Observations on the union which has become necessary between the hitherto separated branches of the medical profession, and on the foundation of a Faculty of Medicine, addressed to W. Lawrence, Esq. F.R.S. &c; / by T. Forster.

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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE UNION WHICH HAS BECOME NECESSARY BETWEEN THE HITHERTO SEPARATED BRANCHES OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION, AND ON THE FOUNDATION OF A

FACULTY OF MEDICINE,

ADDRESSED TO

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BY

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&c. &c.

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MR. ABERNETHY begins one of his most useful Medical Works with complaining of that artificial Division of the Profession, which, by separating the Surgeon from the Physician, has a tendency to circumscribe and diminish the utility of both, and which in point of fact places the *pure* PHYSICIAN infinitely below the GENERAL PRACTITIONER in the quantum of useful knowledge which he possesses.

England is indeed the only country of Europe in which I have resided, and I have visited many countries in the course of my life, in which this absurd division of the Healing Art exists. In France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands,

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Scotland, Ireland, and I believe I may add every other State, with the exception of the South of Britain alone, the two branches are united; and the Doctor of Medicine enjoys a diploma that enables him to exercise all the functions of Surgeon, Physician, and in many countries of Apothecary also. The mischief arising from the restrictive regulations which exclude Surgery from those who practise Physic as *Medicinæ Doctores*, is of the most dangerous kind; as such regulations hold out inducements to young candidates for the office of prescribing medicines to neglect the most important branches of elementary knowledge. If a young Physician knew that he would have to undergo an examination in Anatomy and Surgery, such as would fit him for the practice of the latter, he would necessarily qualify himself for it, by a study of those requisite Sciences, which are now only acquired by a very few Doctors of Medicine who have had the good fortune to have been thrown, early in life, in the way of Surgery, or who, having once practised that art, have become graduated Physicians afterwards, in a Foreign or Scotch University. And these always become the best Physicians, from the tendency that Surgery has, by occasioning a perpetual recurrence to Anatomy and Physiology, to keep the most important facts fresh in the memory.

I am aware that it may be replied to my arguments, that the Physician, as well as the Surgeon, usually attends a course or two of Anatomical Lectures, and, if he pleases, may attend Lectures on the subject of Surgery. This is all very true; but I reply, that the mere attendance at lessons and demonstrations of Anatomy is not sufficient to instil into and to fix in the mind of the Student that complete and readily available knowledge of the structure, functions, and disorders of so complicated a machine as the Human Body, as shall qualify him for becoming a perfect master of the Art of Healing. Besides, the majority of medical cases are mixed cases, or those which partake of what is technically called a surgical nature, and which, therefore, require the judgment of both the Surgeon and Physician. Now nobody can know any thing of the nature of the human mind, and of the powerful effect of the combination of ideas, and not at once see that the union of Surgical and Medical Knowledge, in one and the same individual, must be capable of producing a more sound and comprehensive judgment of a difficult case, than could result from the deliberations in council of two or more practitioners, each possessing a different sort of knowledge. The wholesome proverb, that *Many cooks make bad broth*, is nowhere more clearly illustrated than it is by the havoc which the Councils of Medical Men formerly made on the constitutions of invalids, where discordant opinions have been brought together in cases which were, at best, involved in much obscurity. And a sensible patient will generally prefer, for this reason, to rely on the judgment of one good Medical Adviser, than to perplex himself with the various opinions of many. This practice is not only sound, but begins to be daily acted on; and it calls loudly for the establishment of a Medical Institution, that shall direct and encourage every individual to qualify himself for acting alone in every case to which he might be called.

If I were to recommend any distinctions in the Profession, it would be in case of those who might choose to study the diseases of particular organs, and to become referees therein, in the character of Oculists, Aurists, Dentists, and Accoucheurs. But even in these cases, so essential do I believe the General Practice to be, to any of its particular applications, that I would have these men always and necessarily begin their career, as indeed many of them now do, by the study and practice of the Profession generally, and in all its branches. Few persons who have not thought deeply on the subject are aware, perhaps, of the immense advantage which results to Medicine from the collateral sciences and particularly from the union of the most essential branches thereof in the same person. Chemistry, like Anatomy and Surgery, must be perpetually practised, in order to be perfectly understood and kept in the memory; and if it should be said by some of the advocates for the present division of the Profession, that the Physician, with his Hospital and College education, posseses the means of acquiring all these collateral branches; I should reply, the merely hearing lectures and making a few experiments, is not enough to render a man either an Anatomist, a Physiologist, a Chymist, a Meteorologist, or a Botanist, but perpetual exercise in these sciences: and every one knows that it is sound knowledge of these that lays the basis for the character of a Physician, by furnishing a good foundation, whereon to begin the study of Nosology, and of Cases, which gives the finishing stroke to the medical education.

Were it not invidious, I could cite some fearful examples of mistakes made even by bodies of pure Physicians in the construction of our very Pharmacopœias; which have been subsequently rectified, and I am sorry to add exposed by practical Druggists. And this really appears to me to have arisen from the defects of a system which separates the prescribers from the compounders of drugs; and which therefore, except in cases where the former happen to be amateur chymists, must perpetually render the recurrence of such mistakes more than probable. You will excuse my referring specifically to the particular transaction to which I allude, although it has already been made public, since I refrain from doing so, merely from that courtesy and good will which we are all bound, in charity and honour, to observe towards all men, but especially to those of our own calling: an *Esprit du Corps*, which is always to be delicately observed, wherever exposure is not demanded by a higher sense of duty to the public. The facts are known to yourself.

In that most useful and laborious class of men, the Apothecaries, all the three branches of Surgery, Medicine, and Pharmacy, are united; and this circumstance, together with that of their being more familiar with the constitutions of their patients, renders them, it must be allowed, the most efficient part of the Profession, as well as the safest and most confidential Medical Advisers of the family, while the calling in a *pure Physician*, in cases of extreme danger, is resorted to, frequently as a mere compliance with the etiquette of an old custom, which originated at a period when the Apothecaries were not so well educated as they are at present. For as both are educated now I confess I can see no superiority whatever which the pure Physician possesses

over the Apothecary, while the latter has the advantage of much additional information in which the former is frequently deficient, both in Anatomy and in practical Chemistry. And as the two branches are now constituted in England, the General Practitioner seems to me to possess that sort of superiority, when compared to the exclusive Physician, which common sense always allows to the *practical*, in prefence to the theoretical part of any Science whatever. Dr. Hunter, Mr. Hunter, and Dr. Baillie, all derived their eminence from a practical knowledge of the several branches combined. And if I may allude to living examples, without offending the public, has it not been a fortunate union of Surgery, with the knowledge of Physiology, and of simple Medicine, which has enabled Mr. Abernethy to be so extensively useful as the instructor of the Physician? And has it not been the superaddition of the various adjutant sciences which has raised my friend Mr. Lawrence to the most eminent situation which he now holds at the head of the Surgical Profession?

I might, indeed, allude to many foreign examples, if it were necessary, to show that a knowledge of the various branches of our art and of science generally, wherever there shall be talent enough to comprehend them, combined with perseverance, would always lead to a more than ordinary skill in the Profession. But it is generally speaking hard, and often requires the stimulus of poverty, for persons to deviate from the habits of the common herd. And the low grade to which the exclusive system has in fact brought the Practice of Medicine in England, is the real cause why so many of its most talented Professors, who are not in want of a livelihood, have abandoned it, in order to live a more dignified life in the pursuit of some favourite science.

This is more rarely the case on the Continent than here, because Medicine, united as it is with Surgery, comprehends so much more scope for the exercise of genius.

In proportion as Sciences are certain, and founded on demonstrable facts, they are found to make a regular progress towards perfection. Surgery has done so from its beginning, when its professors were Barber Surgeons, and the Apothecaries mere Druggists, to the present day. Heister, Pott, Hunter, Abernethy, and Lawrence, have in succession improved its practice, and the art has steadily arrived at a great degree of perfection. But medicine has from a much longer period been a wavering and uncertain science, and its successive Doctors, so far from producing a steady advance of its principles, have exhibited in their endless varieties of opinion and contradictory practices, the fullest possible proof of its precarious and empyrical character. To strip it, therefore, of the solid basis and support of Surgery and Anatomy, is like taking the ballast out of a tottering bark in a squally day and setting it afloat without a rudder, on the uncertain billows of the ocean. It is notorious that for ages what one Physician has recommended another has condemned; one forbids animal food, another recommends a breakfast of roast beef; a third prohibits wine and beer; a fourth warmth: one says eat little and often; another more justly prescribes regular meals twice or at most three times a day; one gives calomel for almost every complaint; another almost condemns its use altogether; even fire, and fresh air have found their enemies among our Professors;

and the most opposite sort of drugs have repeatedly been prescribed in the same disorders, and with an apparent similarity of result; while in reality, as I have often discovered, a change in the state of the air has been the effective agent in the recovery of the patient. All this contradictory practice will be found to vary inversely as Physic shall be founded on rational views of Physiology and on a sound *practical* knowledge of science.

The bitterness of vituperation, and the jealousy so frequently conspicuous in rival Physicians, arises, too, in my opinion, from the uncertain nature of the science itself, when exclusive of Surgery: for there being no regular authority, nor definitive source of appeal, as there is in the Law, the mutual animosities of the parties, however unconscious of it they may be themselves, really spring from the very fragile nature of the bone which they contend for; and in this respect they resemble the more ignorant sort of theologians of the last age, whose reciprocal hatred and mutual accusations of heresy, have always varied in direct proportion to their common ignorance of the subjects about which they disputed.

There are two more things that I wish to point out to the notice of the Profession. One is, that at present, the most serious cases, even those styled purely medical cases, are often carried for consultation to eminent Surgeons, by preference, from a just notion that the seat and nature of a disease must be best known to a morbid Anatomist. The second thing is, that the consciousness of superior and more extensive attainments on the part of the Apothecaries will naturally make them reluctant to call in the advice of Physicians, whose titles enable them to assume a nominal superiority. For on the simple axiom of *Continens contento major*, the Apothecary, educated as he is now a days, must, *cæteris paribus*, be superior to the pure Physician.

These, and other circumstances, which I could point out, in the great changes which education is working in the manners and habits of social life, must tend to lessen the public esteem for our branch of the Profession; and if the change which I have here recommended does not take place, must sooner or later bury the farcical vocation of *pure Physician* in the utter oblivion which it deserves, in an age of intellectual improvement.

A counterpart to the evil of pure Physician has been recognized in the tendency which *exclusive Surgery* will have, not only to encourage a dangerous enterprize in operations, but to resort ignorantly to the knife, in many cases where medical skill would be more available.

Without the full knowledge of Anatomy, Physiology, Chemistry, and Surgery, our Profession soon degenerates into mere empyricism, and reduces us to the humble level of the Quack Doctor. And it is in consequence of the public getting daily better acquainted with this truth, that the Apothecaries are becoming our rivals in the confidence of the invalid, in this period of general enquiry and knowledge.

Physicians are legally competent now, if they please, to be consulted in surgical cases; nor would I by any means recommend them to adopt the habit of operating. On the contrary, I think as long as the present system exists, we should avoid, and I always have studiously avoided, making any the least encroach-

ments on the real or supposed prerogatives of the Surgeon and Apothecary. But if those who are forming a new College, could establish, as in France, a *Faculty of Medicine*, which should confer on its members, after due examination in all branches, and at a certain age, the right of practising, if they pleased, in *all* branches, instead of having separate schools and colleges for each, I am persuaded the benefit would be as much felt by the faculty itself as by the public: we should no longer here learned Doctors sarcastically compared to Beldams and Mountebanks; and the honourable and necessary art which we profess would rise to its just level in the scale of useful sciences.—For the sphere of practical utility, and the safety of acting on a single opinion, would be much increased, as every member of the FACULTY OF MEDICINE so constituted would possess all the requisites for affording relief in the innumerable and dissimilar disorders that are entailed on this our frail and uncertain condition of mortality.

Now, in order to be somewhat more specific in what I would wish to recommend, I shall subjoin a few hints, and submit them to the better judgment of yourself and the liberal part of the Profession at large. I shall then reply to a few miscellaneous objections, which I have noticed in the Public Journals raised against the present system, and shall conclude with a short sketch of the history of Medical Practice, both here and abroad.

I should suggest the formation of Medical Colleges, bearing the title, COLLEGIUM FACULTATIS MEDICINAE. In these there should be Lectures given in Anatomy, Physiology, Surgery, Chemistry, Botany comprising the medicinal properties of species, Pharmacy, Meteorology, comprising the Influence of Air on Disorders, Pestilence, and Epidemia; Theory and Practice of Medicine, Forensic Medicine, and if required, on the particular branches, as Opthalmology, and so on. Such a College should be instituted in every large town where there was an Hospital, to which the Students should have access, subject to certain regulations. The Directors of the College should appoint and hear the several examinations of the particular Professors, and should, after a due course of study, confer degrees, which should become a warrant, that the public might with safety employ the candidate. Whether or no there should be subordinate Surgeons for country practice, as at Vienna, I leave to subsequent enquiry. But at present I am inclined to think that there should be but one sort; and that if a man, from conscious eminence, from some manual defect, or from age, should choose to decline the operative part, and be only consulted, he should rest his title to that distinction on his acquired renown, and on those merits of which the public might have become the judges. Lads might be admitted to this College, either on leaving school or college, as might be; but, generally speaking, the younger they began medical studies, after the routine of Latin and perhaps modern languages, and a few elementary branches of education were over, the better. For I am persuaded, that the time that is often wasted in Latin and Greek at Classical Universities, might be much more usefully occupied in the schools of practical science, and in attending Hospitals. The London University

seems to me to have a fine opportunity of opening such a School of Medicine as I have described, and of setting an illustrious example, to be followed in other places.

Whoever contemplates the benefit that would arise to society from such a system, must also see the truth of your excellent observations, contained in your speeches on the opening of country schools of Physic and Surgery. I need not repeat them, I am contented to refer to them, and to remind you and the public that there would be additional necessity for this, if the liberal and comprehensive plan of medical education should be adopted, which it is the object of this letter to recommend. One great advantage of opening Country Colleges and Schools of Medicine would result, as you judiciously observe, from the necessity, which would be thereby avoided, of exposing the Students to the temptations and gross immorality of the British metropolis, which appears to me to exceed that of Paris, or indeed of any other capital town in Europe.

The College should be open to young men of all nations, from the Earth's Girdle to the Frozen Pole, as friend Allen expressed it in one of his lectures ; nothing should disqualify a man for a degree but ignorance, or immoral character; and I need scarcely add, in these days, that there should be no renewal of antiquated tests of religion, the signature of articles of faith, nor the subscription to any creed whatever. These sacred subjects have all their appropriate places of discussion, and they can have nothing to do with the Schools of Medicine in this country, where the private judgment of individuals is substituted for authority in religious matters, and where it is consequently necessary, for the sake of public harmony, to prevent any large society of men from making the salvation of their souls in Heaven the subjects of their conversation with their fellow-creatures on earth. In Austria, I observe that religion is made one of the studies of a medical man, and very properly so there, for in that country, where all men think one way, the profession of the Faith is a bond of union. The religion of that country too is the great Catholic religion of nearly the whole of Christendom ; but in this country, where the Reformation has divided the people into countless sects and schisms, it too often becomes the clarion of discord, and rouses all that mutual hatred and animosity among parties which it is the express object of Christianity to suppress. We consider the question as settled for ever—Whether the sound integrity and moral conduct of the pupil will be enhanced by any particular cant that he may be induced to adopt. Whether the pure religion, which teaches men in Faith, Hope, and Charity, *to do as they would be done by*, can be better transmitted than by those orthodox channels through which it had flowed for *eighteen centuries?* And whether, since good wine needs no bush, and internal beauty wants not the foreign aid of ornament ; sound moral character, and the intellectual attainments which render men useful members of the scientific Professions, may not very well dispense, in the *nineteenth*, both with the plumes and tinsel of spurious honours on the one hand, and the cant of any particular fanaticism on the other ; the former of which is too often made the ὑπερ ὄνου σκίας of ignorance, while the latter is too generally worn as a cloak to

cover vice. Hence I would reject at once any distinctions of merit in the Colleges of Sciences, except the One Degree necessary as a guarantee of Professional character; and would dispense with all conditions of eligibility but those of aptitude for study and good morality.

I have submitted these remarks to the better judgment of the liberal part of the Profession at large, and addressed them to yourself, because no man has contributed more largely to the improvement af any science, than you have to that of Surgery and Medico-Surgery. While your effective energies in liberalizing its Professors, and in sweeping away from the Healing Art all systems of selfish monopoly, exposing the shallow pretension of arrogance, and paving the way for a better order of things, have been no less conspicuous nor less acknowledged by a discerning and liberal public.

T. FORSTER.

CHELMSFORD, *January* 16, 1830.