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### FEMALES AS PHYSICIANS.

WE hope that we should be the last to interfere with the privileges and rights of the female sex, or to arrogate to our own any pursuit or means of gaining a livelihood, which can be equally well performed by theirs. Peculiarly fitted as woman is, for the domestic sphere, there are many other duties which she is capable of performing without transcending the limits set by nature to her capacities, and which will enable her to secure for herself an honorable support. It is to be lamented that in this country, at least, it is considered degrading for women to be employed in certain professions for which they would seem to be peculiarly fitted. On the other hand, it is especially the case among us, that women have striven to pursue many occupations which elsewhere furnish almost exclusive employment to men. In stating our reasons why we think that women are not qualified for the practice of medicine, we again say that we have no wish to interfere with their *rights*. We conceive that they have just as much right to practise medicine as men have, provided they can do it as well; and we think that the public is equally bound to patronize them, provided their services are equally valuable.

We have said that nature has established limits to women's sphere of occupation. It is thus found that those pursuits which require the exercise of the highest intellectual power—the learned professions, commonly so called,

law, divinity, medicine, literature—are beyond her capacity. The study of mathematics is one which requires the exclusive employment of the reasoning powers, and how few women have ever attained excellence in this science. It is true there are exceptions to this, as to all laws. It was a woman (Madame Hortense Lepaute), who, in 1758, had the courage to undertake the calculation of the retardation of Halley's comet, a work which appalled many an astronomer of the sterner sex. England has also produced a Somerville, who occupies a distinguished position among European savans; and we acknowledge with pride the genius of Miss Mitchell, the astronomer of Nantucket, whose discoveries were rewarded with a gold medal by the king of Denmark. These very exceptions, however, only serve to prove the rule, that by far the greater amount of intellectual superiority is found in the male sex.

In the same way, the practice of the medical profession, especially since the healing has become elevated to a science, has been almost exclusively confined to men. Nor does this seem surprising, when we consider the degree of intelligence, judgment and courage which a successful practitioner ought to possess, or the responsibility, anxiety and fatigue which he is compelled to undergo. "But France, at least, has produced eminent female physicians." True, Boivan and Lachapelle are eminent authorities in the science of obstetrics; but what are they, and half a dozen others, compared with the thousands of distinguished medical men, whom that country has produced? How comes it, that in a country where there are so few obstacles to their advancement except what are inherent in their sex, so small a number of women should appear, to demonstrate their capacity for mental superiority?

The department of obstetrics is one, if any, which would seem the most appropriate sphere for the employment of female practitioners, and, we are told, women are extensively employed in this department in nearly all the great European cities. We fully recognize the advantages which would result from the employment of women in the treatment of the diseases of females, especially in obstetrical cases, if they were fully capable of it. The fact is, however, that, as a general rule, women in those hours of peril and suffering entailed upon them by an inscrutable Providence, feel the need of stronger support and assistance than their own sex can afford; by a natural law, the weaker in those circumstances rely upon the stronger. The midwives of Edinburgh and Paris are chiefly employed among the poorer classes, who cannot afford to pay physicians, and it does not appear that the number or the success of the latter are at all diminished in those cities by the female practitioners, and they are always called in when the case presents any unusual difficulty. In this country midwives are rarely employed. Even in large cities, where alone they could succeed, the means of relieving the sick poor by dispensaries and other institutions, as well as by the gratuitous services so freely afforded by medical men, render them unnecessary, nor does there seem to be any prospect of their numbers increasing beyond a trifling extent.

We have hitherto spoken of the difference in the mental capacities of the two sexes as a reason why women will never make good medical practitioners. In the physical condition of women, also, we find much in support of our views. The weakness of her bodily organization renders her less fit to undergo the incessant fatigue, the loss of sleep, the exposure to weather at all hours of the day and night, which are the lot of the active medical practitioner. We have heard of an instance which illustrated this fact

in a somewhat ludicrous manner. A gentleman in New York had occasion to summon a female physician, in the night time, to a member of his family who was suddenly taken ill. The visit being terminated, he was about to retire to bed, when he was informed that he was expected to escort the doctor home!

The social condition of females also offers a serious bar to their success as medical practitioners. Even if our fair competitors take a vow of celibacy, the chances are that most of them may become married. Now, it is hardly possible for a woman to devote the requisite time to her household duties, and to the rearing of a family, and at the same time faithfully to perform the duties of an active medical practitioner. It is obvious, too, that their practice must be confined to women and children; hence there must always be two medical attendants to each family, which would give rise to innumerable difficulties.

We have touched upon a few of the many reasons which naturally suggest themselves against the probability that females can ever make successful practitioners of medicine. We hope there are no men in our community who are so selfish, so ungentlemanlike, as to harbor any feeling of jealousy or rivalry against female physicians. If women *can* practise medicine with advantage to the public and honor to themselves, we should be the last to wish to prevent them. While we sincerely believe that they *cannot*, we shall never oppose any well-intentioned and honorable effort to qualify them to do so. We regret that this cannot be said of the New England Female Medical College, an institution which has for some time existed in this city, and which, if we are to believe the numerous commendatory puffs which are circulated in the public prints concerning it, is in a highly flourishing state, but which more reliable information leads us to suspect to be in a languishing condition, notwithstanding a liberal appropriation from the Legislature of 1855. The reasons for this decline are obvious. The institution was recommended to the patronage of the public on the ground that the profession in this country was in a degraded state, that its practitioners were generally immoral, mercenary, and dangerous to the interests of society; that this state of things was brought about by the confidence placed in physicians, the privileges necessarily accorded to them, which confidence and privileges they had grossly abused. As a means of disseminating these views, the friends of the College have circulated widely certain pamphlets filled with statements which are for the most part wholly untrue, and supported by no evidence whatever. They are, moreover, of such a character that no decent person could read them without blushing. This is particularly the case with the "Young Lady's Book," by the *Reverend* William Hosmer, of Auburn, N. Y., the character of which, as the *Boston Post*, in a notice of it, remarks, is such that no lady would read it. If such were the means used to recommend the institution to public favor, the character of the men who employ them can be easily guessed. There is no probability that the public will place confidence in them, or that an institution under their control, can ever become a means of enabling females to qualify themselves properly for the practice of medicine.