

Proposed medical statute / John W. Ogle.

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PROPOSED MEDICAL STATUTE.

London, May 2nd, 1860.

DEAR DR. ACLAND,—

As, owing to non-residence, I was prevented speaking in Congregation on the Medical Statute promulgated last week, and as along with other Oxford medical graduates in London, I feel how important it is that they who have to decide the matter by their votes should be made fully acquainted with all that is thought on the subject, I venture in a letter to you to submit the following observations with all respect and deference to the notice of Congregation.

With the tenor of the Statute generally (as according so well with all the progress of physical science lately made in Oxford), I most entirely concur. I perfectly agree to the contemplated provisions in the new Statute regarding the extended period of study, the two-fold examination, and the more comprehensive examination which will in future be required from the Bachelor in Medicine; and not only do I think the steps taken in this direction desirable, but absolutely necessary. There are, however, two measures in the Statute which appear to my mind (as I see by the report in the *Times*, they did to the minds of several others), highly objectionable. They are as follows:—

FIRST. That the Bachelor in Medicine, of whose knowledge, skill, and general ability, a far higher proof will henceforth be required at his two examinations than heretofore, shall, in order to accomplish the Doctorate, have written and produced a Dissertation of such a calibre, and so original, that it shall be deemed worthy of being printed and published; and that *unless his Dissertation shall possess so high a value, the M.D. degree shall be refused to him.*

SECOND. That of the worthiness of his Dissertation, and consequently of the fitness of the Bachelor in Medicine to obtain his Doctorate, *one individual shall be the sole judge.*

Now, as regards the FIRST of these measures, I heartily agree with the intention according to which it is proposed by this Council. It does appear very desirable that some means should exist by which graduates in medicine should be stimulated and encouraged to produce good and original works in medical and the collateral sciences, for the sake of knowledge generally, and for the common benefit and credit of themselves and of Alma mater. But I by no means think that the proposed plan is 'THE' one which should be adopted for compassing this end. It appears rather to be one which, for the sake of producing some possible good, would work much harm.

And for the following reasons:—

- (a.) Because it would be a means of rejecting and *dis-qualifying* those who already may not only have been, by permission of the University, in actual practice among the public for very many years*, but who, under the new enactment, will have

* This might specially be so in the case of those who, after taking the M.D. degree may

already passed as stringent as possible an Examination on subjects pertaining to Medical knowledge. This will appear even more inconsistent when the prominence is considered, which, according to the New Medical Act, the Medical Council of the country have given to the M.B. degree.

According to your own statement, made to the Oxford Commissioners, "nothing can be more absurd than that a public body should reject a man *whom at a previous period it had licensed to practice, 'per universum Angliæ regnum.'*"

(b.) Because, in addition to the high fees required for the M.D. degree, the facility for obtaining the degree in medicine and elsewhere, and for procuring the diploma of the Royal College of Physicians of London, the above measure will considerably conduce to limit the numbers of those who wish to proceed to the further medical degree at Oxford. Whereas, considering the great influence which Oxford is daily gaining over every department of English life, and considering also what advantages are opening up to the pursuit of medical and kindred studies in Oxford, it is of the utmost moment, so to legislate as to attract the minds of members of the medical profession towards the older universities.

(c.) Because the number of those who are really able to write a Dissertation worthy of issuing from a university, as being '*the sole test*' upon which alone the M.D. degree shall be conferred, will inevitably be so small that it is much to be feared that in time these tests will degenerate as to become quite as much unsubstantial a proof of really high attainments as the Dissertation required under the existing Statute.

(d.) Because the testing of qualification for the M.D. degree will be capable of being practically evaded by the substitution of the work of others.†

As regards the comparison between Oxford and the London University, which has been drawn, it does not appear to be at all apposite. At Oxford, a man is generally at least 28 years old when he is able to look for the M.D. degree, whereas at the London University that degree may be obtained by candidates who are only 24 years old. Again, the examination for the M.D. degree at that place, is one on Medicine and Clinical Study at the bed side in addition to one on certain metaphysical branches of knowledge. But inasmuch as with us the M.B.'s examination can only follow that examination upon which the M.A. degree is eventually made to rest, and as we require, as part of our M.B. examination, a complete and stringent test of clinical knowledge at the bedside itself, the comparison can hardly be said to be un-

have been prevented by illness, or by residence in a part of the country remote from any Hospital or field of observation, from prosecuting original research.

† As touching upon this point, an eminent physician and physiologist, one very conversant with medical matters on the continent, has told me that according to his experience of the German universities, of those who compose Dissertations for medical degrees, one-fifth write them entirely themselves, two-fifths compose them in German, and have them translated into Latin, and the remaining two-fifths neither write the German nor the Latin themselves. It is well known, that for the most part the Dissertation which in foreign Universities forms only a portion of the test required, has become merely a piece of elegant Latin composition. Again, at Paris I am told that the Dissertation for the degree is only a part of the examination, and, as a rule, is generally worked out in conjunction with the graduate by the Professor or Tutor.

favourable to Oxford. Surely if we are at all to have any true and searching test for the M.D. degree, its subject matter ought rather to be some practical and clinical examination, than a Dissertation indicating qualities rendering it specially worthy of being singled out for originality and published.

As respects the SECOND of the measures alluded to,—If the M.D. degree (the non-acquisition of which in a variety of cases precludes highly able and practical men from public posts of office) is to be made dependent on the Dissertation produced being so original as of necessity to demand publication, then surely it would be most arbitrary to place the determination of its merits in the hands of one individual from whose decision no appeal is provided. Moreover the decision as to its worth, might prove a most invidious task to any single person upon whom it devolved. Probably in most cases this method of applying the test would be practically free from objection, but on the other hand it might be far otherwise,* and the POSSIBILITY of any abuse, intentional or accidental, ought surely not to be rendered statutable.†

For such a measure, (provided the degree is made contingent upon acquirements of such a really higher standard, than is the M.B. degree) no analogy, I believe, in either of the faculties can be pointed to, either at this or any other University body. It is surely Napoleonic.

Such are the blots, which I think, appear, on the face of the new Statute—not such, as at all to compromise the Statute as a whole, inasmuch as they might easily be omitted without detriment to the entire structure, and are not, as are the other provisions of the new Statute, in any way demanded by the recent Medical Act.

That I am not alone among the non-resident medical graduates in the views above expressed. I would say that with one exception, ALL the Oxford *M.D.*'s residing in London, whom I have had the opportunity of personally conversing with at length, perfectly agree in all the objections which I have expressed. They are as follows:—Dr. WILSON, late student of Christ Church; Dr. LATHAM, late fellow of Oriel; Dr. MAYO, late fellow of Oriel; Dr. T. HAWKINS, secretary to the Medical Council; Dr. PAGE, late student of Christ Church; Dr. MONRO, Dr. COOTE, Dr. SUTHERLAND and, in addition, a great number of Cambridge and other *M.D.*'s, including Dr. BENICE JONES, Dr. PITTMAN, registrar of the College of Physicians; Dr. BALY, Physician to the Queen; Dr. HANDFIELD JONES, &c. The same views are held by several Oxford graduates connected with King's College, including the Principal, Dr. JELF, and Mr. PEARSON, fellow of Oriel,—also, by a number of surgeons connected with the professional educational boards,

* As by reason of peculiarity of opinions or temper on the part of the Regius Professor who might be called upon to disprove opinions which he was peculiarly tenacious about; or, as when his sole judgment might have to determine whether a junior and perhaps abler man deserved the Doctorate.

† Mr. Paget, whose opinion differs from my own on other points in the present question says, in a letter:—"As to the M.D. pass being dependent on the Regius Professor alone, I think the rule would do no harm with so good a Professor as Dr. Acland," &c., &c. But there have been, and may be again, Regius Professors who would be quite unfit to pass judgment on a Dissertation.

including Mr. CÆSAR HAWKINS. Of the above, several gave their opinions to Dr. MONRO, at the same time as to myself. Two only, out of a vast number whom I have consulted, thought, that the attainment of the *M.D.* degree should depend on the Dissertation being worthy, by originality, of being published, and they were Dr. WATSON, and Dr. HAWKINS. Both of them, however, considered, as did Dr. SIEVEKING and Dr. BEALE, that the decision of its merits, should by no means be left to a single individual. Dr. LATHAM, whose letter was read in Congregation, told us that in his opinion, that the Dissertation of all presenting themselves for the Doctorate, should in every case be published; but *that the degree should not depend on the Dissertation, in any way whatever.*

Both Dr. WATSON and Dr. LATHAM distinctly said, that in sending the letters which they wrote, approving the Statute, they had by no means contemplated, that the decision of the merits of the Dissertation should remain in the hands of one person.

I would then strongly urge upon Congregation, before voting, to take into consideration, the wishes and feelings of that portion of our graduates, the large bulk outside of Oxford, for whom it is legislating, and by no means to apply the powerful test contemplated for the *M.D.* degree.

I would, by all means, have it expected, that candidates for the *M.D.* degree, should strive to produce original work worthy of publication, and of being sent forth by the University, as part of her labours. This should be invited, and those will very gladly produce it who are able. Render the two *M.B.* examinations, required when license to practice is given, much more difficult than those of any other University; fence the degree round with every rightful difficulty, but by no means exclude from the degree, all, who from circumstances, cannot rise to an essay of originality and high standard, but who, after hard testing at the *M.B.* examination, have already received the approbation of the Academic body.

But in whatever way this may be adjudicated, I feel quite assured, that in future, the profession will not like the thought, that the *M.D.* degree and its privileges are to be dependent on the dictum of one person. The obvious plan to be pursued, is to rest the application of the test for an *M.D.* degree (whether severe or not), in the same hands as that for the *M.B.* degree, *i.e.*, in the hands of the Regius Professor, conjointly with two *M.D.*'s appointed by Convocation, who, if it be really worthy, will require its publication.

In conclusion, I cannot help stating, that I fear I may have written too freely—certainly at greater length than I purposed. The only excuse I can give, is the interest which is shown now in London about this Statute, and the fact, that I felt somewhat called upon, from the circumstance that I was associated last year in conducting the examinations for the Medical Degree, to bring forward the views which are, I believe, held by the profession generally.

I beg to remain, dear Dr. Acland,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN W. OGLE, M.D.