

[Circular letter. Begins] Dear Sir, For some years past the College have required from every candidate.

Contributors

Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

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DEAR SIR,

FOR some years past the College have required from every Candidate for a Diploma, not merely a Ticket of Admission to the necessary Lectures, but a certificate of actual attendance upon these Lectures. The College have judged it necessary, that before any one shall be considered qualified to practise Surgery, he must submit himself to examination, and must satisfy his Examiners as to his acquirements; but at the same time, they consider regular attendance on a prescribed course of study to be indispensable for obtaining these acquirements, and hence they insist upon evidence of such attendance.

The whole value of these Certificates must depend upon their correctness; and if they can be obtained by Students who do not merit them, not only will the intention of the College be frustrated, but one important motive to diligence and industry will be withdrawn. I am aware that, in the opinion of some, Certificates of Attendance are not considered of much importance. It is argued that the Teacher ought to make his instructions attractive to the Student; that if they are so, no additional motive will be necessary to secure his regular attendance; and that if they are not so, the best contrived expedients will fail in obtaining it. I am far from undervaluing the truth which is contained in this remark, and I trust that the Lecturers will persevere in their attempts to make instruction as attractive as is consistent with their duty. But we ought never to forget, that while some Students are possessed of virtuous principles and studious habits so strong as to make other motives unnecessary, and while others are so incurably indolent or unprincipled as to make our efforts for their good nearly hopeless, the great bulk of young men attending Classes are so constituted as to require for the successful prosecution of their studies, all the motives which can be brought to bear on them. One of the most influential of these is the fear of rejection on their final examination, and hence there is active exertion, even with the most indolent,

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for some time before this. The fear of being refused a Certificate has recently begun to operate as another motive; and every one who has had much intercourse with Students must have observed the beneficial influence of this fear. It is to be regretted that our system of instruction in this School offers so few *inducements to excel*, (and I hope this subject will be seriously considered); but were the Certificates given in strict accordance with merit, the hope of obtaining a good testimonial would operate as strongly as the fear of obtaining none. Now, if a young man, who has no extraordinary love of study, and who feels powerfully the temptations to idleness by which he is surrounded, finds that his neglect of duty will be unnoticed by his teacher, and that his irregular attendance will be rewarded by a "regular" certificate, what consequence is to be expected but continued misconduct?

I cannot suppose that any Lecturer in Edinburgh will give a false certificate; the body are too respectable to allow me for a moment to cherish so unworthy a suspicion. But I fear that instances are not infrequent of certificates being given where the teacher has not actually ascertained, but merely presumes, the regular attendance which he certifies. The natural unwillingness to disoblige, and the amiable desire of hoping the best, operate, it is to be feared, in the present competition which prevails among the Teachers, in the way of giving certificates with too little caution, and too little discrimination. It is the strong belief that such cases do occur, and my having learned, in conversation with Lecturers, the want of those means by which regular attendance can be ascertained, that have led me to take the liberty of addressing these remarks to you, with the view of requesting your serious attention to the subject.

You are well aware of the method lately adopted by the Professors, to enable them to ascertain and to record the attendance of their pupils. It is an imperfect system,—it is at best an approximation only to the truth, and I fear that in some cases it is rendered nugatory by fraud;* but still it is a decided improve-

* The method adopted by one Professor, of requiring each pupil to lay down a card on his table, instead of merely giving it to the door-keeper, is much more likely to be successful.

ment upon the former state of things, and has already done good in numerous instances. Could not it, or some similar method, be adopted by the extra Collegiate Lecturers? Where the number of pupils is considerable, something of the kind seems to me indispensable, if any thing like a faithful and discriminating testimonial is to be awarded at the end of the course. It is not possible for a teacher, when his attention is engaged at lecture, to know correctly who are present and who are absent; and if he should know, how is he to retain in his memory the actual attendance of each pupil till the end of the course? Where the class is smaller, such an expedient may be thought unnecessary; and there is no doubt that the teacher will know, and will recollect pretty correctly, the general attendance and studious habits of each of his pupils. But he will possess no record of this attendance, no data but his own recollection, to found a testimonial upon; and should a certificate not be asked at the time, but after the interval of some years, he will feel much at a loss in giving a correct one.

Upon the whole, some artificial expedient for ascertaining and recording the attendance of each Student, appears to me to be indispensable for securing the value of the certificates given to them. The subject is one of so much importance, that I am desirous of bringing it under the attention of the College, that some regulation may be enacted, securing the requisite evidence, and at the same time relieving the teacher from unpleasant feelings, in refusing a certificate, by enabling him to refer to a law which he is bound to obey. I respectfully request your matured suggestions on the subject, sensible that you are better fitted for seeing the different bearings of it than I can be; and from the combined opinions of the Lecturers, who are Fellows of the College, some plan may be devised, of more practical value than the hints of an individual.

It is obvious that no enactment of the kind (should it be adopted by the College), will have reference to the present Session. But it is highly desirable that the certificates to be given at its conclusion should be as correct as the existing system will admit of. I therefore beg that even now some attention may be paid to the subject; and I trust that no considera-

tion will deter you from withholding a certificate when you believe it is not merited.

I request also, that every certificate shall bear the date when it is given; that both the ticket and the certificate shall have the year written in letters, and not in figures alone (as 1834-5-five) and that the name of the Student shall be given in full and not in initials.

In concluding, allow me to express my hearty wishes for the success of the Medical School of this city, and for the Teachers connected with the College of Surgeons, who have done, and are now doing, so much to maintain its reputation and efficiency.

I am, DEAR SIR,

Yours truly,

WM. BROWN.

25. DUBLIN STREET,

24th March 1835.