

INCORPORATION OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS: EXAMINING BOARD.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

In your number for November 27th, there is a letter from Mr. Martin, of Reigate, in which that gentleman notices, in favourable terms, a letter I addressed to you a few weeks since, in which I advocated the incorporation of the general practitioners. To that letter I beg leave to make a few observations in reply.

In the first place, I may remark, that I see nothing in the present aspect of medical affairs, to lead me to suppose that any other course than the incorporation of the general practitioners can safely be advocated as an expedient measure. Did the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, even at this late period, show any sincere desire to admit, on an honourable and liberal footing, the general practitioners into their respective corporations—as Licentiates in Medicine in the College of Physicians, and as Licentiates in Surgery (where they are not already members) in the College of Surgeons, thus creating two distinct classes in each College, Fellows and Licentiates; the former including all consulting and pure physicians and surgeons, and the latter including all general practitioners; I, for one, believe, that the interests of the profession as a whole, would be best met by the body of general practitioners consenting to such an arrangement. In this case, the examination of the general practitioners in medicine would properly, I conceive, devolve on a mixed board, consisting of four or six physicians, and as many general practitioners, the president being a physician; and in surgery, on a board of four or six surgeons and as many general practitioners, the president being a surgeon. It is, however, but too probable that more exclusive views will prevail in the Colleges, and that we shall be spared the necessity of canvassing the details of any such scheme as this.

I may proceed, therefore, to consider what the plan of examination should be in case of the general practitioners being incorporated into a society or college. I am quite disposed to admit that, when incorporated, the general practitioners should be placed in an independent position as regards the examination of candidates for the license; and that care must be taken to guard against the introduction of "a body of men," to use Mr. Martin's words, "less skilled and less informed than the present race of licentiates." Cooperation and union, however, do not necessarily imply, and indeed may be far from implying, dependence; and I must still confess that I should wish to see the medical part of the examination conducted by a mixed board of physicians and general practitioners, in equal numbers, the president being always a general practitioner; and the surgical part of the examination by a board of surgeons and general practitioners, (the latter being the same individuals who assist in the medical examination,) in equal numbers, presided over by the same general practitioner, who should have the casting vote. I know that it will be urged that there are general practitioners who, without any aid from the Colleges, are fully competent to form an examining board, both in medicine and surgery.

This I am quite ready to admit, as regards medicine, to the full; though, as regards surgery, in the present condition of general practice in London, I feel a greater doubt. But if we even admit this competency to the full, I believe that the licence would be much more highly valued by the candidates for it, and would be really more valuable when attested by such signatures as those of a Watson, a Copland, a Williams, or a Forbes, in medicine, and by those of a Brodie, a Guthrie, a Cooper, or a Travers, in surgery, in addition to those of skilful general practitioners, than it would be if attested by general practitioners alone, however experienced and however able. As regards surgery, I incline to believe that such a course would be essential, in order to ensure a sufficient guarantee of the qualifications of the candidate in this department of practice. The examiners from the Colleges would be conferring and receiving honour by such an arrangement, which would be alike honourable to both parties. In such a sketch as this it would be premature, perhaps, to attempt to fill up the details as regards the method of election, &c., which will readily suggest themselves to the reader.

There is another part of Mr. Martin's letter in regard to which I beg to make a few remarks. Mr. Martin contends that the Court of Assistants and the Court of Examiners are distinct, and do not derive their power, from the trading part of the Society of Apothecaries; and, further, that these Courts are the virtual representatives of general practitioners. The Court of Examiners, I am aware, is thus distinct; but I am greatly mistaken indeed if the Court of Assistants, by whom the examiners are appointed, be not the ruling body of the trading company. The general practitioners of this country have received indeed their license to practise from the Court of Examiners, but I do not see how that constitutes the said court their virtual representatives. They are not admitted to any participation in the government, or the privileges of the society, or of the Court of Examiners; they have merely conferred on them the right to practise, and I would maintain that the general practitioners—the great third estate of the profession in England—are thus without either actual or virtual representatives in the medical polity of this country. The member of the College of Surgeons has some ties, slight and defective though they be, with the College, in the lectures, the library, and the magnificent museum of that corporation; but I am much mistaken if the licentiate of the Apothecaries' Company, after he has once received his licence, ever finds his way back to the hall in Blackfriars, unless in the capacity of a purchaser of drugs. The Court of Examiners have however performed their task well, and should certainly contribute a considerable quota of their number to the new examining board; indeed, in case of any charter of incorporation being granted to the general practitioners, it would only be a proper compliment to these gentlemen that such charter should be made out in their names, coupled with those of a sufficient number of the leading general practitioners, both of the metropolis and provinces of England and Wales.

It is to be hoped that, in this juncture, the general practitioners of England will display that energy and firmness, coupled with moderation, which are calculated to secure to them that place in the medical body

politic which I think they have a right to seek; and which the real interests of our profession, as a whole, appear to me also to demand.

I may be allowed, in conclusion, to remark, that the great danger at the present moment, appears to me to be that of one grade of the profession seeking its own interests, irrespective of those of the profession as a whole, and endeavouring to elevate itself at the expense of some other grade, whether that grade be above it or below it. Let us hope that class interests will cease to be our sole principle of action; and that, in this great struggle, and golden opportunity, for a healthy organization of our profession, Ephraim, so to speak, will no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim.

I again take the liberty to subscribe myself, simply
MEDICUS.

MODE OF REMUNERATION OF THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND
SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

May I solicit the favour of insertion in your columns, if not considered intrusive, for a few observations which I deem worthy of the consideration of the General Practitioners of England, especially at the present epoch of the profession of medicine.

It is unnecessary for me, in the 19th century, to advert to the blessings which the healing art has conferred upon suffering humanity. It is, I am sure, equally needless to question the disposition of the majority of its members, (the General Practitioners,) to uphold its respectability; but from custom they have, perhaps, hitherto unavoidably, given the public a false impression of their position, for the most part, by the form in which they seek a recompense for their inestimable services. I allude to the prevalent practice of "sending in the bills" to their patients, and in other ways leading them to suppose that they are, what a contemporary medical journalist rather illnaturedly calls them, (and it must be admitted with some truth,) "The medical tradesmen in England."

If we seek for a "college" for the General Practitioners, (by whatever appellation it may be called,) which is now the most expedient course to pursue, let us render ourselves worthy of this dignified position, which the public will acknowledge we are entitled to, by aiding in obtaining for us; let us convince Sir James Graham, (be it said with all respect for this exalted personage,) that we are worthy of a better name than mere "vendors of medicine." Let us still continue to practise as discerning physicians, (for I submit the Legislature, in the Act of 1815, however questionable its propriety, gave the Apothecaries' Company the virtual powers, though not the name, of a College of Physicians, and thereby have created a body of medical practitioners, whom the present Legislature now rather unceremoniously deals with,) undaunted surgeons, gentle accoucheurs, and scientific pharmaciens; but in the name of an honourable profession let the "Doctor's shop" not be a term to be found in the vocabulary of the general practitioner, to whom the year 1845 is likely to make a new era in the

practice of medicine. Let our demand for service rendered be made for such, but not for medicine, the actual amount being still the same, adapted to circumstances. If this change was accomplished, in my humble opinion, the "vendors of medicine," soon ceasing to exist, the general practitioner would still continue an actively employed and more highly valued member in the medical body, occupying a more appropriate position in the medical faculty, and in public estimation. To make this change effectual, it must commence with the senior practitioners, and be resolutely adhered to by all.

That the time has arrived for this alteration will, I hope, be conceded, especially when it is considered that this amendment is almost implied by the general practitioner seeking, from the oligarchical representatives of an aristocratic country, a Royal College of Incorporation.

I am, Sir,

Yours obediently,

ROBERT HUTCHINSON POWELL,

Licentiate of the Apothecaries' Company, London; M.R.C.S.; M.B., London University.

Tunbridge Wells, Dec. 17, 1844.

SIR JAMES GRAHAM'S MEDICAL BILL.

MAIDSTONE MEETING.

At a meeting of the Medical Profession of Maidstone, and its vicinity, held at the West Kent Infirmary, on Friday, November 15th; present:—Wm. Sibbald, Esq., M.D., in the chair; Mr. T. Day, Dr. J. J. Power, Mr. Wedd, Mr. Sedgwick; Mr. Joy, Staplehurst; Mr. Prance; Mr. Hitchings, Seal; Mr. Sankey, Leeds; Mr. Whitfield, Biddenden; Mr. Henry Pout, Yalding; Mr. Robert Perry, Marden; Mr. J. Otley, Mr. G. Sanders, Mr. Geo. Leney, Mr. Allwork; Mr. Ayerst, Boughton; Dr. Imlach, Sittingbourne; Mr. Alfred Atkins; and Mr. Trevanion V. Oates, Secretary. The following Resolutions were adopted:—

Moved by Mr. Hitchings, of Seal; and seconded by Mr. Prance, and carried unanimously:—"That this meeting desires to express its satisfaction that the legislature has at length evinced a disposition to amend the present anomalous condition of the medical profession; and they feel grateful to her Majesty's Government for having more immediately taken this measure under their management, as affording the best prospect of its being carried into effect. Whilst fully approving of many of the principles contained in the proposed bill, they cannot refrain from pointing out others, requiring extensive modification, before being permitted to become the law of the land."

Moved by Dr. Power, and seconded by Mr. Godfrey Sanders, and carried unanimously:—"That this meeting approves of the Council of Health and Medical Education, as being calculated to promote the respectability and protect the interests of the medical profession. It is, however, the opinion of this meeting, that the proposed constitution of the board requires further consideration, and that it will fail in giving satisfaction, whilst the Government influence so greatly preponderates, and whilst the largest and most influential portion of its members, the general practitioners, and those resident in the provinces, are not adequately represented."