

*Whelan's Ed.*  
Bell (John)  
MEMORIAL

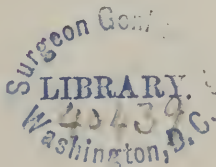
TO THE

TRUSTEES

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

*by* ✓  
*John Bell.*



PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY EDMOND BARRINGTON AND GEORGE D. HASWELL.

1850.



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GENTLEMEN:

THE undersigned, as a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, who, in its palmy days, has listened to the lessons of a Wistar, a Physick, a Chapman, and a Rush, through the readings of his gifted son, cannot regard with indifference any measure bearing on the fortunes of his *Alma Mater*. His early and continued advocacy of a high educational standard in the Medical Department, may now be referred to in justification of the present memorial, in which this theme will be brought before you, under a belief, on his part, that the importance of the cause must secure your attention, even though the manner in which it is pleaded should fail to gain your undivided suffrages.

The undersigned, on his return from foreign travel and study, seized on every suitable occasion to impress on the minds of the professors, and of his professional brethren generally, the propriety and necessity of an increase in the number of branches to be taught, and of an extension of the lecture term. He would cite, in proof of the accuracy of this statement, a paper on Medical Education, written by him, and published in the *North*

*American Medical and Surgical Journal*, as long ago as the year 1826.

He believes that his representations on the subject, coupled with the fact of his having taught the Institutes of Medicine for some years, in the course of summer instruction in the Medical Institute of Philadelphia, had a no small share of influence in inducing the Board of Trustees of the University to agree to the proposal of Dr. Chapman, that the latter should be allowed an assistant, whose duties were to consist in lecturing on this branch. A great step was thus made towards the creation of a separate chair of the Institutes of Medicine.\*

While supporting the just interests of your institution, the undersigned has not withheld his friendly criticism on what he believed to be wrong in its course. His frankness in this way may have been displeasing to the Medical Faculty, as conflicting with its notions of temporary expediency and pliant policy. Be this as it may, he cannot abandon, at once, his early habit of watchful regard for the prosperity of the University, nor withhold some remarks and suggestions to your honourable body, of a tenor similar to that in which he would have spoken to his colleagues of the Faculty, if he had been made one of its members.

In the performance of this somewhat irksome task, the under-

\* The present incumbent of the chair, who was also Dr. Chapman's assistant previously, may not perhaps remember the instrumentality which the undersigned had, in the way stated, in procuring him his first appointment. He certainly could not have been mindful of the fact, stated to him at the time by the undersigned, that the latter, during the canvass, some years ago, for filling the chairs of *Materia Medica* and of the Institutes of Medicine, took particular pains to tell the Trustees, on whom he called, that he was only to be regarded as a candidate for the chair of the Institutes, in the event of the lecturer on this subject being elected to the chair of *Materia Medica*, a post which he (the lecturer) was very anxious to obtain. Notwithstanding this explanation of the views of the undersigned, he received a vote in the Board very little short of that given to the lecturer on the Institutes, who, failing in his attempts on *Materia Medica*, was fain to fall back on his first branch.

It is very clear to the undersigned, that if he had acted with that entire regard for self, so characteristic of Faculty movements, and pressed his claims in a direct manner, without regard to the feelings and wishes of the other chief candidate, he would have been elected to the chair of the Institutes of Medicine.

signed reciprocates, with a sincerity equal to their own, the friendly feelings which he learns were professed for him on a recent occasion, by a majority of the Faculty, when they tripped him up, just as he was within reach of the goal of his ambition, and unsuspecting of ambush or unfair design. If his comments sometimes assume the form of strictures, he must claim the privilege of a recognised observer, who scans the merits of performers in certain parts, but without touching their character and conduct off the stage. It is with their professorial, not professional nor personal deportment, that the undersigned has to deal. If they have acted badly,—still in the histrionic sense,—excited ridicule when they hoped to win applause, and destroyed the prestige from former success by present failures, they are not, on these accounts, to be deemed less skilful physicians and surgeons, nor less esteemed for their social worth, be the same more or less.

A slight comparison of the present with the past will place the subject more distinctly before your Board, and incline you more readily to give a favourable ear to some suggestions which will follow.

The painful fact cannot be concealed, that the fair creation of a Shippen, a Rush, a Physick, and a Wistar, shows unequivocal signs of decay. In times past, Chapman embellished what Rush had created. Dorsey furnished lucid commentaries on the Principles of American Surgery, first laid down by Physick. Dewees added his practical precepts to the tasteful prelections of James on Obstetrics. Wistar, although wanting the elocution and *facetie* of his predecessor Shippen, imparted an interest and a charm to Anatomy beyond all that could be expected from the most practised orator. Barton, unequal, but often able and eloquent, knew well how to bring out the chief points in *Materia Medica*, and to enliven his subject by varied illustrations.

Then were the halls of the University resonant with the teachings of genius, fashioned by science and adorned by literature. Then did the ingenuous youth flock from all parts of the country to imbibe the lessons of a wise experience and a truthful philosophy. But now, how changed the scene! In the teaching of Anatomy, the earnestness of manner and the expressive tones of Wistar are replaced by a fashion of speech and gesture which

reminds us of a Maelzel's automaton! The annals of Anatomy show that your institution does not present the first instance of a teacher who has a knowledge of the structure of the human frame, and yet who is ignorant of the structure of a sentence. There are words in the one case as there are bones and muscles in the other; but both are alike dull and dead, and separated from their connections, as if by the same pitiless scalpel. No philosophy is borrowed from the pages of the Natural Theology of a Paley. No poetry snatched from the Childe Harold: no jest, with its fine moral, from Hamlet. Nothing to enliven, nothing to diversify, nothing applied to expression for the sculptor, the painter, or poet, finds a place in the anatomical muster roll of your literal professor.

But, in a person who holds forth on the Institutes, or, as it is sometimes called, the Philosophy, of Medicine, we have a right to expect a *facundia oris* united with a *lucidus ordo*, and at least a clear and well-arranged form of expression, so necessary to sound dialectics. The present professor has certainly an uncommon, though it cannot be called a perfectly original style. It belongs, in fact, to the school of Jeremy Bentham, bating its philosophy. It is a Benthamee dialect. Whether our professor will be as fortunate as the illustrious Englishman, and find a zealous disciple, a second Dumont, who will give a clear paraphrase in French, a translation of which into English will render his lucubrations intelligible, is a consummation more devoutly to be wished than seriously expected. Still, however, let us hope. Are not the Egyptian hieroglyphics being, at last, deciphered?

Is it the fault or the misfortune of the successor of James and Dewees, that the soporific influence which he might desire to exert over his patients with ether and chloroform overspreads his class when listening to his sedative discourses?

“Soft creeping, words on words, the sense compose  
At every line, they stretch, they yawn, they doze.”

Is it not possible for him to emit a single ray of genius, or even to scatter a few flowers of literature, to enliven the gloom, and to cheer his youthful followers on their way?



Shade of Physick ! what shall be said of your successor in the chair of surgery, who entertains his hearers with accounts of Liston and his favourite cat, and of Dieffenbach and his rapid driving and good dinners. His disquisitions on cookery and eating supply the place of observations on the Fine Arts. Are these the ethics and the art of surgery; all that could be gathered in foreign travel to bring before our American youth? The professor is evidently inspired with the ambition of the Epicurians of whom Horace speaks. He thinks more of the invention of a new patty than of a new instrument.

Sunt quorum ingenium nova tantum crustula promit.

Let it not be supposed that these professorial peculiarities are introduced here from any unkind feeling to the individuals who exhibit them. On the contrary, a knowledge of them is necessary, in order to enable us to do justice to the fears which the members of the Medical Faculty are said to have felt and expressed, lest a new professor of unpopular fashion of speech should be added to their number.

That a Faculty should deprecate any farther addition to the dulness, "Laborious, heavy, busy, bold and blind," with which it is already saturated, is very natural and very proper. At present, this body may be compared to water which holds in solution a large quantity of a bitter and deleterious salt, without the solution being changed in appearance; and it is only when the point of saturation is passed that there is a deposit of the foreign saline matter, obvious to the most casual observer. But it is not easy to understand the policy of the school, in its being afraid of learning, as well as of dulness; else why does it refuse, as opportunity offers, to receive a sprinkling of humane letters?

It is related of the learned author of the *Conspectus Medicinæ*, that he displayed more anxiety for its pure latinity than for its doctrinal accuracy; and that, hence, when composing it, he read Cicero three times for Celsus once. Some of our Faculty friends are more impartial, but in a somewhat different sense. They eschew, equally, both Cicero and Celsus—Addison and Good. They have no regard for the fiction of Grecian mythology, which supposes Apollo to be the tutelary deity of physicians. Their

sympathies are evidently in favour of Mercury, who, while he professes to take cloquence under his charge, has a keen eye to the money bags.

But the object of the undersigned in addressing your honourable body at this time, is not so much to institute comparisons, which the learned Dogberry has rightly declared to be "odorous," as to offer some suggestions, with a hope of at least retarding the downward course of his *Alma Mater*.

The present government of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania is an anomalous one. Ostensibly it, like that of the other departments, is vested in the Board of Trustees. In reality, it is exercised by the Medical Faculty. The former goes through the form of appointing; but the latter designates him who is to be the successful candidate. Were this designation made in a fair, open, regular, and authentic manner, so that the responsibility of the measure should rest on those from whom it originated, there would be no room for reprehension, scarcely even for complaint. The reasons for the preference having been openly stated could be openly discussed, and their real weight estimated; separating those which bore directly on the required qualifications of the candidate, from motives of personal regard for him, or of personal or professional pique or jealousy towards a less-favoured competitor.

At present, the Faculty, in its united and organized shape and functions, does not, we are told, address the Board of Trustees on the subject of new appointments; fearful, as we have heard it intimated, that any open recommendation made in this manner would be regarded by your body as an interference liable to rebuke. It would seem, however, that this course is infinitely preferable to the irregular one which is commonly followed. As things now are, a professor may call on a trustee or trustees, and suggest modifications and changes in the school, recommend a friend or disparage a rival, without his incurring the responsibility for an opinion, which emanating from other quarters would be subjected to the tests of comparison and proof. Neither his name, nor, if a party wishes to hunt in couples, that of his associate in secret calls, is revealed by the trustee, who, at the same time, may be so biassed by their representa-



tions or misrepresentations, as the case may be, as to give his vote in a way to destroy the hopes of a candidate founded on the labours and preparation of years. The alleged disqualification whispered by these secret visiters may be untrue, or greatly exaggerated, or equally if not still more applicable to their favourite, but still the successful, candidate.

Circumstances preceding the late elections in the Medical Department of the University, prove that the professors have, virtually, the power of filling vacancies, subject to certain forms gone through in your Board. It was enough, for example, for the brother and other friends of the Professor of *Materia Medica* to become the exponents of his wish, in their applications to you, that he should occupy the vacant chair of the Theory and Practice of Medicine, for him to be elected. In your Board his cause found a willing audience. You were disposed to believe that, as he had acquitted himself so well in the chair of *Materia Medica*, he ought to be gratified by a transfer to that of the Theory and Practice. The terms of this proposition contain, indeed, an antecedent and a sequence; but there is no logical connection to constitute them either a syllogism or an induction. They may, it is true, still be of use by confirming the assertion of some writers, that a theory of fallacies is a necessary part of logic. This novel fashion of argument supplied the place of any earnest investigation into the real grounds of the fitness of the Professor for the new post, and a comparison of his merits with those of other candidates. "Doctor Wood will be elected at once, to stop all competition," was the frank avowal of intention on the part of a member of your Board. Commonly, competition is encouraged, so as to give the parties on whom the duty devolves a wider range of selection, and thus increase the probability of their obtaining the highest order of talent and assured fitness for the office. In the present instance, it was not thought necessary to go beyond the magic circle of the old Faculty. True, the transfer implied, of necessity, a double experiment,—two vacancies to be filled instead of one. There are lucky blunders in war as in diplomacy. Let us hope that the recent educational movements of an institution on which fortune does not of late deign to smile, may be put on this same list of lucky blunders.

Equally potential as his implied wishes for his own transfer, were the declared ones of the new professor of the Theory and Practice in favour of his friend and protégé succeeding him in the chair of Materia Medica. It was carefully made known to you, that Dr. Wood's collection of plants and other specimens would be at the service of Dr. Carson, if the latter were elected. Of the reinforcement to his cause, at the eleventh hour, by other professors mention will soon be made. The whole affair shows conclusively, that the belief held by the undersigned, of the paramount influence exerted by the Faculty, and this in an indirect and unfair manner, in the matter of elections, is fully borne out.

These comments on the policy pursued by your Board, and on the course taken by the Faculty, are not intended to detract from the substantial merits of the newly-elected professors. Time will soon test the correctness of the different opinions which have been advanced respecting their ability to discharge their functions in an acceptable and useful manner.

During the period of which we are now speaking, a little by-play was attempted by some of the Faculty, under the supposition that they might indulge in a similar game to that so skilfully played by their leader. In anticipation of the expected transfer of the Professor of the Institutes to the chair of Materia Medica, when this should be rendered vacant by the election of its incumbent to that of the Theory and Practice, your attention was directed by some of the professors to the expediency (propriety was not the word) of curtailing the Institutes of Medicine to mere Physiology, in order to adapt it to the capacity of a young favourite. Even if this suggestion should not be adopted, you were asked to appoint this gentleman to the chair of the Institutes, although it was notorious that his attainments, substantial and praiseworthy as these are, fell utterly short of the experience, reading, extended observation, and familiarity with disease, required for the responsible post into which ill-judging friends thus wished to thrust him. Pains had been taken by three of the professors to prepare your minds for a scheme of this kind, alike odious to the profession, and in direct contradiction to the promises made by the

Medical Department of the University to raise the standard of medical education, in conformity with the recommendations of the American Medical Association.

When, at length, the opinion of the other members of the Faculty, and more particularly of that of their leader and director on this subject, was ascertained, your Board learned that no new action was called for in the premises. If the professors had been taught their true relations to your Board, this discreditable episode would have been prevented, and you saved a practical proof of the fallacy of the common belief, that the members of the Faculty know best their own interests, and those of their school; and, as a consequence, that their views are to prevail over all the facts, reasons, and policy adduced from other and disinterested quarters.

In what terms can the truthful student of his profession, who is accustomed to survey it in its grander scientific bearings and beautiful and harmonious proportions, speak of the attempts of those who would tear away some of its most useful and ornamental parts, to gratify the caprices of the hour? Some excuse may be offered for one of the three professors who were active on that occasion, in his frank acknowledgment that he did not know what was meant by the Institutes of Medicine. Another of the three, more wonderful to relate, was the professor of this branch! It may be, that he finds himself in the situation of an eminent preacher, who, on one occasion, stopped short in the middle of a sermon of a metaphysical cast, and said: "But we are afraid our hearers do not understand us. In fact we are not sure that we understand ourselves, and, therefore, we will change the subject." It is not often that our clerical brethren are accused of becoming obscure by delving too deep into metaphysical lore, although it has been alleged that they sometimes blind themselves and their flocks by raising a dust on old-travelled roads.

Whatever may be the conviction of the professor of the Institutes, on the score of his not understanding himself, certain it is, that a large number of his hearers are sadly puzzled to unravel his meaning. In kindness let us suppose that his is "the dark from excess of light" of which the poet speaks.

That the professor of Anatomy, accustomed as he is to the

handling and sight of dead matter, should forget that the organs have functions, and in his love of dissection want to cut up even the Institutes of Medicine, ought not to surprise us. *Physiology*, or the science of healthy functions, would fly at his approach. *Pathology*, or the science of diseased functions, would be resolvable, in his mind, into mere morbid anatomy—still dead structure—leaving unexplored a consideration of the causes, symptoms, signs, complication, and march of disease. *Hygiene*, or a knowledge and study of the modifications of the functions by all the agencies, both internal and external, to which man is subjected, and from which are deduced codes of public and of individual health, is, we fear, regarded by your professor in the light of a speculative science if not downright poetry.

This tripartite division of the Institutes of Medicine, so long received in the schools, and the several parts of which have been so often and elaborately described and investigated by the most distinguished writers and teachers in medicine, was about to be mangled if not destroyed by three of that body to whose counsels you are so prone to defer, as if they were based on knowledge, and matured by wisdom. We are afraid that it will be said of them—doctors but not *docti*,—professors indeed, but not teachers, who would not be recognized either in the school of Socrates, or of Plato, or of Aristotle. But it is not necessary to try them by so recon-dite a standard. If they had ever glanced at the pages of Boerhaave and Gaubius, in which the boundaries of the Institutes, more than a century ago, are defined, and at those of Allison and Williams, of the present day, they would have felt some compunction for their attempts on the noblest part of medical science—wanting which, it would soon be the prey of empirics and impostors of every degree.

Had the functions of the Medical Faculty been properly defined, in the time as well as the manner of their exercise, the majority of its members would not have been betrayed into a breach of ethics, not to use harsher, although it might be more correct, phraseology, in the recent canvass for the chair of *Materia Medica*. They would hardly have ventured to belie their professions of neutrality, by their calling on different gentlemen of your Board almost on the eve of the election, and by



making such statements as to drive them off from their intended support of a candidate, who, but for this interference, at this juncture, when he was deprived of the opportunity of reply, by explanation or denial, would in all probability have been elected.

In view of these irregular procedures, which, while they are hurtful to individuals cannot fail to be, at the same time, detrimental to the University, the undersigned would respectfully suggest, that the relations of the Medical Faculty to your Board be more clearly defined than they are at present, and, if need be, new ones established. The power and the responsibility for the exercise of this power ought to be in the same hands; and hence it is a question, worthy of consideration, whether it would not be advisable for the Faculty to be invested with power to fill vacancies occurring in its ranks; or, at least, to have the privilege of nominating candidates, from which list alone your Board could elect. In either case the Faculty would be more distinctly answerable for its conduct to the professional public than it now is. If the reason assigned for your so readily deferring to its wishes, even when irregularly and irresponsibly, and it may be insidiously expressed; viz., that it knows its own interests best, be valid, you can scarcely object to the proposed change. If, on the other hand, you believe that your supervision and control are beneficial and requisite, and it must be confessed that recent developments favour this view, then will you receive the opinions and representations of the Faculty with the same caution as you would evidence in general, and will make the customary deductions and allowances for fallacies and prejudices. From these the Faculty cannot boast exemption, even if it were illumined by a larger share of wisdom than its warmest friends claim for it.

But enough has been said to evince the necessity of a better defined government of the Medical Department of the University, and of repairing its worn out and somewhat clumsy machinery.

We have divine authority for the uselessness of piecing an old garment with new cloth. Still more vain is the attempt to rejuvenate an old and worn out body. Such a result is one of the promises of empirical pretenders, but it can only find credence

among the ignorant and the credulous. We can, indeed, cut off a mortified limb, cauterize excrescences, and stimulate a languid frame into somewhat quicker movements, and a nearer approach to healthy appetency; but, in order to do these things well and soon, we must consult with others than the patients themselves, and get other hands than theirs to use the knife and apply the caustic, or to compound the alteratives which are to work the desired changes in the chronically-diseased body.

If we would devise a suitable treatment, prior observation of the symptoms and signs of the disease must be made, so as to enable us to ascertain the extent of the deviations from the healthy standard. With this view, the undersigned would respectfully suggest some measures for your becoming better acquainted than heretofore with the frail body in your charge. At the very outset, it, like the subject of wasting consumption, may refuse to admit its own feebleness and decline, but these are not the less real, and call not the less urgently for the exercise of your collective wisdom and large experience.

In the first place, you must be supposed to be desirous of knowing the range of the several branches which are professed to be taught, the order and succession of topics, and their several relations to one another. Conformably with this intention, you will require each professor to place before you, at suitable intervals, a synopsis or a syllabus of his course of lectures, so as to allow of your seeing, at once, whether there is the desired conformity between the promise implied in the title of the chair, and the matters actually taught. Opportunity would, also, be given for your ascertaining the real standard of medical instruction in the college, and how far it approaches to the just requirements of the science of the day, and the usage in other institutions.

It would then be seen, for example, how little the strange medley of microscopic anatomy and histology, metaphysical fragments, transcendental conjectures and piebald aphorisms, now poured forth in Benthamite dialect from the chair of the Institutes, really represent the component parts of the subject,—Physiology, Pathology and Hygiene. By the first we study man in the discharge of his healthy functions; by the second when these are diseased; and finally, by the third, as he



is affected and modified by all the agents with which he is surrounded or to which he is subjected, both in his individual and social capacity. Each of these three sub-divisions is made the subject of a separate chair in many of the European schools. Combined, they form the true foundation of the Practice of Medicine, which, without their support, must rest on the props of empiricism and random conjecture, and be threatened every moment with downfall and ruin.

Next, we will suppose a syllabus of the surgical lectures in the University to be placed before you, for your inspection. It would be easy, in such a case, for you to see at a glance a lamentable omission of the Principles of Surgery; and, consequently, of those guiding precepts which teach the nature and progress of lesions of structure, and their constitutional sympathies and appropriate constitutional treatment. From the same full source will be obtained the means of prevention, which render a resort to destructive or operative surgery, or those operations that may be performed by any expert mechanic, unnecessary. It is this higher conservative and truly scientific part of surgery, deduced from general anatomy and pathology, and from a knowledge of the restorative processes set up by nature, which constitutes the greatness of the English school, in the teaching of John Hunter, and of the American school in that of Physick. What is now substituted for these instructive commentaries, and the lessons of a wise experience? Has modern science been invoked? Have the researches and experiments of a Bell, a Cooper, a Brodie, a Lawrence, a Macartney, or a Guthrie, been imitated? The ambition of your professor does not incite him to attempt the steep ascent of science, there to breathe at large with men of genius and of worth. His philosophy contents itself with common places and empirical details, set off by some indifferent wax figures and coarse paintings, and would that we could say, not seasoned by petty gossip, personalities, and the "jest unclean."

A syllabus would show the true relations which the lectures actually delivered bear to the title of the chair of Obstetrics and the Diseases of Women and Children. The last-mentioned division includes themes of large signification and scope, which require for their elucidation something more than a few nursery

aphorisms and scraps of dogmatic pathology, cked out with "so and so."

Applying the same test, you would see to what extent Chemistry is a handmaid to Medicine. In this relation, it ought to impart a knowledge of the chemical composition of the fluids and solids of the living body, and the changes to which the latter is subjected in the various states of health and disease, during respiration, digestion, circulation, and nutrition, as well as in the processes of secretion and calorification.

Your new professor of Materia Medica and Pharmacy will find no difficulty in imitating his predecessor, by preparing a full Syllabus of his course of lectures; but still leaving it in doubt, whether in the one, as in the other case, more extension might not be asked for Therapeutics, if we look to the real wants of the student and practitioner when they use the articles of the Materia Medica. It is not enough to say that such an article cures a disease, without we add the precise circumstances of general and local derangement to which it is applicable, and the remedial measures that ought to precede as well as to follow its administration. Unless these general principles of Therapeutics be inculcated, the lessons of Materia Medica go little beyond natural history and chemistry; and in all that relates to the cure of disease, they are merely aids to learned empiricism.

An incidental but a far from unimportant benefit, arising from a full and accurate syllabus of each of the course of lectures delivered in the University, would be to determine the reality of the promise held out from year to year, that the session is lengthened to six months. Is there a continuous and connected teaching of his branch by each professor during this period, in such a manner that students failing to attend in the first month, and going away in the last, are made to understand that they lose an integral part of the courses of instruction, and that an ignorance of this part will tell against them in their examination for a degree?

Mere odds and ends of lectures, themes taken up at random during the first month of the extended session, do not meet the requirements of the case, nor the expectations of too credulous friends.

*August 10th, 1850.*

JOHN BELL.