sustain by a division of the salary he had heretofore received. But should Dr. Post conclude to decline the appointment

made by the Regents, I am persuaded, in so doing, he will not be governed by views of a pecuniary sort ; and I also believe, that his regard for the general good of his profession will still induce him to comply with the wishes thus expressed by the Regents and the government of the state, by accepting the appointment with which he has been honoured in the University.

With regard to the resignation of my professorship in Columbia College, concerning which the Faculty have also thought proper to express *their* opinion, I beg leave to inform you, that a committee of the Regents of the University has been appointed "to signify to the trustees of Columbia College, that the object of the Regents, in uniting the medical institutions in this city, is by combining the talents of the professors in one seminary ; to render the state of medical education more respectable and useful ; and that the said committee are further authorised to request, in behalf of the Regents, the co-operation of the said Trustees in carrying the new arrangement into effect." Whenever, therefore, the Trustees of Columbia College may determine how far they will co-operate with the Regents of the University, I am ready to adopt such measures as *they* may consider necessary or expedient. Having been honoured by them with the appointment I hold in that College, to *them alone* I consider myself amenable for my conduct in relation to the medical schools of this city.

I have now stated to you as briefly as possible my connection with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the agency I have had in promoting the late coalition.

Whether I have departed from my duty as a friend to medical science, or the interests of this city, I submit to the decision of the profession, and of our fellow citizens in general.

I am, Sir, with esteem,  
Yours, &c.

DAVID HOSACK.

Dr. JAMES S. STRINGHAM.



Med. Hist.

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