

interests of professional men, and damage the public health, by assuming false titles, and practising accordingly. Instead of doing this, we find the magnates of our colleges decrying all prosecutions and penalties as impolitic, because, forsooth, they themselves happen to have flourished in their absence. So that the corporations are comfortable, they have little care for the discomfort and hurt of the individuals whose interests it is their bounden duty to protect. It was only after repeated remonstrances that the College of Surgeons could be moved to act in the case of the Taunton pastrycook, in which their diploma was fraudulently obtained; and in the case of OSBORNE, after more than a year of hesitation, they have come to no decision, though upon one important point presented by this case the Edinburgh College of Surgeons has been most prompt and emphatic.

We are credibly informed that the authorities of the Royal Society are considering whether they shall take the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor-general, as to their possessing the power to rescind the illegal proceedings to which the public attention has so often been directed; or whether they shall apply to parliament for a short Act to legalize the irregular doings which have so disgraced the Society.

Correspondence.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AND HOSPITAL.—PROFESSOR SYME'S APPOINTMENT AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

[LETTER FROM DR. GEORGE WEBSTER.]

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have read, with considerable pain and no little surprise, your leading article, in THE LANCET for January 8, on the appointment of Mr. Syme to the surgeoncy of the hospital, and the chair of clinical surgery at University College. I have always viewed the College with feelings of interest and gratification, as the forerunner and origin of the University of London, (the foundation of which will have marked a bright era in the history of the metropolis,) and as the only institution in England where the whole circle of the sciences can be freely and fully taught, irrespective of the student's religious belief. It is with pain, therefore, that I witness any attack upon such a splendid temple of science and literature, and the more so in the present instance, that I cannot perceive the cogency of your reasoning, the truth of your facts, the force of your arguments, or the fairness of your inferences. I confess I am equally surprised at the whole tenour of your article; for to me, who have read THE LANCET since its first number, it appears to be a total departure from the principle of "Detur Digniori," which has ever been the ostensible guide of your valuable journal in hospital and other elections. It savours so much of the old leaven of nepotism and family arrangement, that, knowing you cannot possibly have any private or interested motive, I have come to the conclusion, that it is the ebullition of some disappointed candidate, to which you have unwittingly allowed a too prominent place in your pages.

Let us examine the charges against the College authorities somewhat in detail. First. "The Council and Medical Faculty have proclaimed to all the world (by the election of Mr. Syme) that there is not one English surgeon qualified to be a professor of clinical surgery in the College, and a practitioner of surgery in the hospital." This charge is reiterated in divers other forms. Second. Professor Syme's election is said to be an *insult* to all the surgeons of England; but especially to those who have been educated at University College, from whom, it is alleged, a clinical professor ought to have been chosen.

I deny the conclusions *in toto* as to the unfitness of English surgeons, or any insult being offered to them; and I am sure they would be equally repudiated by every member of the Council. There are doubtless many surgeons in London who would worthily fill the clinical chair of surgery, and the office

of surgeon to the hospital, at University College; but there may be many valid reasons against their acceptance of, or appointment to, these offices, as I will presently show. I will venture to affirm, without fear of contradiction, that not above three, if so many, English surgeons, whether educated at University College or not, could be found to say, boldly and honestly, that they considered themselves *insulted* by the election of an Edinburgh professor, or that they expected to be called upon to fill the chair of the lamented Liston. Mr. Liston was himself a Scotchman and an Edinburgh surgeon!—did you therefore oppose his appointment, or did you or any one else consider it an insult to English surgeons? Did you oppose the appointments of Professor Grant, Professor Sharpey, or Sir Charles Bell?—all Scotchmen, and all from the Edinburgh school, to which, also, Mr. Fergusson, of King's College, belongs. Did the other celebrated men in London think themselves insulted by such appointments? Certainly not; nor do I believe that any one among all the eminent and honourable men in our profession would wish to depress a brother by unfair prejudice, or raise himself to further eminence, except by the rivalry of talent and the competition of greater excellence.

I have alluded the rather to these points, because you have inveighed against what you call the prevalence of Scottish influence, to the exclusion of English candidates. In this I cannot agree with you. I have narrowly watched the various elections of its medical officers since the foundation of the College, and I only remember one instance of unfairness to a candidate for a high appointment; but the successful candidate in that case was an Englishman. It ought to be remembered, however, that University College (or the London University, as it was at first called and intended to be) was chiefly formed on the model of the Edinburgh School; and it was natural, that to introduce the Scottish system of medical and surgical instruction, (that is, the more extended courses of daily lectures now pursued in all the London schools,) several of its first and subsequent teachers should be from Scotland. But then, as now, the most eminent men in their several departments have been elected to the vacant professorships, and the rule, firmly established, is to do so, without fear or favour, wherever they may be found.

In looking for a fit and proper successor to Mr. Liston, as an operator and clinical teacher, many requisites were necessary to fill these offices even with common respectability; but it was very evident that no *ordinary* person could venture to succeed such a master in surgery. He must have already earned a high reputation, be a bold and successful operator, a man of extensive experience, and a tried instructor. It was in vain for the Council to turn their eyes to the great London hospitals,—the most eminent surgeons were already attached to their respective schools, and would naturally remain so. Young men, or untried men, however promising or talented, were not those from whom to select an operator of well-known abilities, and whose extensive experience would, at the same time, fit him for a clinical teacher.

Professor Syme (whom I have not the pleasure of knowing personally) possesses, in an eminent degree, all the requisites which I have mentioned. He was an early pupil of Mr. Liston, and subsequently his colleague as a lecturer. His reputation as a bold and successful operator is well known, both in London and all over Scotland, and stands as high as Mr. Liston's did, when he left Edinburgh for the metropolis. He has been many years in practice, and has had ample experience, both publicly and privately, and he is on all hands acknowledged to be a successful teacher and an excellent lecturer. The pupils of University College have reason to rejoice that a gentleman of such talents and abilities has been prevailed upon to become their teacher, while the council of the College may well congratulate themselves that they have been able to secure the services of so eminent a surgeon. I think, also, that instead of censure they deserve great praise for their selection, uninfluenced by favouritism to their present surgical staff or their former pupils; but I have no doubt, if any of these gentlemen had in *all respects* been *equally qualified* with Mr. Syme, they would most gladly have preferred him to a stranger.

The third charge is contained in the following query:—"Is there, in the whole medical department of the College, a single professor who received his education in the College?" And you answer, "not one." I should think this is an error. If I mistake not, Mr. Quain, the professor of anatomy, was a pupil, with his brother, Dr. Jones Quain, and then demonstrator; Dr. Taylor was professor of pathology or clinical medicine, till his health obliged him to retire—he was a pupil; Mr. Morton has been acting as a professor in giving Mr.

Cooper's lectures when the latter has been absent from infirm health; Dr. Parkes and Dr. Garrod, both former pupils, are assistant physicians; Mr. Potter was assistant surgeon at the time of his death. Mr. Ellis and Mr. Marshall were demonstrators; Dr. Croft is resident medical officer; Mr. George, lecturer on the teeth, &c.;—quite sufficient to show that old pupils are not neglected for any other influences when they are capable of filling situations in the Hospital and College.

You mention, fourthly, that Mr. Morton, the assistant surgeon, (and son-in-law to Mr. Cooper,) who received his education at the College and Hospital, and who performed Mr. Liston's duties during his illness with much satisfaction, "has been unjustly and impertinently thrust aside to make room for a stranger from Edinburgh;" and that "Dr. Hall Davis, (formerly a student at the College,) who officiated for his father, Professor Davis, in his last illness, was thrust aside to make room for a stranger from Dublin," (not from Edinburgh!) and this you adduce as Scottish influence against Englishmen.

I have not the honour of knowing either of these gentlemen, but I believe Dr. Hall Davis was then a very young and inexperienced physician, if he had even graduated, and merely read his father's lectures. Surely this was no reason for appointing him to the important chair of midwifery! As to Mr. Morton, I have always heard him spoken of as a promising young surgeon, but I much mistake the amount of his good sense if he ever contemplated his own succession to Mr. Liston's offices at the present time. You seem to have forgotten that Mr. Quain, as surgeon to the Hospital, would have, in the common course of such appointments in the London medical schools, a claim much stronger than Mr. Morton; but he, also, with characteristic modesty and sound sense, preferred the interests of the hospital and school to his own private interests or ambition. But I am happy to think that the system of nepotism and family arrangements has never obtained root, far less any growth, in the soil of University College. What would *THE LANCET* of former days have said, had Dr. Hall Davis—then a very young and an inexperienced man—been elected successor to his father, because he had read a few of his lectures to the pupils—or had Mr. Morton been appointed to succeed Mr. Liston, because he had been a pupil at the College, and is Mr. Cooper's son-in-law! Should we not have had a series of thundering articles upon the evils of paternity, and nepotism, and neveys, and noodles, and jobbery, corruption, and favouritism? Undoubtedly we should, and with very good reason too.

The interest I feel in all that concerns University College has prompted me (most venturesomely, I admit) to throw together these hasty remarks, in reply to what I have no doubt you will, on reflection, think unjust charges against the council of that body. And I trust that you will, with many others, welcome to London the eminent "stranger from Edinburgh" with as much cordiality as was extended to his distinguished, but now much lamented predecessor and countryman.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

Dulwich, January, 1848.

GEORGE WEBSTER.

P.S., Jan. 17th.—As you have deferred the insertion of my letter for a week, I beg the favour of a postscript being added to it.

In your "Notices to Correspondents" in last number, you have anticipated some of my objections, and I am glad to observe that you agree with me in giving and expecting a cordial welcome to Mr. Syme. But you now bring the "concourse" into the question, and condemn the Council and medical faculty for having selected Mr. Syme, instead of resorting to it, when you infer that some gentleman educated at University College might have gained the appointment. I need not discuss the merits of the concours, as I have already expressed my sentiments respecting it in my address to the profession on medical reform. Without intending the slightest disrespect to any former student at the College, its proposal in the present case forcibly reminds me of the reply of Alexander the Great, when asked by his father why he did not contend for the prize in the Olympic games: "I would do so if I had kings for my competitors!" Great operators and experienced clinical teachers—the Alexanders of surgery—are not so numerous nor so quickly "manufactured" as you would seem to imply.

You again ask, "Why should the gentlemen educated at University College be shut out from all chance of obtaining the vacant offices?" I emphatically repeat, that they are not so, and I think I have proved the point. Indeed, such an idea would be absurd. I believe the fixed principle and uniform practice has been for the Council to endeavour to elect the

gentlemen of all others in their estimation best qualified for their respective offices, whether to be found in England, Scotland, or Ireland; and that they have been generally successful your own pages amply testify.—G.W.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—I rely on the spirit of fairness which characterizes "*THE LANCET*" for the insertion of a few observations in reference to your remarks of last week on the appointment of a surgeon to University College Hospital. I would have left these to the calm judgment of the medical public, had they not emanated from the pen of the editor of a popular and influential journal, and of one, too, which has done so much to relieve certain members of our profession from the stigma of *caste* and of country frequently thrown at them by interested, and often not over-scrupulous, labourers in the same field.

It is generally understood that Professor Syme, of Edinburgh, is the gentleman who has been selected by the Council of University College. In justice to that gentleman, and for a proper understanding of my object, let me premise that I have not the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with Mr. Syme. I know him only as an author, and a most successful surgical lecturer and practitioner. His repute has gained for him the appointment to an hospital in the metropolis. You claim that for some of the gentlemen who have been educated at University College, or, at least, for some English surgeon. I give you credit for consistency. If my memory does not fail me, you urged objections to the appointment of the late and lamented Mr. Liston to the same office. I have forgotten the grounds of your objection on that occasion, but I remember a remark in "*THE LANCET*" of that time, to the following effect:—"The Council of University College were looking out for a person whose knowledge lay in his hands." That, if these were not the exact words, was the purport of your language. Having been a pupil of Mr. Liston, and having followed him often and closely in the wards of the Edinburgh Infirmary, I was well convinced that your observations could not properly apply to him. I knew, indeed, that he was expert with his hands, large though they were, yet that these hands were guided by a prompt, a sound, and a self-relying judgment. A short trial of him in London soon testified his greatness as a surgeon, and justified the choice of the Council of the University; and, let me add, hundreds of his pupils lauded your magnanimity when you volunteered him your support, though his position there was contrary to your wishes.

The office of surgeon to University College Hospital must necessarily place the possessor of it in a favourable position before the public. Your remarks imply that this vantage-ground belongs by right to an English surgeon, and especially to one who has been educated at University College. I cannot believe that one who has advocated election by *concours* so powerfully, and who has, with no less power, denounced election by nepotism, or by the elevation of some junior officer of an hospital merely from his connexion with it, can mean that the council of a popular and liberal institution should confine their choice of officers to gentlemen belonging to their own school; yet my mind is staggered when you speak of an insult being offered to the gentlemen who have been educated at University College, as well as to English surgeons generally. This must mean, if not a University College man, let us, at least, have an English surgeon. I did believe that the Editor of "*THE LANCET*" would be the last man in Great Britain to advocate any patent to office but that of superiority, to raise the cry of country over that of talent, or to claim the advantages of a public institution for any one simply because he happened to be educated at a certain school, or born in a certain country. In short, why should a Yorkshireman, unless from superiority, be preferred to a Scotchman? Scotland is as much a part of Great Britain as Yorkshire is; and the fact of a man being born in the latter district, or even educated at a particular school, is no guarantee of talent greater than that of a man, with similar opportunities, born and educated in the former. Your favoured idea of election by *concours* certainly strikes at the very foundation of partiality, either for country or school; and in the absence of that, which I would desire could I see the probability of a fair tribunal, I am ready to signify my approbation to the managers of any public school who, divesting themselves of partiality and prejudice in favour of the offspring of their own especially, or of that of the schools of their own section of country, can take a more philanthropic view of their trust, and say—Let us have the best man, no matter where born or where educated. My opinion is, that the Council of University College have adopted this rule in the selection of Mr. Syme—whether successfully or not, it is no part of the object of this letter to say.—With thanks for your former endeavours to benefit the profession, I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Wolverhampton, January, 1848.

PETER BELL, M.D.