A short statement of facts, relative to the first appointment of a Professor of Surgery in Edinburgh / By a member of the College of Surgeons.

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SHORT STATEMENT OF FACTS,

RELATIVE TO THE

FIRST APPOINTMENT

OF A

PROFESSOR OF SURGERY

IN

EDINBURGH.

BY A MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

John Thomson M.D.

Edinburgh:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM BLACKWOOD,

64, SOUTH BRIDGE-STREET.

1806.

TO

WILLIAM FARQUHARSON, M. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE AND INCORPORATION OF SURGEONS OF EDINBURGH:

SIR,

The following short Statement is submitted to the Public, in the hope that it may tend to correct certain erroneous opinions which have been entertained respecting the motives and conduct of the Royal College of Surgeons, in the affair to which it relates.

I have taken the liberty, without your knowledge, to inscribe to you this Statement, in the conviction that the College will always find in you a firm assertor of its rights, and a strenuous and liberal supporter of every measure which has for its object the advancement of Surgical Science in Edinburgh.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

A MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

EDINBURGH,
Nov. 15*th* 1806.

A

SHORT STATEMENT

OF

FACTS.

THE INCORPORATION of SURGEONS was first instituted in the year 1505, by a *seal of cause* from the Town Council of Edinburgh; and in that act the Magistrates and Council bind themselves to give the Incorporation a dead body once in the year, for the purpose of anatomical and surgical demonstrations.

THE UNIVERSITY was founded by JAMES VI. in 1582: but the teaching of ANATOMY and SURGERY remained in the exclusive possession of the Incorporation of Surgeons till the year 1720, when the Incorporation, on the resignation of ALEXANDER DRUMMOND and JOHN M'GILL, their joint Professors of Anatomy, unanimously agreed to recommend to the Provost and

Town-Council Dr. ALEXANDER MONRO, one of their members, to be Professor of Anatomy within the city.

In consequence of that recommendation, Dr. MONRO, having been appointed Professor by the Magistrates and Town-Council, delivered his lectures upon Anatomy in the THEATRE belonging to the College of Surgeons till the year 1725, when he was first received into the University.

The present Dr. ALEXANDER MONRO was appointed Professor of Anatomy on the resignation of his father in the year 1759; and, in addition to this appointment, received from the Magistrates and Town-Council of Edinburgh a commission to teach Surgery, in the month of August 1777. The circumstances which gave rise to this appointment were the following. The late Mr. JAMES RAE, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, having for several years delivered a Course of Lectures on the Practice of Surgery, under the immediate and public patronage of the College, addressed a letter to that body, in

October 1776, requesting the College to frame an application to his MAJESTY, for the royal sanction to establish a Professorship of Surgery in the University of Edinburgh; and, in the event of the College approving of his proposal, that they would be pleased to recommend him to his Majesty to fill that chair. In this letter, after pointing out to the College the benefits to be expected from such an appointment, Mr. RAE adds, 'I understand that Dr. MONRO, 'hearing an application was intended for 'having a Professorship of Practical Surgery 'established, has taken some alarm, appre-'hending it may be prejudicial to him as 'Professor of Anatomy, and has got his 'brethren of the College, in a faculty meet-'ing, to give their opinion of the inutility 'of such a Professorship, as he teaches all 'that students can learn from it.'

The proposal of Mr. RAE being unanimously approved of by the College, it was suggested that it might be proper, before drawing up a petition to his Majesty, to examine Dr. MONRO's commission; and that, if the proposed Professorship should

appear to be an infringement of his right, the College in point of justice ought to proceed no farther. Dr. MONRO's commission was accordingly examined; and the minutes of the College of Surgeons bear, that the Corporation being fully satisfied that the proposed application for establishing a Professorship of Surgery in no-ways interfered with the Professor of Anatomy; they therefore appointed their Deacon, with his council, to draw up a petition for that purpose to his Majesty.

The petition which was drawn up by this committee being approved of by the College, it was transmitted by the Deacon in their name to Sir LAWRENCE DUNDAS, at that time the member of parliament for the city of Edinburgh, accompanied by a letter, requesting that he would have the goodness to present this petition to his MAJESTY, and use his endeavours to promote a measure so obviously tending to the public benefit. Another, letter was at the same time sent to the then LORD ADVOCATE, inclosing a copy of the petition, and desiring he would favour the

views of the College with his countenance and support.

At the ensuing meeting of the College of Surgeons, on the 21st of May 1777, the Deacon produced a letter from Sir LAWRENCE DUNDAS, informing him that he had written to Lord SUFFOLK, the Secretary of State, to request his Lordship would appoint an hour when he might wait upon him with the petition from the Royal College of Surgeons—That the day following was fixed on by Lord SUFFOLK; but owing to a sudden attack of illness, his Lordship had been hitherto prevented from receiving Sir LAWRENCE's visit on the subject of their petition. The Deacon also laid before this meeting a letter from the LORD ADVOCATE, in which his Lordship states, 'That it would give him infinite plea-
'sure if he could be of service to the
'Society in any particular, but that it was
'not in his power to interfere in behalf of
'their application, as he had many months
'before received a letter from the Prin-
'cipal and Medical Professors of the Uni-
'versity, requesting, that if an applica-

'tion should be made for the erection of 'a Professorship of Surgery in Edinburgh, 'he would represent to his MAJESTY's 'Ministers, that, in the opinion of the 'University, and particularly of the Medi-'cal part, the erection of such a Profes-'sorship was useless, and would be very 'improper; and that as the subject of 'this letter, coming from such a respect-able quarter, was one upon which he 'was totally incapable to judge, he could 'do no more but simply transmit the 'representation which had been made to 'him to his MASESTY's Ministers.'

At the next meeting of the College, on the 17th of July 1777, they were informed that an application had been made by Dr. MONRO to the Town Council, to be appointed Professor of Surgery in the University of Edinburgh; but the College, regarding this appointment as an infringement of their privileges, empowered their Deacon to appear at the next meeting of the Town Council, and to desire an extract of Dr. MONRO's petition, and crave that a commission for teaching Surgery should not

be granted to him till the College should have time to be heard in defence of their privileges.

At a meeting of the College of Surgeons, held on the 4th of August following, the Deacon informed the College, that his council had drawn up a memorial and petition on the subject of Dr. Monro's commission, which he had presented to the Magistrates and Council, in consequence of which they had agreed to refer the matter to the Lord Provost and his Committee, and to suspend all farther proceedings till they should see whether the College of Surgeons could offer any solid reasons why their former resolutions respecting Dr. Monro should not pass into an act of Council.

The College conceiving from certain expresssions of the Lord Provost, that his Lordship and the Council had not fully understood their meaning in the memorial and petition which had been delivered to the Council by their Deacon, authorised the Deacon and his council to draw up

another memorial, setting forth the claims of the College, and the reasons why in their judgment the Professor of Surgery should not only belong to their body, but should be also a practical Surgeon.

On the 19th of August, the Deacon represented to the College, that his council had met in consequence of the appointment of last meeting; but finding they had not sufficient time to draw up a memorial to be laid before the Provost and Council, who were to meet next day, it was recommended to him to attend the Provost's Committee, and crave a further delay for giving in the memorial; that he did accordingly wait upon the committee, and asked a delay, but was refused it; the Provost informing him at the same time, that the Council would proceed next day to confirm their former resolutions with respect to Dr. Monro, and give orders for extending his commission: That upon making a report of this to his council, they advised him to appear the next day at the Council Chamber, and take a protest against the precipitate nomination of Dr. Monro;

and this he accordingly did, and gave in reasons of protest, which were engrossed in the minutes of Council, and to which the Deacon-Convener adhered. He then produced a copy of the protest to the meeting. The College approved of what he had done, and ordered the protest to be inserted into their minutes, of which the following is a copy :—

"I ALEXANDER HAMILTON, Deacon of the Incorporation of Surgeons, for myself and in name of the other members of Council who shall adhere to me, do protest against the precipitate measure of Council in nominating Dr. ALEXANDER MONRO Professor of Anatomy, to be also Professor of Surgery in this University, without giving the Incorporation of Surgeons full time to be heard. And my reasons of protest are—

"1*mo*, That the said nomination can prove of no real benefit to the University, as it is certain no man can teach both branches completely within the usual time employed in a course; nor can this Professor do more by this additional no-

mination than has been already done by him.'

" *2do,* The charter from King WILLIAM and Queen MARY in favour of the Incorporation of Surgeons, gives them an exclusive privilege to operate upon living and dead bodies, and entitles them to be furnished annually by the Magistrates with a subject for the purpose of instructing Students; and therefore the Professor of Surgery should be appointed out of their body.

" *3tio,* Whatever merit the Professor of Anatomy may assume to himself, it is well known that the ablest professor can only give the rudiments of the art; the surgeon must be formed by witnessing the practice on the living body.

" *4to,* Because the unconstitutional means which have been used by the Professor of Anatomy to prevent a practical surgeon being named Professor of Surgery, and who had the art to combine the other Professors in support of his measure, some of whom, if left to the dictates of their own mind, would have declared for its utility, are evident marks of a de-

sign to monopolize every branch of Medical instruction; which attempt, if successful, may have a destructive tendency to the University, of which you are the patrons.—And,

" *Lastly*, Because the reservation of the Council of a power to divide the two Professions, shows their real sense of its propriety; and therefore, it was not acting for the benefit of the University to give a commission for both branches to the present Professor, even during life.'

The College perceiving distinctly the means which had been employed to prevent Surgery from being taught as a distinct branch of Medical Science, and to defeat their intention of having it taught in the University by a practical surgeon, conceived it to be their duty to insert into all the Edinburgh newspapers the following declaration, bearing date the first of October, 1777.

" The College of Surgeons, empowered by royal charter to teach the different branches

of their profession, received with pleasure the proposal of Mr. RAE, one of their members, in the year 1769, to give a full Course of Surgery, founded on the practice of the Royal Infirmary, the proper School for Surgery, where all chirurgical maladies are treated, and the different operations are executed and directed, by the surgeons alone.

"Mr. RAE's proposal met with the unanimous approbation of the Managers of the Royal Infirmary, as appears by their minutes of the 2d of October 1769, signed by PRINCIPAL ROBERTSON.

"The motives of the Society for promoting this institution, were a full conviction that a separate Course of Surgery, properly executed, would prove an advantage to the University, and tend to excite an emulation among the members of the Society, by study and application, to qualify themselves to teach the different branches of their profession; and, from trial, satisfied of the utility of Mr. RAE's Course, they resolve to continue their assistance to promote its success.

(Signed) 'ALEX^R. HAMILTON.'