

Late controversy in relation to the Medical College of Ohio.

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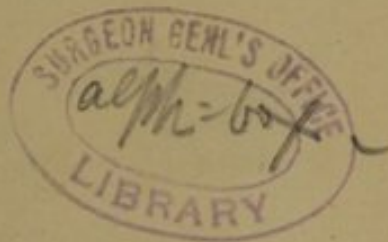
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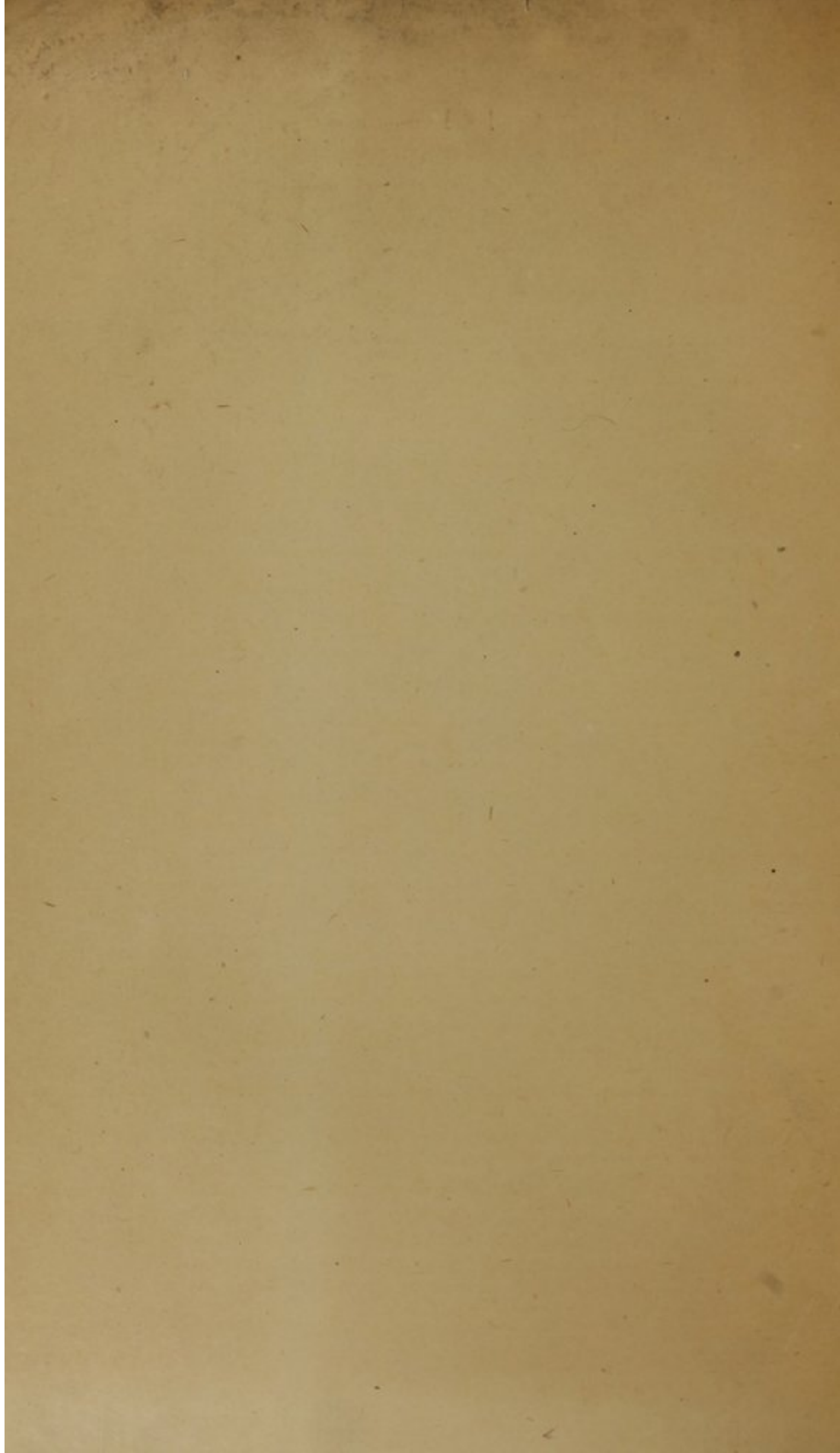


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WRIGHT (M.B.)

Late Controversy
in relation to the
Medical College of Ohio.





LATE CONTROVERSY

IN RELATION TO THE

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF OHIO.

CINCINNATI, May 3, 1850.

TO DR. ROBERT THOMPSON:

DEAR SIR—After our conversation last winter, and the assurances I then gave you in regard to the stability and success of the Medical College of Ohio, you will be surprised to learn, that she has suffered another revolution. We were both anxious to put a stop to the fretful, childish disposition she has always manifested, of never being satisfied with what she has, and never knowing what she wants. You deemed it advisable to restrain her action, and correct her temper, by bringing her under a new law. I aimed at the accomplishment of the same object, when I recommended uniform, mild, and, at the same time, firm treatment. It must be acknowledged, however, that when you said the College would be subject to repeated and inevitable changes under its existing charter, your opinion was founded upon superior forecast.

When men *accept* places in the Board of Trustees as a matter of duty, rather than choice, having no special interests to subserve, they will, in most cases, be guided by the lights of experience; but, those who *seek* their places, are generally governed by sinister motives, or aim at the gratification of some personal pique. The present Board is mainly the creature of local circumstances. There are too many of those

Who sometimes crawl, and sometimes climb,
Known only by their track of slime.

And again, .

“clocks will go as they are set—
Irregular man's ne'er constant—never certain.”

Not only has the College lost its State character, but it has become a *family* concern. There are in the Board two brothers-in-law, and an attempt has been made to elect another relative. A father-in-law to a newly elected professor, was recently elected a Trustee. He is a man of worth and high respectability, but, unfortunately, strong temptations have been set before him. It was natural that he should desire the return of his son to the College and to the chair which this son had before abandoned, and when his wishes and interest were gratified by the Trustees, in this regard, it was again natural that he should see no wrong in any act in which they might ask him to participate.

The Faculty were solicitous for a change in the College edifice, and offered to make any reasonable sacrifice to accomplish this object, so that students would feel that a proper regard had been paid to their comfort and convenience—and that strangers would cease to inquire “what kind of soap and candles are made in that factory?” The ma-

majority of the Board of Trustees considered the improvement of the College, and the disorganization of the Faculty, as one and the same thing. Hence the prostration of the one, and the distraction of the other.

By the following communications, you may judge somewhat of the nature of the controversy which has been going on for some weeks, between the Trustees and one of the Faculty. You may say, perhaps, that there is something of personality in some of the reflections. I offer, as my excuse, the provocation which I received, and the indignation which I necessarily felt.

Yesterday, the chairs were all vacated, and in part re-filled. This, you will say, is trifling with public confidence, and the best interests of the school. True; but, you will observe that by this course they could reach my chair, and thus accomplish indirectly what they were afraid to attempt directly.

You will ask, what is to be done to place the College above the malign influences which now surround it, and to secure it against change, change? I refer you to the wisdom of the next legislature for an answer to this question. It is not intended that any organization which may be now effected shall be permanent. When the vacation of the chairs was first advocated, it was urged, that any number of competent lecturers could be selected from the national medical convention, who would be exceedingly gratified to receive any appointment which might be given them. But, after this plausible motive had worked the desired changes, an uncompromising hostility was expressed against any man who might be brought from any quarter outside of the city. Then came the question, had we not better get Dr. Wright entirely out of our way, by the vacation of the chairs, and then present a show of organization, by making some temporary appointments? But, you will inquire, what is the great aim of the disorganizers? I will answer your question by an illustration:

A friend purchased a horse, which had been recommended to him as one of great durability and power. After working him hard all winter, he gave him the privileges of the pasture in the spring and summer. At the close of each working season, he was deprived of his groom, and at a period too, when he had just acquired a knowledge of the habits and necessities of the animal. The horse grew older as time advanced, and of course felt the effect of hard usage. But, his master, not being willing to cast him aside as useless, sent for a celebrated farrier, and requested him, at any cost, to restore the animal to activity and usefulness. The doctor examined him with great care, and gave the following as the result of his deliberations: "The horse is blind on this side, and sees but little on that. He is wry-necked, ring-boned and spavined. He is hip-shot, bow-backed and raw-boned. And, again, his teeth are so much worn, he can be fed upon nothing but gruel. Now, it is my deliberate opinion, that I may work upon this critter just as long as I please, and I can make nothing better out of him than *a poney for the boys.*"

This is my opinion in regard to the future condition of the College. It has been *Roll'd* and *Riddled* so much, that it has but little of the quality of cohesiveness left. And after all the fragments shall have been brought together, and compressed into form, you will say that it is very much like "*a poney for the boys.*"

There are some points worthy of consideration by those who still think the school entitled to their fostering care. In appointments and removals, the Trustees are utterly regardless of the public character of the institution. They will not admit that any one outside of Cincinnati has a right to claim a hearing upon these points. Whenever a member of the Faculty remonstrates, in respectful language, against a contemplated innovation, he is silenced by the reply that some of the doctors in the city have recommended it. And when I have urged, over and over again, that if they had more confidence in the advice of physicians not connected with the College, than in those who were in every way interested, they should listen to the voice of the profession throughout the State, I have received in effect, and nearly in words, this gentle and gentlemanly rebuke: "What do country doctors know about the affairs of the Medical College of Ohio?"

Not only have the Board treated with contempt the profession of the State, but, they have been acting in direct opposition to the will of the last legislature. Names were presented to the appropriate committee of the legislature, of persons qualified to act as Trustees. Edward C. Roll was a candidate. He was writing letters and sending telegraphic despatches expressive of his great anxiety to be elected. The delegation of Hamilton county declared that "Ned" was their first choice, and some of them went so far as to say that they would not give him up. I was satisfied that he had some fell purpose in view, but lest his rejection should create some prejudices against us in regard to the hospital controversy, I said, "we will take him whatever may be the sacrifice to myself." Then Dr. Vattier's name was proposed and rejected by all concerned, in consequence of his known hostility to a portion of the Faculty. Every one foresaw that the introduction of such a man into the Board would be followed by the worst of evils. But, notwithstanding he was rejected by the legislature, he was in a short time thereafter elected by Edward C. Roll and his kindred associates. The result has shown that the legislature was correct in its calculations.

It is self-evident that no Medical College can be successful without being harmoniously conducted. With the present board of trustees, such a result is impossible. As far as I now recollect, they have refused assent to every petition sent to them by the Faculty. They have even taken from the Faculty (for what purpose is best known to themselves) the privilege of appointing their own door-keeper.

This, I suppose, is a time of general rejoicing among our Eclectic neighbors. One of the present disorganizers of the College, who is a physician, has extended to them his sympathies, and, as he supposed, secret aid. This I learned, for the first time, while I was acting as the agent of the Faculty, during the sitting of the legislature in '48-1849. Whether he will now, in his capacity of Trustee, carry out the same views and wishes, remains to be seen.

I might enumerate many other things concerning the government of the College, but I have already trespassed too long upon your patience. The following are the communications to which allusion has already been made

TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF OHIO:

GENTLEMEN—Among the numerous statements in circulation, and now being discussed by the medical men of our city, in relation to the Medical College of Ohio, is one, which, from my position, it would be wrong for me to pass by in silence. The statement is, that some of the Trustees have declared their intention to vacate all the chairs in the College, while others are deliberating upon the propriety of the measure.

When in Columbus, at the sitting of the last general assembly, acting as the agent of the faculty, and by the request of several of the Trustees, I was informed that a bill was in the hands of a member of the medical committee, having in view an entire change in the organization and policy of the College. That bill was presented to me for examination. I opposed the presentation, and afterward the passage of it, in the House, mainly upon the ground, that it contemplated another vacation of all the chairs in the College. I stated, that the various changes which had been brought about, from time to time, had embarrassed the institution and retarded its prosperity, and that, if continued, they must necessarily and speedily result in its hopeless downfall.

I considered the bare agitation of the question, as having a prejudicial effect in regard to a loan for college improvements, as well as upon the minds of students. It was stated, in reply, that although the bill contemplated one general change, to take effect soon after its passage, it was intended to render opposition powerless—to add permanency and efficiency to the Faculty in their efforts at well doing.

I then observed, that the institution had not yet recovered from the injury of the last convulsion, and I begged that she should not be so soon disturbed in her relations, and that her enemies should not be thus encouraged to renewed and more vindictive attacks. A pledge was also given, that the vacation of the chairs did not enter into the plans of the Trustees, and I believe that this pledge induced members to withhold their votes from "Dr. Thompson's bill."

My authority for giving this pledge, was derived from the last annual report of the Trustees, in which was expressed the belief, that the vacation of the chairs had contributed to diminish the size of the class—from frequent expressions of regret, by the Trustees, that they had been persuaded to vacate the chairs—and from their expressed belief that such changes had resulted in serious, if not lasting, injury to the College—and again, from the well-known fact, that the instability of the institution has been condemned by the profession outside of the city, from whom it derives its protection and support, whose voice has been unheeded, and whose opinions have been grossly abused.

It is not expected, or asked, that the Trustees will be governed by my advice; but, I have deemed the above explanation proper, at this time, in justification of myself, and in behalf of those friends of the College to whom my assurances were given.

Respectfully,

M. B. WRIGHT.

TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF OHIO:

GENTLEMEN—I have been informed that the enemies of the College, under the guise of friends, and my individual enemies in partic-

ular, are busily engaged in devising and suggesting plans, by which to effect the vacation of my chair, and my removal from the College. What charges have been brought against me, I am unable to learn; but, I have too much confidence in the good judgment and integrity of a portion of the Board, to suppose that they will condemn any man without a hearing, or that they will heedlessly pronounce judgment against a reputation, however small, which has been acquired by years of toil and bitter experience.

Is my moral character arraigned? Then may I not demand the specifications, or that rumor shall be brought into some tangible form?

Is it said that I cannot cooperate in a kindly spirit with my colleagues? To their verdict I will cheerfully submit.

Am I engaged in the promulgation of medical heterodoxy? I am ready, at all times, to subject my opinions to the test of discussion or experiment.

Am I charged with incompetency? A committee can very readily obtain the opinions and wishes of those who constituted the last class, and especially its list of graduates.

If there are any of the new members of your Board, who have pursued me for years with an unrelenting persecution, may I not ask, what I do not now know, the cause of their venomous hatred?

May I not hope that other members of the Board will regard "clamor" against me, as I regarded it against them when I procured their election? If condemnation is to rest upon cowardly insinuation, who, among the most innocent and worthy, are safe?

If any of those who are seeking my place can exhibit any superior qualification, I will cheerfully retire in his favor, as I have ever pledged myself to do, and offer him good cheer in all his professorial efforts.

If the defamers promise to withdraw *their opposition* upon no other ground, than that I "shall cease *my opposition* to a full, salivating use of calomel, and to the Samson-like practice of olden times," I have only to say, that I will never yield principle to this extent while God lets me live, and whilst my experience, observations and reflections, all teach me I am right. I feel it to be a moral duty, on all appropriate occasions, to wage a warfare against all such medical abominations.

Is "*a noise* to be kept up until he is frightened to resign?" I thank God I am made of sterner stuff. It was said, on a memorable occasion, "the old guards know how to die, but they do not know how to surrender."

"He has peculiar ways, that every body do not like!" Indeed! Then I must be an odd genius, truly.

If I have not sacrificed enough of personal ease, and interest and friendship, then I must acknowledge myself vanquished, for I can do no more. At all events, I feel that I have a right to claim an investigation—I have a right to demand that I shall not be guillotined in secret, for no other reason, than that "it is desirable to make just such a break in the faculty, that others may the more easily obtain places.

Respectfully,

M. B. WRIGHT.

CINCINNATI, April 20, 1850.

ADAM N. RIDDLE, ESQ. :

SIR—As you have manifested an earnest desire, and are laboriously engaged for my reformation, it would appear ungrateful in me, not to assist you in securing your own reformation. I would, therefore, present a few thoughts for your evening reflections, and a few materials for your morning oblations. And I pray most fervently to God, that he will enable you to escape from the hands of the *molder*, endowed with vitality enough to think and act for yourself.

When, during the winter, you had reason to believe that efforts were being made to secure the election of a Board of Trustees, pledged to the fulfillment of certain objects, you requested me to go to Columbus, and to use my influence in counteracting these efforts, and in securing the re-election of the old Board of Trustees, yourself being one of the number. I was faithful to the trust which the Faculty, yourself and other members of the Board of Trustees, had placed in my hands. I represented the condition and the interests of the College, honestly and earnestly. I found that you were an obnoxious member of the Board, thrown aside, for several days after my arrival at the seat of government, and nothing but my unwavering support obtained your election. These facts came to your knowledge as they transpired: but I wish to refreshen your memory for your own special benefit. Thus, it would seem, I have conferred upon you a position, by which you have been enabled to assume the high honor of being my prosecutor. And, as such, I now address you.

I was cautioned against the new influences that would be brought to bear upon you, by those most familiar with your weaknesses—but I could not be convinced, that you were destitute of every feeling of uprightness; and I knew that there were sober, intelligent, well-meaning men in the Board, who, whatever might be your natural fickleness, would assist you in keeping in the plain path of duty.

A Board of Trustees, including yourself, was elected. One after another of the old members, those whose efforts had been devoted to the prosperity of the College, resigned. Their places were filled from selections made by the remaining Board. By and by, you were wheedled and persuaded to become the leader of a party, upon which, but a short time before, you had heaped your choicest anathemas. From the — day of March, on which the President of your Board conferred the degrees and delivered his address, up to the — day of April, you called him a dolt, fitted by nature and education to be a grunter, rather than the representative of a body of intelligent men. On the latter day, he was re-elected your presiding officer, by your influence and vote. I will omit here what might be said of a bargain, and simply ask, that you will, with unknitted brow, look calmly upon the whole of that beautiful picture.

The vacation of chairs, which you had declared over and over again to have become a dangerous and ruinous policy, came up for consideration. You were soon among the advocates of the measure, knowing, at the same time, that it had its foundation in malice and a desire for place. Not effecting that object, you then saw through a lens which had been kindly furnished you, that the vacation of my chair was important, or, in old-fashioned language, that I must be turned out. Up

to the very hour, almost, when you aimed, in secret, to destroy my character, you professed friendship—asked my advice and assistance in matters appertaining to the interests of the College, and I cheerfully sought and obtained the information required. And do you not recollect with what bewitching smiles and sugared words, you told me I was the only one who seemed to know any thing about the affairs of the College.

You seem to be in favor of secret executions; and it may be, that you wish to try the experiment before you express your important views in regard to a new State constitution. But do not the people of this land require, that punishment should not precede proof of guilt?

You are a lawyer, and would you condemn without a trial? You profess to be a gentleman, and would you allow men to steal from you so enviable a character, whenever it may suit their interests and convenience? You are an official member of the church, but, may one not in authority be expelled by your ipse dixit?

Remember, I am not asking favors. I demand sheer justice. I demand charges, specifications, and a trial. By the evidence adduced, I am willing to stand or fall. Yours, &c., M. B. WRIGHT.

CINCINNATI, APRIL 22, 1850.

MESSRS. CROSSMAN, HUDSON, BOWLIN, *Township Trustees:*

GENTLEMEN—A resolution has been introduced into the Board of Trustees of the Medical College of Ohio, having in view the vacation of the chairs of Professors Wright and Bayless, in the Faculty of that institution; and, as Trustees, we are desirous, before giving our votes on the resolution, of acquiring all the information we can, respecting the official conduct of these gentlemen. As you are, by law, the guardians of the Commercial Hospital, in which one of these gentlemen has practiced for many years, we would be glad to receive your opinion as to the nature, extent and value, of his services, as physician to the hospital, and also as to his general conduct in the discharge of his duties, so far as the hospital is concerned.

F. BALL,
Very respectfully yours, E. B. REEDER.

P. S. We should be glad also to know your opinion as to the policy of vacating all the chairs, and the effect such a measure would have upon the hospital, in case the chairs should be refilled as speedily as possible.

CINCINNATI, April 23, 1850.

TO FLAMEN BALL AND EDEN B. REEDER:

GENTLEMEN—Your letter of the 22d inst., asking for information as to the nature, extent and value, of the services of Drs. Wright and Bayless, as physicians of the Commercial Hospital, has been received, and we cheerfully respond to your inquiries. There are from 150 to 200 patients almost constantly in the hospital, and of these about seventy are females. For about twelve years past, Dr. Wright has had, we believe, the sole charge of the female wards, and, at some periods, he has had charge of the other departments; and, during the whole time, his professional conduct has been characterized by untiring industry, great ability and success. He has seldom been absent from the city, for a period longer than a few days together; and, in the numerous, varied and difficult cases, which have come under his charge,

he has always evinced great alacrity, cheerfulness and humanity, in the discharge of his duties. In short, he seems to have taken a deep interest in the hospital as a humane institution.

It is with profound regret that we learn of the effort made to remove him from his chair; for, without derogating from the character of any other physician in the city, we think, should the effort succeed, that his loss to the hospital would be very great, if not irreparable.

As regards Dr. Bayless, we have not had the same opportunity of judging, as he has been in the College but a short time, and, we believe, has not had charge of any of the wards in the hospital. So far as we have had an acquaintance with Dr. Bayless, we esteem him a gentleman, and believe him well qualified to discharge the duties of his profession.

You also ask our opinion as to the policy of vacating all the chairs, and the effect of such a measure on the hospital. Our reply is, even if the chairs were speedily refilled, its effects would be bad upon the hospital—and, in our opinion, would be very bad policy, as we think such a course would be the signal of the downfall of the College.

We are, respectfully, your friends,

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| WILLIAM CROSSMAN, | } Trustees Cin. Town'p. |
| JOHN HUDSON, | |
| JESSE B. BOWLIN, | |

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF OHIO, April 24, 1850.

WHEREAS, a resolution has been introduced into this Board, by one of its members, having for its object the vacation of the chairs of Professors Bayless and Wright, in this institution, which resolution now lies on the table; and, whereas, that, before removing any professor from his chair, it is but just to the parties and to ourselves, to assign and establish sufficient cause for such removal: therefore,

Resolved, That the party introducing said resolution be, and he is hereby, requested, to assign, in writing, the charges and specifications upon which such removals are sought to be effected; that a copy of such charges and specifications be furnished to each of said Professors, and that a day be fixed for a public trial of the parties implicated.

YEAS.

MILES GREENWOOD,
EDEN B. REEDER,
GEORGE W. HOLMES,
FLAMEN BALL.

NAYS.

JOHN L. VATTIER,
JACOB STRADER,
ADAM N. RIDDLE,
JOHN P. FOOTE,
E. C. ROLL.

No! they would not give me an opportunity for self defense, for that would work a defeat of their nefarious purposes. To the Trustees of the Medical College of Ohio, then, belongs the exclusive honor of expelling one of its faculty, without even an assignable excuse. Will the profession of Ohio justify such tyranny and oppression? If so, I cheerfully submit, and acknowledge that I have been contending for their rights from mistaken views of their character.

Truly yours, &c.,

M. B. WRIGHT.

