

LETTER TO LADIES,  
IN FAVOR OF  
FEMALE PHYSICIANS  
FOR THEIR OWN SEX.

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## EDITORIAL OPINIONS.

Though this is but a pamphlet, it is a publication of more interest and importance than are most of the large volumes that are presented for our notice. \* \* This Letter presents a large amount of information, both local and general, in a style plain and convincing, yet admirably delicate and judicious. *Boston Traveller.*

We cheerfully notice the publication of this interesting Letter on an interesting subject. *Boston Post.*

The subject Dr. Gregory has so sensibly touched upon is really an interesting one, and we think if his Letter should be generally and candidly read, it would impress some people with some new ideas of more importance than they had ever imagined. *Boston Bee.*

We wish the work might be generally circulated. We know something experimentally of the advantages of a Female Physician in our own family; of the greater delicacy, comfort, and success, which attend their labors in certain cases: and we feel a desire that others shall know of these advantages; and that they may do so, we commend to them the study of this able Letter. *Bangor Whig and Courier.*

This Letter treats of a subject of great importance to society, and one that has hitherto been too much neglected. We commend it to general attention. *Portland Transcript.*

This Letter should be in the hands of every American woman. It is upon a subject in which she is deeply interested. *National Era, Washington, D. C.*

The author of this work has performed a service for humanity. Thousands and hundreds of thousands should read this little work, and shape their course accordingly. *Northern Christian Advocate, Auburn, N. Y.*

We have a pamphlet written by the able and earnest Secretary of the Female Medical Education Society, from which we will give an extract in order to induce our readers to send for the whole. It ought to be circulated throughout the Union. *Godley's Lady's Book.*

### Extracts from Letters to the Secretary of the N. E. Female Medical College.

*From Ex-Governor Wm. Slade, of Vermont.*

Having met with your "Letter to Ladies, in favor of Female Physicians for their own Sex," I cannot refrain from giving you a word of approval and encouragement. I am much impressed with some of the reasons urged by you for the employment of female physicians in complaints peculiarly incident to women, and especially in connection with the birth of children. It seems to me that no intelligent and humane physician can hesitate to approve any well-directed effort to bring female talent into this department of his profession. I have nothing to say of "women's rights," as claimed by many; but I am most deeply convinced that the sphere of woman's usefulness may be enlarged — and that it may with great propriety, and greatly to the alleviation of female suffering, take the direction that the Female Medical Education Society are laboring to give it. I need not add that I wish you great success in this effort to do good.

*From Judge Joel W. White, Norwich, Ct.*

Your "Letter to Ladies," relating to the objects of the Female Medical Education Society, of which you are Secretary, has been read by me with great interest. No institution, in my opinion, has stronger claims upon public benevolence for its support than the Medical College conducted and sustained by your association, whose object is to remove a large amount of female suffering.

The ideas by you advanced have induced me to become a contributor to the amount of \$20, the fee of life membership of your society. Enclosed you will find a check on the Suffolk Bank for the amount, which please apply for the support of your institution.

*From Rev. Luther Wright, Woburn, Mass.*

Enclosed are \$20, the sum requisite to constitute me a life member of the Female Medical Education Society. Among the philanthropic and Christian enterprises of the day, I think the one in which you are engaged is especially entitled to favor and support; it accordingly gives me pleasure to contribute something at present, with the hope of doing more at another time. It appears to me that persons who have wealth to appropriate to benevolent objects could not make a more advantageous investment for the good of society, and of the race, than by endowing the institution that your association is engaged in establishing.

*From Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, Philadelphia.*

I am happy to enclose you the name and subscription of one life member of the Female Medical Education Society. \* \* I shall greatly rejoice if I can aid this grand and good cause in which you are engaged, heart and soul; and you may rely on my assurance of doing what I can. I have given away all the pamphlets you sent me. The "Letter to Ladies" is much esteemed, and the Report of the Massachusetts Legislature is high authority. Can you favor me with another package of these pamphlets?

*From Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, Hartford, Ct.*

Please accept my earnest thanks for the Reports of your Society, and especially for the admirable pamphlet addressed to our sex, by your own pen, which you have had the kindness to send me. Of the latter it is impossible to speak too highly.

[The note from which the above was taken enclosed \$20, the fee of life membership to the Female Medical Education Society. The following is from a subsequent letter.]

I rejoice that your philanthropic design advances in public estimation, which I am sure it will continue to do, being founded upon the immutable laws of nature, and also a palpable element of true patriotism. \* \* Boston, in former days, took the lead of all our cities in, liberally sustaining noble plans, and, I trust, still preserves that character.

*From Mrs. Emma Willard, Troy, N. Y.*

Having just found time to peruse your interesting "Letter to Ladies," I am ready to say that I heartily approve your views. Women need instruction, and such an institution as yours to receive and educate them and I wish to your praiseworthy efforts every encouragement.

*From Mrs. Almira Lincoln Phelps, Patapsco Female Institute, Maryland.*

I am happy to send you the enclosed \$20, the fee of life membership of the Female Medical Education Society.

It has long been my opinion that the science of medicine should be cultivated by women, especially in those departments in which women are peculiarly interested. It has required a great amount of moral courage to brave public prejudice on this subject; but the work is begun, and can never retrograde. Your Society is doing much to aid it, and you have my best wishes for success.

\* The corporate name is now "New England Female Medical College," and donors are called "Patrons," instead of Members. See 3d page of cover.

## TO THE LADIES.

THESE pages are addressed to you, ladies, because it is your welfare chiefly that they were designed to promote; and upon your influence and aid must depend, in a great measure, the success of the object recommended.

By a candid consideration of the testimony herein presented, you will, it is hoped, be induced to encourage the education of suitable females to share in the duties of the medical profession, especially those that pertain to their own sex.

This course will introduce among the female portion of the community, generally, a better knowledge of the means of preserving and restoring health—a knowledge which their own physical well being, and that of the race, demands that they should possess. By thus extending their intelligence and usefulness, in a sphere so peculiarly appropriate, they will not only enjoy the satisfaction of accomplishing greater good, but will strengthen their claims to honor and esteem.

Every one, who is at all acquainted with this subject, must be aware that great inconvenience and unnecessary suffering, mental and physical, result from confining this knowledge and these qualifications to male physicians, on account of the delicate relations which exist between the sexes, and the proper regard of which is indispensable to the best interests of society.

With a deep conviction of the importance of the object presented in these pages, it is earnestly commended to the favor and support of the intelligent, benevolent, and Christian women of the community, by

THE AUTHOR.

Boston, January 1, 1850.

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perish at birth, as to know how many leave the world after a stay of a few hours, days, or weeks, and are reported under the head "infantile diseases." At any rate, there are as good reasons for it now as there have been in time past.

From the data furnished by the new registry of births, some other important considerations can be presented. There are three hundred physicians in this city: 4200 cases of midwifery would give them on an average fourteen each — not enough to make them adepts in the art; but, on account of the repugnance to employing young physicians in these duties, they have less than their share of cases, next to none at all, while the older and more celebrated are overwhelmed with applications; so that some cannot do justice to their patients for the want of skill, and others for the want of time. As the *age* would not be a matter of so much consequence to female practitioners, the business would be more equally distributed among them.

I am very well aware that the medical profession, in consequence of an over supply of members, has but a poor remuneration from all the duties that now pertain to it, and I regret as much as any one the inconvenience that may result to some physicians from restoring the practice of midwifery to females; but a measure recommended by so many and weighty considerations should receive the support even of those who may be temporarily discommoded.

Suppose, now, that these forty-two hundred cases of childbirth, instead of being attended by three hundred gentlemen, were intrusted to forty-two good women every way qualified for the office, — and surely Boston could furnish that number of females, of just the right description, to be educated and employed as sage-femmes, — one hundred cases in a year, or about two a week, would be a moderate practice without attending to other departments. They could, of course, devote ample time to their patients, and would never be interrupted by the miscellaneous duties of the medical practitioner.

The number of females being considerably larger than that of males, in consequence of the recruiting of armies and

navies, the loss of men at sea, and, in this section, the constant emigration, women need all the occupations for which they are adapted. So their performance of these duties, instead of being a loss of labor to the community, would relieve the widow and her children from want, and the relatives or the public from the necessity of sustaining hundreds and thousands of females who have both the ability and the disposition to support themselves if they could only have the opportunity.

But man, the lord of creation, has the world before him, and can choose his profession or pursuit—war, politics, agriculture, commerce, mechanic arts, mercantile affairs, (not excepting ribbon and tape,) and a thousand vocations and diversions; and, not content with these, he must wrest from the long-suffering and ever-yielding sex the more responsible and dignified of their duties, deprive them of the honor of presiding over the nativity of mankind—a calling which Heaven and Nature designed them, and them alone, to pursue.

There are said to be forty thousand physicians in the United States. Twenty thousand of these ought to give place to this number of women, and turn their attention to pursuits better adapted to their strong muscles and strong minds than is this waiting with ladies from two to twenty hours, and this simple, mechanical routinism of midwifery. Indeed, physicians of good intellectual and scientific attainments do consider it beneath their qualifications; and when circumstances permit they are glad to be rid of it, and devote themselves to departments better calculated to exercise their mental capacities.

In addition to providing for the self-support of twenty thousand or more women, this change would release that number of men, and secure to the country the benefits of their mental and manual industry—quite an item in our political economy and national wealth. Of course this very desirable change cannot be brought about so suddenly as to create any great disturbance in the established order of

things, even if the enterprise is carried forward with all possible vigor; so that physicians now in the field need not be greatly alarmed in prospect of female competitors.

There are probably three thousand young men annually assembled in the medical schools of the country. Let half of the prospective pupils turn their attention to other pursuits, and the same number of females be put in a course of training, and the proper division of professional duties will gradually be established between the sexes. If at first but a quarter of the male should give place to female pupils, (and there ought to be that number at least,) the change would be still more gradual. But, in fact, every one ought to wish that the whole business of midwifery could be immediately transferred to women; for every instance of the real or supposed necessity of employing a man in such a case is an unfortunate occurrence and one to be lamented.

There is not all the necessity which some people imagine for these severe trials of female sensibility. In the Southern States, the colored women perform these services to a great extent, and that without knowing the first letter of the alphabet. An editor of this city, during a temporary residence at the south, employed one of those natural Ethiopian doctresses to attend his lady in confinement, and with the most satisfactory results. A gentleman who had resided in Arkansas remarked to the writer that one of his neighbors there owned a famous practitioner of this description, who spent her whole time in riding from the residence of one planter to another, and was a source of quite an income to her master.

Thomas Ewell, M. D., of Virginia, a distinguished physician, honorary member of the Philadelphia Medical Society, and an eminent author, appeals to the ladies upon this subject in the following graphic and earnest manner:—

“In some parts of our country the negro women, feeling their ignorance, and fearful of harming their mistresses, hesitate in acting until they accidentally discover the powers of Nature: they then obtain great reputation in the practice of

midwifery, rivalling the most renowned doctors of the trade. They soon discover the secret that Nature does all the business, and that they have only to keep themselves quiet and pocket the credit of the operation.

"Indeed, considering the extraordinary facilities which Nature has provided for the birth of the humankind, considering the numbers who bring forth daily without suffering, it seems wonderful how so many ladies on these occasions can make such an ado about the affair, can so idly injure themselves with unhappy conceits, can apprehend any thing but the most fortunate termination of their case.

"But the cause of all such groundless fears may be traced to the arts and ignorance of designing persons. A thousand times more notice is taken of one little irregularity of the attendants than of the many cases Nature conducts without aid. This operates on the fears of the women; each considers that the worst may be her case; assistants at extravagant rates are sent for; and they pocket commonly very handsomely for the folly of the patient. I beseech you, for the sake of decency, of justice to your attendants, of charity to poor women, abandon such improper infatuation. Believe the truth, that, in ten thousand instances to one of the contrary, women can render you all proper assistance without the meddling of men operators. Their hurry, their spirit for acting, have certainly done more harm than all the improper conduct of women, of which they are so fond of talking."

When physicians, whose own interests and that of their profession would lead them to sustain the present system, speak in this strong manner against it, women ought certainly to believe their testimony.

A SUCCESSFUL MIDWIFE. — The following inscription, taken from a gravestone in the Old Burying Ground, in our neighboring city of Charlestown, will show in what high esteem these professional women were held in this vicinity less than a century ago : —

"Here lyes Interred the Body of Mrs. Elizabeth Phillips, wife to Mr. John Phillips, who was Born in *Westminster*, in