

Address to the community, on the necessity of legalizing the study of anatomy / by order of the Massachusetts Medical Society.

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Massachusetts Medical Society.
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H. Williams

ADDRESS

TO THE COMMUNITY,

ON THE

NECESSITY OF LEGALIZING

THE STUDY OF

ANATOMY.

BY ORDER OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY.

BOSTON:

PERKINS & MARVIN, 114, WASHINGTON ST.

1829.

At a stated meeting of the Counsellors of the MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY, held February 4th, 1829, it was

Voted, That a Committee be appointed to prepare a petition to the Legislature, to modify the existing laws, which now operate to prohibit the procuring of subjects for anatomical dissection; and to report the same for the consideration of the Society, at their annual meeting in June. This Committee consists of Drs. J. C. WARREN, E. ALDEN, and A. L. PEIRSON.

At the annual meeting of the Society, held June 3d, the Committee on the subject of Dissections having reported,—after considerable discussion, it was finally agreed to refer the whole subject to a Committee of nine, with a request that they would report to the Counsellors, at their stated meeting in October next; and the Counsellors were authorized to take such measures as they might deem necessary in behalf of the Society. The following gentlemen were chosen to serve on this Committee, viz. Drs. ABEL L. PEIRSON, Salem; JOHN C. WARREN, JOHN D. WELLS, JOHN WARE, WILLIAM INGALLS, GEORGE C. SHATTUCK, Boston; NATHANIEL MILLER, Franklin; NEHEMIAH CUTTER, Pepperell; and JOHN BROOKS, Barnardston.

At a stated meeting of the Counsellors, held Oct. 7th, 1829—The Committee appointed in June last, on the subject of Dissections, reported that they had issued a circular letter to the Fellows of the Society, with a view of advancing the objects proposed by their appointment; and they recommended to the Counsellors to cause a petition to the Legislature to be prepared and presented at the winter session of the General Court.

Voted, That this Committee be requested to continue their attention to the subject, and adopt such other measures as they may deem expedient in relation to it.

Voted, That they be authorized to make expenditures to promote the object for which they were appointed, provided they do not exceed \$150.

A true copy from the Records.

Attest,

GEO. HAYWARD,
Rec. Sec. of the Mass. Med. Society.

Boston, Dec. 7, 1829.



ADDRESS.

IT is a truth sufficiently mortifying to the practitioners of the healing art, and disastrous to the community, that while all other pursuits of science are encouraged and facilitated in this Commonwealth, and throughout New England, that alone, which has for its object a knowledge of the structure of man, with a view to heal the diseases to which he is subject, is not only unprovided for, but virtually disgraced and condemned. It is time that the facts upon this subject be laid before the public,—that the wants of the profession be fairly and distinctly stated,—and the science of Anatomy rescued from degradation and persecution.

We hardly need to dilate upon the importance of a knowledge of Anatomy in a medical education:—it is the ground-work, the very alphabet of that education. The proposition is almost self-evident, that no man, who does not possess it, can be, especially in the outset of his career, a safe practitioner. The study of the healthy structure of the body prepares him to discover the variations induced by disease, and to detect the organ in which this variation

is produced. Thus alone can remedies be applied with the best reference to the seat of disease. A mistaken notion prevails, that the treatment of internal diseases does not require a knowledge of Anatomy, as much as that of those whose changes are recognizable externally, and allowed to fall within the province of the surgeon. The causes of disease are seldom found in the part affected. The laws of sympathy bind distant organs to each other, and a paralyzed hand, or gouty foot, may be owing to disease of the brain or stomach. Pain in the shoulder, in disease of the liver,—and pain in the knee, in that of the hip, are familiar instances of this sympathy. The cure of these and other external complaints, is often to be effected by means applied to internal organs; and a knowledge of the structure and functions of these organs is as much required, as it is when the part affected is to be the object of a surgical operation.

In all surgical cases, the hand of the operator is paralyzed, if not guided by a knowledge of the parts in which the operation is going forward. Many a conscientious practitioner has declined performing surgical operations for the lack of this knowledge, to the great risk of life and limbs, especially to the laboring classes of community, whose pecuniary means do not allow them so wide a range in the choice of their physician.

Accidents are daily happening in all parts of the country, which call for the application of anatomical knowledge on the part of the practitioner of medicine, and upon the possession of which knowledge

important lives are depending. And if ever the triumph of knowledge over ignorance is complete, it is when the skilful surgeon, guided by his acquaintance with the structure of parts, is enabled to ward off otherwise inevitable death, by a seasonable operation, in cases of bleeding, and other accidents and disorders, which require prompt relief.

The following facts, (and many similar might be stated,) illustrate the above remarks :—

Hernia, or rupture, is a most common disease, and one to which laboring men are by far the most liable, as it is usually produced by sudden and violent bodily exertion. It is generally known, that if the protruded bowel becomes strangulated, or confined within the hernial bag, so that it cannot be returned into the abdomen, death almost inevitably ensues. Now the operation required for the relief of this dangerous condition, is one which can readily be performed by every anatomist. And yet, in the most populous part of Massachusetts, a very aged practitioner, and one who was eminent in the practice of his profession for more than half a century, had never known this operation to be performed within the circuit of his extensive practice, till about twelve years ago. When he was asked how many he had known to die of the complaint, on whom no operation was attempted, he said, “Certainly more than a hundred.” A hundred lives lost, within the knowledge of one practitioner, for want of anatomical science ! How great must have been the number in the whole of New England, who perished miserably from the same cause !

It may be fair to compute that, when the operation is seasonably performed, life is preserved in four cases out of five.

The axe, the adze, the chisel, the scythe, and the sickle, are the most common implements among those who labor; and they often inflict wounds, which carry horror and dismay to the hearts of the by-standers, who are ignorant of the means of applying relief. But, in such a case, the surgeon, possessed of anatomical knowledge, who knows where to find a blood-vessel, and how to secure it, is a guardian angel, and brings life and safety in his hands.

During the past year, a mechanic from a seaport town, being on a visit to his friends in the country, trod upon a scythe in such a manner as to cause the point to wound him just below the ear. Notwithstanding the plugging and stuffing practised by the medical attendants, this man died of bleeding on the fourth day, without an attempt being made to tie the great artery of the neck, which probably was wounded.

A woman, in a neighboring State, fell down cellar, and wounded the carotid artery with a broken earthen pot. She bled to death after several days, without an attempt having been made to put a ligature on this artery, which would have been an effectual and comparatively safe method of stopping the bleeding, and which a moderate knowledge of Anatomy would have enabled any resolute practitioner to have performed.

A child, in a town not many miles from the metropolis of Massachusetts, having got a bean in its

windpipe, was suffocated, after several days of great torment and distress. After its death, the body was examined, and, on making a slit into the air-tube, the bean dropped out. A by-stander, not medical, instantly exclaimed, "Why could not this have been done while the child was alive?" The answer to this question can only be found in the humiliating acknowledgment, that the physicians, in whose hands the case had fallen, were ignorant of Anatomy.

A farmer, in the county of ——, struck the point of a scythe into the left leg. A violent bleeding was the consequence. A physician in the neighborhood being called to him, stuffed the wound with balsam and lint, and put on a bandage as tight as possible. The force of the blood, however, was greater than that of the bandage; and the bleedings returned repeatedly, till the patient was nearly exhausted. Then a surgeon well acquainted with Anatomy came, and took the bandages from the limb, which he found mortified around the wound, from the tightness of the bandage. He next made an incision deep in the sound part of the leg, and exposed the wounded artery, and tied it. The bleeding was entirely stopped, and the poor man, though very low, recovered at last, and continued a valuable member of society. This is not a solitary case. We could relate a great number very similar, in which important lives have been preserved, which must have been lost without a very minute knowledge of Anatomy.

With the above, let the following fact of an opposite nature be contrasted:—A late celebrated

teacher of Anatomy, in the early part of his practice, was called upon to reduce a dislocated hip, and, after making several ineffectual attempts, was obliged to abandon the case. He procured a subject, and immediately applied himself to the dissection of the hip joint, and to the study of the muscles and ligaments, by whose agency the bone is retained in its unnatural state of dislocation. Having made himself master of the anatomy of the part, and discovered, as he thought, the cause of his failure, he returned to the dislocated hip, renewed his efforts, guided by a more perfect knowledge, and succeeded to his entire satisfaction.

But, supposing it conceded, that anatomical knowledge is necessary for medical men,—are not the means of obtaining it the same as formerly? We are certain the impediments to this indispensable pursuit are multiplying, and the power of the healing art to promote the health and happiness of the community must be more and more diminished, as these impediments increase.

In the preamble to that celebrated law of the Old Colony of Massachusetts, passed within twenty years of the date of the first charter, providing for the support of common schools, the necessity of this enactment is stated in these remarkable words,—“to the end that *learning* be not *buried in the graves of our forefathers.*” The wisdom of *our* forefathers is now manifest in the general diffusion of common learning, and yet *we*, their descendants, have been willing to suffer a department of knowledge no less necessary to the well-being of society

than common learning, to be burdened with oppressive and unnecessary restrictions, and in a fair way to be buried in the tombs of our fathers.

Until the last ten or fifteen years, some opportunities for dissection have been afforded to zealous and laborious students. The revolutionary war qualified a considerable number of men to act as surgeons ;—men whose memory, whose instructions, and whose bright example are still cherished amongst us. Dissections were afterwards privately carried on to keep up the knowledge these persons had acquired in actual service ;—though, to a small extent, the late war with Great Britain likewise was productive of some of the same results. So that it may be said, there has been a stock of anatomical knowledge laid up by the enterprising and industrious of the generation who occupy the advanced portion of medical experience, obtained when the laws were less severe, and dissection was winked at, if not countenanced. About the close of the last war, medical schools began to be established in this part of the country, and that alarm began to be excited, which occasioned the Legislature to pass severe laws against the robbing of grave-yards, which had not before been recognized as a crime. This alarm was much increased by several instances of unjustifiable and mercenary removal of the bodies of very improper subjects. And the penalties annexed to our laws have been, from time to time, increased, till it has become scarcely more hazardous to assault the bodies of the living, than those of the dead. It is obvious then, some change must be effected in the present state of our laws ;

or present and future generations must fall far beneath the past in one of the arts of life of most common and indispensable importance.

But will not plates and models in wax, and descriptions, suffice for every needful purpose, and answer as substitutes for the actual inspection of the human body? Every person, whose experience in the profession entitles him to an opinion, will say, "*No, they cannot.*" The common observation of mankind convinces them, that plates and models are but poorly adapted to teach a knowledge of any mechanical contrivance of merely human invention:—it is therefore presumptuous to suppose that the physician can, by such imperfect means, attain to a practical and familiar acquaintance with the complicated and wonderful structure of the human frame,—the perfect work of infinite power and wisdom.

If any man wished a very perfect piece of machinery made for a cotton-mill, would he trust an artist who had seen only books and plates on the subject? or if he wished some repairs made, would he think it judicious to employ a theorist, and not a practical man, who had been accustomed to handle such machinery?

Many persons confound the opening of bodies to ascertain the cause of death, and the changes made by disease, with the dissecting of bodies to learn Anatomy;—and express their surprise, that physicians are not contented with the degree of liberty which the good sense of the enlightened part of the community already allow on this subject. But the task of the student of Anatomy is one which re-

quires much patient labor, and for a long time. He has not only to make himself familiar with the form, size, and relative position of the different organs of the body, but likewise to examine their intimate structure,—the course of their blood-vessels and nerves,—the places where these are most liable to be injured by violence, and where they can be most readily secured, tied, compressed, and divided. For this purpose, *he must dissect, follow out, and examine these parts, till he is as familiar with them as with the streets in which he daily walks.* It is this accurate knowledge alone, which can be safely relied upon in cases of danger resulting from wounds and accidents.

Actual dissection, then, of the human body is the only way in which a knowledge of Anatomy can be acquired; and a portion of the bodies of those who die, must be made the subjects of this operation for the benefit of the living. Perhaps it will be said, You can learn Anatomy elsewhere;—go to New York, to Philadelphia, or to Paris;—you will there find ample opportunities for dissection, without violating the feelings or the prejudices of any one. To this we would answer, that the execution of such a proposal would be impracticable to the greater part of the profession. The sons of persons in easy circumstances may indeed command such an advantage. They can cross the Atlantic, and come home rich with the scientific treasures they have accumulated in Europe. But three quarters of the profession are not competent to the charge of a long and expensive journey or voyage. They must obtain what knowledge they are able at

home :—and if they are forbidden the means of acquiring a sufficient acquaintance with the profession, then three quarters of the community must suffer for their ignorance.

Further, we should reply to a proposal of the nature intimated above, by asking, whether a citizen of New England is justified in advising us to go out of our own country to acquire the knowledge of an indispensable profession? How would it accord with our high pretensions to improvements in the instruction of the rising generation?

If dissection is indispensable, then, whose bodies are to be devoted to this purpose? This is the important question :—it ought to be distinctly stated, and fairly answered.

The feeling, with which are regarded the remains of those who have been dear to us when alive, a feeling which belongs to the whole of community, and to physicians as much as to other men,—revolts from any thing that looks like treating those remains with indignity. Ask any man, who has reflected on the subject, if he has any preference as to the mode in which his body returns to its original elements,—whether it be decomposed by putrefaction *in* the ground, or *above* it,—and he will probably tell you, he feels no concern about the disposal of his own inanimate remains, but that his feelings would be harrowed up by the thought, that the bodies of those who had been dear to him should be rudely dealt with. Living friends are the ones whose feelings suffer from the operations of the anatomist; and if this source of distress can

be completely avoided, is not all the valid objection to dissections entirely removed?

The enactments which have been made with a view to protect graves and sepulchres from violation, have been made without any investigation into the wants of the community, and of the medical profession; nor has any inquiry been made as to the practicability of pointing out the class of subjects which are proper to be devoted to the purposes of science. To be sure, the bodies of those who suffer death for their crimes have sometimes been decreed to the knife of the anatomist; and this very circumstance has contributed to render Anatomy odious, without affording a material supply of its wants.

In all our large towns, deaths are continually occurring among a class of persons whose connexion with the sympathies of the living is so slight, that there is no one professing to regret their departure, or willing to show respect to their remains. The number of persons of this description is much greater than might be thought possible in such a state of society as that we live in. In the city of Boston there die annually not much less than a hundred persons who have no relation to mourn for them. Of these, a large part consists of individuals brought to a premature death by vicious excesses. We have repeatedly known of two or three such dying in one day, from continued debauchery and excess:—persons sunk so long in disgusting criminality and licentiousness, that the earth seems to be corrupted by their existence, and relieved from a burden by their departure. Shall we jeopard the best lives in

the community, from a pretended respect to the decaying remains of such as these?

These insulated and unhappy beings should receive from us, during life, the relief and protection their destitute circumstances require. But when their lives are ended, and their bodies insensible to pain, they are the proper subjects to be devoted to the benefit of mankind. Not that their bodies are to be so used as a punishment, because they are outcasts from society by their crimes or misfortunes:—dissection is not to be made a part of the expiatory penalty of crimes:—it is not to be regarded as a *punishment*, but as an operation on the dead for the benefit of the living; and on this very account, those laws which permit the Judge to annex dissection to the punishment of death, operate injuriously to science, and rather tend to keep up a horror of Anatomy. But the *unclaimed* bodies of *all* persons who die in the prisons, and different eleemosynary institutions of the country, are the proper subjects of Anatomy,—simply *because the feelings of no living being can be violated* by their dissection;—and as for the *dead*, all will allow, that it is comparatively of little consequence in which of the various modes adopted by the customs and caprice of mankind, our parent earth receives our bodies. “If we coolly reflect for one moment, we must admit, that employing the body in the communication of useful knowledge, and preserving the parts with care and respect, for the purpose of transmitting this knowledge to posterity, ought to be more agreeable to every body’s feelings than casting the body into the water, broiling it on the fire, exposing

it to be devoured by beasts and birds of prey, or depositing it in vaults, to putrefy and moulder away;—or even embalming it, which consists in preserving the external form in a frightful and unnatural state. It is a remarkable and instructive fact, that each of these modes of disposing of the body, is venerated by some nations, who would abhor all different modes, as being unfeeling and indecent;—showing that there is no common or natural reason on the subject, but that the customs respecting the dead are arbitrary, local, and irrational.”*

If a law is enacted which simply places a *permissive* power in the hands of those authorities in whose custody these unclaimed bodies remain, it will be placed out of the power of the medical profession to abuse their privilege of dissection; and it will always be competent to overseers of the poor, to prevent any bodies but those of the most proper persons from being delivered over for dissection.

But it is objected, that in almost all instances it will be the bodies of the *poor* which are unclaimed;—and the poor are thus made to bear the burden of the proposed law,—and their feelings ought to be regarded by the philanthropist. In answer to this, we ask,—Is not the poor man, of respectable character, as likely to have relatives, or friends, to claim for his body the rites of sepulture, as the rich? And if a single person, however humble, appears to claim kindred, or connexion, with the deceased, his claim should be respected;—for it is

* Macartney's Lecture. Dublin, 1826.

not the body of the pauper, as such, that is contemplated in the proposed act.

Doubtless the propositions here advanced, will be opposed, and at first view will be revolting to some ; but we are convinced that no man can calmly and considerately reflect on the subject, and not arrive at the conclusion, that it is necessary for the public to make some concession of prejudice to the necessities of the case, and that something must be done to protect anatomical pursuits ; and we have never yet seen any mode pointed out that is more free from objections than the one we have mentioned.

The public must choose between these two things,—the dissection of the dead, or the mutilation of the living. We say the *public* must choose, for it is their affair ; and if they choose the greater evil, physicians will be exempted from a pursuit revolting in its nature, and not unfrequently dangerous, and even fatal to their health, in its consequences ; and their occupation will still remain, if not as laudable and beneficial to community, at least as lucrative to themselves, and even more so ; for ignorance often protracts disease.

Medical men are not so sunk in barbarism as to be willing to cultivate science in a mode to outrage those very natural feelings entertained towards the bodies of those who have been loved and cherished in life. It were better that medical science should be extinct, and medicine relapse into empiricism, than that the just rights of humanity should be infringed, and the condition of honest poverty degraded, to furnish the means of sustaining this science. But with regard to the poor, we believe they

have no better friends than their physicians; and common experience teaches, that medical men are looked upon by the destitute and distressed in the double capacity of physician and friend. Notwithstanding this obvious truth, and that the medical profession have, in reality, no interests at variance with those of the community, it has hitherto been an easy matter to excite a popular prejudice against the profession, as a body, and to direct that prejudice to thwart their plans of improvement. We believe that practitioners of medicine may fairly be viewed as instruments of good to their fellow-creatures; and we believe also, that it *will essentially* benefit the *poorer class*, more than any other, to pass a law legalizing Anatomy, and thereby qualifying those physicians, who have in charge the health of the poor, to take upon them the management of their diseases and accidents, with more experience and skill.

Let any large establishment, devoted to the maintenance of the poor, be examined, and it will always be found that there is a portion of its inmates, for whose support the public is taxed, and whose labor is lost to the community, in consequence of unreduced dislocation, and fractures, and other injuries, remediable by surgeons possessing a greater degree of anatomical knowledge than frequently falls to the lot of those who officiate as physicians to the poor. The rich have not the same interest at stake; for money will purchase skill, at whatever cost; and there will always be found some physicians, who will, at great expense, and risk, and labor, procure that skill which the rich are willing to pay for.

A few persons are in the habit of asserting that there is, so far as they know, but little difference between the learned and unlearned in surgery. They have known cases of dislocations being reduced, and cures effected by uneducated persons, which excited astonishment. It has been true, no doubt, that a bonesetter has sometimes set a bone which regular surgeons had failed to do; and it is also true, that they have by laborious manipulations sometimes effected considerable cures. Yet these, when compared with the mass of diseases and operations, which an instructed surgeon is called to treat, and which, in a great number of cases, he treats successfully, are not worthy of being mentioned. They excite surprise and conversation, because they are unexpected. Not being the results of intelligent practice, they seem wonderful and almost miraculous. To these are to be opposed a thousand instances, in which quackery could do nothing. No man, in our community, would call for an empiric, to stop the bleeding of a great artery; to snatch him from the horrors of a mortification from a strangulated hernia; or to relieve his child from a deadly lethargy, caused by a fracture of the skull. If the ignorant are more successful than the educated in *medicine*, they must be so in law, and in the mechanical arts:—then all education is useless, and our schools an unnecessary burden.

On the continent of Europe, where the distinction of classes in society is greatest, there is little or no hindrance to the prosecution of anatomical pursuits. The bodies of all who die in the hospitals, and other charitable establishments, are de-

voted to this purpose ; and yet, so perfectly are all classes reconciled to the arrangement, that no poor person is ever known to be restrained from entering these establishments, by fear of dissection after death. In England and in this country the distinction of classes in society is less marked, and a greater degree of intercourse and sympathy prevails between rich and poor. This is indeed the happy result of free institutions : but is it indeed the legitimate consequence that we should be less enlightened, more prejudiced, and more blind to the real interests of those, whom we wish to protect and benefit, than our worse governed fellow-men ? We are accustomed to congratulate ourselves that our country possesses within itself the means essential to our support and happiness. It is manifestly inconsistent with this assertion, and derogatory to our vaunted independence, that we must send our youth abroad, and at an immense expense, to qualify them to exercise a calling of daily necessity, and indispensable importance.

If anatomical science is to be sacrificed to popular feeling, and dissections totally relinquished,—as they are in a fair way to be, if the present state of things is not remedied, and the laws against exhumation go on increasing in severity as they have done,—what would be the situation of the medical department of our army and navy in the event of another war ? The lives and limbs of the brave defenders of our country would be safer any where else than in the hospital or cockpit. We should be carried back, in the retrograde march of ignorance, to the days when the accomplished Sidney, the flower of

the English court and army, lost his life, because no surgeon was then competent to amputate his limb ; or to a period less remote, when the Director General of the American army, quartered at Cambridge, reported a whole regiment in actual service, with no other surgical armament than one pocket-case of rusty instruments. Surely every man who justly estimates the value of health and soundness to the laboring man, will promote the means of qualifying all, who are to practise the healing art, in a knowledge of the human frame, which is alone to be acquired by dissections.

There are other advantages to the community, which arise from the plan of surrendering suitable subjects to the uses of Anatomy, beside those which flow from the increased usefulness of the medical profession. The whole business of body-snatching, with its disgusting and demoralizing consequences, will be effectually done away with. Our public prints will no longer be filled with the horrid details of half-completed robberies of the grave ; and men, otherwise praiseworthy, and highly useful, as medical practitioners, will not be ruined by fine, imprisonment and obloquy, for having too much zeal in learning their profession.

Dissection, once allowed, in the mode we have proposed ;—or otherwise established by law as an occupation not to be visited by disgrace and punishment,—will go on as a thing of course, without excitement and without wonder, and with no more secrecy than decency and propriety require. It is of high moment for those who deprecate the effects of popular clamor, and desire the peace and quiet of

society, to promote the only means, by which the bodies of those who have relations to feel for them, can be secured from daring and desperate resurrectionists.

It is not a small evil, likewise, that the present order of things tends to raise up a band of these villains, who have, in England, reached an alarming pitch of audacity and hardihood. Sir Astley Cooper stated recently, in an examination before a Committee of the British House of Commons, that there was no man in England, whatever might be his rank or consequence, whose body he could not obtain, after his death, if he had a mind to dissect it. And recent horrid events, which have happened there, prove that the hands of these wretches are not always unstained with blood.

From the great mystery with which anatomical pursuits have hitherto been shrouded, there is no subject upon which mankind are more generally and more profoundly ignorant than in regard to a knowledge of the structure of their own bodies. This ignorance is one of the principal reasons why they are so readily duped by the pretensions of quacks and impostors, who undertake to perform what an anatomist knows to be physically impossible. Imaginary dislocations and fractures, cured by reductions equally fictitious,—the fallacy of which a very little knowledge of Anatomy will serve to detect,—constitute the groundwork of the reputation of half the bonesetting quacks in the country. If dissection shall ever become a legalized pursuit, Anatomy will be a popular study, not only with professional men, but with all who are interested in scientific pursuits, or even governed by common curiosity.

The want of a knowledge, which must be spread through the community, if popular lectures upon Anatomy were as common as those upon Astronomy, and other branches of natural science,—is sensibly felt on many important occasions. In our courts of justice, it is not only necessary that the physician, called to the stand, to give a medical opinion as to the cause of death in a case of suspected violence, or poisoning, should have clear and definite views of the anatomical structure of parts, but the court and the jury need to partake in this very knowledge. Most medical men, who have been called to give evidence upon such occasions, will testify that it is a difficult matter to make themselves fairly understood by the bench, the bar, or the jury. In the Coroner's court of inquest, this deficiency of anatomical knowledge impedes the administration of justice in a still greater degree. Legal medicine is a science which, in an eminent degree, involves the life, property and reputation of persons accused in courts of justice: and to render this science truly the organ of justice, and prevent its being perverted to aid the cause of error, its foundation must be laid in minute Anatomy.

At the present time, the medical profession is looked upon with a great degree of interest by the extra-professional part of community. Our means of knowledge, and sources of skill, are such as can be inquired into and canvassed by all; and the days in which physicians performed the part of jugglers are gone. Mystery and jargon are laid aside, with flowing wigs and gold-headed canes. Physicians now speak an intelligible language; and

have a community of sympathy and feeling with those around them. From this results a better acquaintance, among all classes, with the means of preserving health, and with the soundest methods of physical education. There is but one thing more wanting, to make this correlative influence of medical science one of its most distinguishing honors, and one of the greatest blessings it has conferred upon society. Let Anatomy no longer be viewed with horror, but be allowed to form a part of the education of every well-informed man, and the advantages we speak of will be completed,—the standard of knowledge will be raised. Physicians must be better informed, because the public is better informed. The criterion of medical talent among reading and inquiring, and, consequently, enlightened people, out of the profession, will grow more and more just; and the weakness, ignorance, and prejudice of mankind will not so readily afford stepping-stones to employment for the incompetent and unprincipled.

We think it must be clearly seen that physicians have, by no means, the greatest *pecuniary* interest in any measure which may tend to improve the knowledge of the profession, by legalizing Anatomy. The public alone are to be gainers in a pecuniary point of view. As *much* profit, to say the least, will accrue to the physician while the standard of knowledge is mean, as while it is elevated; and as much money may be made by bad practice as by good.

Let the reflecting and well-instructed people of New England take a fair and distinct view of this

subject. On the one side, it will appear that they imperiously call on the medical profession for a competent skill in their science ;—and on the other, that they prohibit the means of acquiring it by most severe penalties. What remark would they make on such a state of things ? We may reply with confidence, that they would tell us, ‘ We see and admit the importance of Anatomy ; we realize the difficulties you describe ; but we are unable to remove them. The prejudices of the community are against you. We cannot venture even to broach this subject among the people, lest we should incur odium and unpopularity. We admit that a dead and decaying body can be interesting only, where there are friends or relations, whose feelings and sympathies are associated with the sacred relics : but if we propose, that the bodies of those who have no relatives be made subjects for the study of Anatomy, we shall be accused of being willing to violate the remains of the poor and friendless, who have none else to protect them.’

It must be allowed that such remarks are natural in our state of society, and worthy of all consideration ; and, on examination, they would lead us to the following reply. ‘ You are not willing that the study of Anatomy should be prosecuted in this part of the country, and you are willing to take to yourself and your family the consequences of the ignorance of the medical profession. You are willing, rather than to violate, or attempt to rectify an acknowledged prejudice, that the lives of those most dear to you should be put in unnecessary hazard. You are ready to submit yourself to the hands of an

ignorant, blundering surgeon, in case of accident, rather than to run the risk of clashing in *opinion*, and encountering the *prejudices* of those around you. In case you were, when travelling, thrown from your carriage, and seriously injured, you would be prepared to submit yourself to the first comer, however inadequate he were to restore you; and you would allow him to amputate your limb, when, perhaps, it might be saved by a surgeon who knew how to tie a wounded artery, and stop a dangerous bleeding.'

To this it would be answered, 'Oh, no,—you misunderstand me. I have no notion of allowing myself to be mutilated by quacks and ignoramuses. Rather than endanger my life or my limb, I would pay a hundred, or even five hundred dollars to get a good surgeon from a distance. No, no; if the people choose to put up with *pretenders*, let them do it, I shall have nothing to do with them.'

The natural reply would be this. 'Your resolution is perfectly just, so far as it regards yourself: but what is to be done with the poor wood-cutter, whose limbs are crushed by the falling of a tree; or the artisan, who is wounded by his axe, or chisel? They are unable to pay a hundred dollars to get a competent practitioner, and therefore *they* must consent to be mutilated for life, by a barbarous and unnecessary operation.'

Surely every one who has a real sympathy for the feelings of the poor, and a sincere desire to mitigate their sufferings, would repel, with indignation the suspicion that he was willing to subject his poor neighbor to a hazard, from the mutilations of

the ignorant, to which he would not for a moment think of exposing himself. Yet such is the inevitable consequence of the present state of anatomical study in this Commonwealth; and there is no reason to believe that this state of things will improve, unless the enlightened are bold enough to undertake to dispel the prejudices of the ignorant.

To those who love the country of their nativity, and who are disposed to give it a high rank in the scale of intelligence and improvement, it is mortifying that one great and useful profession should be borne down by a prejudice which other communities have dispelled. The study of Anatomy is pursued with perfect freedom in most of the great States and cities of this country. In New York, in Philadelphia, in Baltimore, in Charleston, S. C., there are no unnecessary impediments to a free and full acquirement of anatomical knowledge; and great sums of money are carried to those States where it is permitted, from those in which it is discouraged. Nor, probably, would this feeling of hostility to anatomical pursuits exist in the degree it does here, had it not been encouraged by severe laws, and excited by proclamations and publications, setting forth its horrors in the most alarming and exciting language.

Is it not time for our well-instructed editors, our legislators and magistrates, to break off the shackles of prejudice and superstition from the community under their influence, and to give them those liberal views that are becoming the philosophic and philanthropic spirit of the age?

We are aware, that if our wishes are ever realized, an increased burden will be thrown upon the profession,—and the practice of physic is already no sinecure. The road to eminence, in which all hope to travel, is the rugged, toilsome path of labor and endeavor: it has no bowers of ease and luxurious reclining. The physician will receive no immediate personal benefit by superadding to his present labors the additional one of anatomical dissections; for this every physician must do, to keep pace with the improvement of his profession. But he will reap an ample reward in seeing the true dignity and respectability of his profession advanced, and its beneficial influence upon the health and happiness of the human race abundantly increased.

A. L. PEIRSON, JOHN C. WARREN, WILLIAM INGALLS, GEO. C. SHATTUCK, JOHN WARE, NATHANIEL MILLER, JOHN BROOKS, JOHN D. WELLS, NEHEMIAH CUTTER,	}	<i>Committee.</i>
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Boston, Dec. 1829.

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- A. L. PIERSON
- JOHN C. WALTER
- WILLIAM WOODMAN
- GEO. G. EVANS
- JOHN WALKER
- WILLIAM WALKER
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- JOHN D. WELLS
- WILLIAM WALKER

London, Dec. 1820.