

Remarks on the letters of Dr. Home, to the Right Honourable the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Town-Council.

Publication/Creation

Edinburgh : [publisher not identified], [1821]

Persistent URL

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REMARKS

ON

THE LETTERS OF DR HOME,

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD PROVOST,
MAGISTRATES AND TOWN-COUNCIL.

DR HOME is pleased to consider testimonials of character as liable to fallacy, because they are "obtained either from the partiality of friendship, or by the importunity of solicitation." Most candidates, however, have no other way of making their claims known: It is the mode usually adopted, and that which the Honourable Patrons themselves point out: and it is for them to decide from the rank, the character and the station of those who give such testimonials, of the comparative weight that should attach to them. Acting on this opinion, Dr HOME, at first, declined producing any testimonial; but, if we are not misinformed, he has since condescended to bring forward one from the Medical Faculty, of which he is himself a member, and in which faculty, others, beside himself, are immediately interested in the event of his election. It is however probable he will consider such testimonial as proceeding neither from motives of interest, nor "extracted by importunity, nor flowing from the partiality of friendship." It is the object of these remarks to examine the other mode of recommendation employed by Dr HOME; namely, "the increase in the number of Students in Materia Medica since he began to teach the class,"—and to discover how much of such increase is to be attributed to natural and necessary circumstances, and how much to the presumed superior merits of the teacher.

Dr HOME makes a comparison between the number of Students in the Materia Medica Class during the last years of his Predecessor's life, and the latter years of his own, asserting the increase to be fivefold;—"a relative increase," he adds, "greater than has taken place in any other class in the University during the same period." It is however to be observed, that the *late* Dr HOME's class (from circumstances we do not wish to recall) had sunk greatly below that of the contemporary classes: and, consequently, the *present* Dr HOME's class, in regaining its ordinary level, must have made a rise proportionally greater. Thus, at the very time the *late* Dr HOME could reckon only fifty-one out of five hundred Students, his contemporary, the *late* Dr MONRO, could count several hundred Students in the Anatomical Class;—a disproportion owing, in great part, to the opinion entertained at the time of the respective teachers. In fact, Dr HOME, in this instance, can take extraordinary merit to himself, only we fear, by founding on the unpopularity of his Predecessor as a Lecturer, although as an Author still retaining considerable reputation.

Admitting, however, the great increase in the number of Materia Medica Students, we proceed next to state the chief causes of it.

1. From the increased population and wealth of the empire, the total number of Medical Students has much increased since Dr HOME's incumbency; and more particularly from the state of warfare in which the country has, during that period, been engaged. Of these Students, a much larger proportion also take Degrees in Medicine now than formerly. Of these facts, Dr HOME's statements, with other collateral evidence, afford ample proof. Thus, during the latter period of Dr FRANCIS HOME's incumbency, the average number of Medical Students attending the University is stated to have been 500; and during the same period, the average number of Graduates was, we believe, 33. In the *first* ten years of Dr JAMES HOME's incumbency, the average number of Students was 691, and that of Graduates 47. And during the *last* ten years, the average number of Students has been 794, and that of Graduates 84. By the Statutes of the University, all Candidates for degrees (except the very small number of those who have previously attended a similar class in another University) are compelled to attend the Materia Medica Class: and in three of the most prosperous years of that Class, (those of 1817, 18, 19,) the average number of Graduates was 104, almost all of whom must previously have been Pupils of the Materia Medica Class.

2. By a regulation of the Royal College of Surgeons, in 1807 or 1808, all Candidates for a Surgical Diploma were enjoined to attend, with certain other Classes there specified, that of Materia Medica, taught in some University, or by a member of one of the Colleges of Physicians or of Surgeons. Now the number of Surgical Diplomas granted in the years above mentioned (*viz.* 1817, 18, and 19), was on the average 112. But this attendance on Materia Medica was not made compulsory on those who had served an apprenticeship of three years. Of these apprentices we do not accurately know the number. Dr HOME has not stated it: but we are convinced that his assertion, that "by very far the largest portion of those who apply for Surgical Diplomas" are of this class, is incorrect; and that the contrary is the fact. It is certain, by inspecting the lists furnished by Dr HOME himself, that *after* this regulation of the College, the number of Students in his class rapidly increased. This may perhaps be in part attributed to the circumstance of Dr H. having no rival in teaching his department; for although the late Dr MURRAY (whose talents were so highly estimated) gave Lectures on Materia Medica, yet, from not being a Fellow of either College until a few years before his death, his Tickets for that Class could not be received as a qualification; nor, after he became a Fellow of the College of Physicians, could his tickets be received, as the few courses he gave were only of *three* months' duration, instead of *six* months, as required by the College. Duly considering all these circumstances, we think ourselves near the truth in stating, that, for these three years, at least *two-thirds* of the whole number of Licentiates of the College must necessarily have attended Dr HOME's class.

3. In the *total* numbers of his Pupils, Dr HOME includes those who availed themselves of the privilege of *gratuitous* tickets for a second course. This privilege, not granted, we believe, by any other Professor, necessarily operates as a temptation or

bounty to many Students to enter the Class; inasmuch-as for *one* fee they may get *two* courses of Lectures. Dr HOME does not mention the year in which he first gave this privilege; but looking at the table presented by himself, we conjecture it must have been about the year 1813 or 14; since, from that period, we observe a sudden and very considerable rise in the number of the *second year's* pupils. Of course, this privilege must contribute greatly to augment the *total numbers* of his class: and we find accordingly, on looking at his lists for the years before specified, viz. 1817, 18, and 19, the average number of *gratis* students to be 68, which reduces the *total* average of these three years from 270 to 210.

If, therefore, from the facts stated above, we estimate, *first*, the number of Pupils of *Materia Medica* who become Graduates: *secondly*, the number who obtain Surgical Diplomas; and, *thirdly*, the number of *gratuitous* Students on Dr HOME's lists,—and deduct all these from the average *totals* of his class, only a small number will remain on the list, and which may, in great part, be accounted for by the casualties that arise from Students who prosecute their Studies with the view of taking a Medical Degree or Surgical Diploma, and who afterwards either abandon their professional pursuits here, or fail altogether in obtaining their object.

With regard to contemporary Professors, whom Dr HOME states himself to have so greatly surpassed, we would just beg to mention, that, if we compare two distant periods, for example the years 1800 and 1819, it will be found, we believe, that the increase of Students in the Class of "*Institutions of Medicine*" is greater than in that of *Materia Medica* taught by Dr HOME: for, if we are not mistaken, the number in the former class at the *first* period was about 90,—in the *second* above 200; while in the *Materia Medica* Class, the number, as given by Dr HOME, was 98 in the year 1800, and in 1819, after deducting the *gratuitous* pupils, it was, on the same authority, only 199.—Again, in the Anatomy Class, where the Professor has to contend with numerous and powerful rivals, the number in 1819 was higher than Dr HOME's, or upwards of 200. In the Botany Class of the same period, (which Surgical Students are not required to attend,) the number, notwithstanding, was, we believe, about 170. Of the two other classes, that of the Practice of Physic, taught by the late illustrious Dr GREGORY, and that of Chemistry so ably taught by the present Professor, we need not enter into comparisons. All these facts go to prove, that the merits of Dr HOME, as estimated by the number of his Pupils, do not surpass, in any one instance, those of his contemporary Professors; and in two instances, at least, they fall remarkably below them.

Dr HOME dwells largely, and very properly, on the opportunities of *Clinical Practice* which he has enjoyed; but it should be borne in mind, that the twenty-three years of such practice, during which he delivered eighteen Course of Lectures, affords, in fact, but about four and a half years of actual practice; since each Course of Lectures is but of three months' duration. He has, besides, been nearly *thirty* years one of the Physicians of the Royal Dispensary, and "for many years performed more than his

own share of the duties:" and in addition to this, he has also been one of the Physicians of the Queensberry Fever Hospital; and speaks, with due complacency, of "the great success which has attended his exertions." And yet, with all these meritorious exertions and advantages, Dr HOME has never succeeded in obtaining any share of private practice,—or, as he chooses to express it, has "derived no knowledge of the Practice of Physic from the lucrative exercise of the profession." It is indeed sufficiently curious to remark, that, since the death of Dr GREGORY, although we have in our Medical Chairs not fewer than six learned Physicians, yet, in this, the first Medical School in Europe, and the Metropolis of an ancient kingdom, the whole Medical Practice of all these learned persons would not, we believe, equal in amount that of several *single* Physicians, or even Surgeons, who never enjoyed the advantage which a Professorial Chair is ordinarily supposed to bestow.

