

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## FEMALE RESIDENT MEDICAL OFFICERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MEDICAL TIMES.

Dear Sir,—An article in your last issue touching the appointment of a "Medical Female" to office in the Bristol (Eng.) Hospital for sick children and the consequent resignation of the entire staff of medical men connected with the Institution leads me perforce to venture a few remarks upon the much vexed question at the present time as to the expediency of admitting women to full medical honours and degrees, or of licensing them to practise even if they do attain to a full curriculum of college study and pass the necessary examinations to secure a diploma, whether it be obtained at a Women's Medical College (as in the United States, and I believe now also in London) or at a great sacrifice (!) of feminine delicacy and dignity in the ordinary way. I have for years past been watching critically this new ambition of women to engage practically in the public arena of medical life, as tho' the "home circle" was, nowadays, so narrowed, and still narrowing, as to drive them forth to fill a great hiatus in the busy world as well as gratify their private vanity and feelings. Whenever I have been asked (and how very often in company when a gentleman is at a disadvantage to expatiate fully and reasonably too, is one taxed in this way) "Now, Doctor, what do you say against women becoming medical practitioners?" &c., &c., I briefly answer, "Let 'em try it on, instead of our being *jealous of competition*,"—an expression always sting in our teeth—we know that other causes are at work which will effectually drive them out of our way and give us the victory eventually. Not to harp upon sex and its unavoidable infirmities or disqualification, there is even the bugbear exhaustion looming in the distance, and if hard work breaks down so many medical men what is to become of the medical women, most of whom present the very opposite physique and constitutions necessary to a successful prosecution of the profession even half-way satisfactorily to themselves or the public. Again I say, How do you expect to make a living after all the necessary expenditure of time and money? My wife and her lady friends vow beforehand that they would never entrust themselves or their babies to a doctress! Men, only for a practical joke perhaps might occasionally consult you. None but some renegade medical man desirous of currying favour or notoriety would meet a doctress in consultation, and thus your sphere of usefulness would be so cut down as to almost cease. Then are the advocates of medical degrees silent if I in turn put the questions, "Are the ranks of physicians so thinned out as to require recruiting from those of women, with no home duties requiring attention, or dying of ennui? Or are the functions of existing physicians and surgeons so badly, imperfectly, or unsuccessfully performed as to need the undertaking of them by women? Finally, to avoid multiplying questions, is there any necessity—for who denies the *ability of woman* to qualify herself in any and every particular of medical science—to lure women into false hopes by opening up

avenues for medical vocations of a *special* or general character only to end in disappointment and disgust, if not to that worse and inevitable result, the degradation of a noble calling and dishonor to themselves, perhaps disgrace and punishment eventually at the hands of the law?

It has always appeared strange to me that the old University of Edinburgh should have entertained the admission of women for one moment in the face of facts so easily obtained; it would, however, seem that the Regents are coming to their senses on this matter, judging from their recent action.

The "Jex Blake" party (fit name for such a wild goose scheme) are baffled but not disheartened, kept at bay but not routed; even in view of the enormous costs their recent fight with the University of Edinburgh entailed upon them, (amounting to over \$4,000, I believe) they hold up their heads defiantly. How very much it savoured of the "Female physician" à la Yankee when Mrs. Doctress Etheridge Walker undertook to lecture the poor of London on the desirability of curtailing their prospective growing families; and this under the very noses of the profession in that great metropolis. Truly the devil was showing his cloven foot in such a transaction, and if once tolerated there would at once be an exodus of these medical parasites from the United States and the establishment of grand headquarters in London somewhat similar to "Madame" Restell's unblushingly gorgeous "Bagnio," "Serraglio" or *Women's Retreat* in New York, known well among the female population, not only of that city, but with a widely extended reputation all over the United States as an abortion den, carried on by a staff of these "female physicians," not only with safety but with secrecy (as regards patients and their family connections) and almost incredible pecuniary profits. Twelve years residence and practice in the United States has opened my eyes considerably in this matter of admitting females to medical college education and "I speak therefore of what I have seen, and testify of what I do know." With many of these doctresses I have had to live alongside; have known them attend lectures at college with the rest of male students, *sans peur sans reproche*, but their private practice carried on insidiously consisted of deeds of darkness which brought them much gain and comparatively easy livelihood, for they shirked the regular routine of hard work which would otherwise fall to their lot if practising legitimately. But philanthropy and "a delicate consideration for their sisters' weaknesses and ailments," &c., &c., with all such canting hypocrisy, is not their aim at heart. "This is a progressive age," (of course) "this is a rational age when *reason*, not religion rules our actions," (of course) and "we hold—*reason tells us*—that if a woman cannot do her duty by a large fan—!" (of course). To all such specious cant have I often had perforce to listen, but the thin end of such an immoral wedge in an ignorant community is calculated to do immense harm. Now is their opportunity. Did anyone ever know a Yankee to lose a chance for doing "biz," male or female? At the present time the United States of America having led the

van, continue to turn loose upon the world the great majority (if not all, in fact,) of doctresses or female physicians, and if their necessity and degree is admitted (no matter how well they may pass examinations) they will obtain a foothold and work incalculable mischief, poisoning the minds as well as ruining the bodily health of the female community. It is so easy a matter for a female physician to engage in private confab with a girl, or married woman, and broach the subject of abortion (a thing which no medical man would ever be guilty of) and thus "evil communications corrupt good manners." And when a medical man hears (as I have more than once heard) of small hand lamp chimneys being used as specula with knitting needles as stillets, or again of gum catheters with tip cut off and the accompanying wire rod together with the *modus operandi* being *partially* or *wholly* understood, not only by married women, but, *mirabile dictu*, by young girls in the United States, one may well shudder at the state of moral as well as physical life across the lines, and cease to wonder at the physical decay of nationalities. But the contamination thus spoken of has even a wider spread influence, for the regular medical man may be tempted into collusion with these harpies of female physicians, for the gains are great, and medical men are apt to remember at how little their sacrifices and services are estimated by the public generally; and, as said Shakespeare's poor apothecary, "My poverty and not my will consents!" Many a \$100 bill has the writer of this article had to refuse for conscience sake, and known it go into the hands of other and less scrupulous practitioners in the same town, who knew probably well enough that if he did not secure it some female physician would! It is not many days since I was approached by one of these harpies, a Yankee parasitical "female physician," (God save the mark) a recent importation from New York state, who informs me "of the good success she had in *those cases*," and "of how she played into the hands of various medical men in S—," and with a knowing leer and wink of the eye and a business-like shake of the head, gave me to understand that "there was money in it," there being no such "femyle doctress" in these parts! &c., &c., ad nauseum! I listened, moralized, and bowed her out. This class of women are representative in their way, and find numerous clients for their services, and being experts in this their peculiar art are able to divest the consequences of "prurient desires" or regular, and continued illicit love of more than half its terrors, and being females, to shield them with all the greater secrecy. To such harpies more readily than to a medical man will married as well as single women flock; the former with (very often without) sometimes the leave of their husbands; anyhow an abortion is desired and procured, and the first foundation laid of a life of sickness or debility unfitting them for the duties of housewife or mother, and entailing a degenerate progeny or enfeebled population on the nation.

I argue, Mr. Editor, that it is not only the practice but the possession of knowledge as gained in a medical college of any kind that should b