

THE following letter has been handed to us for publication :—

} BERKSHIRE MEDICAL COLLEGE,  
Pittsfield, Mass., Aug. 30, 1866.

*To the Directors of the New England Hospital for Women:—*

LADIES.—The letter of your Secretary, dated Aug. 13th, and communicating to me certain action lately taken by yourselves, was duly received. I have delayed replying to it until the present moment, because I have thought the matter of such importance as to require mature reflection, and that I might act, whatever my decision, only deliberately and upon conviction.

By the vote, general though its terms, of your Board, the attending surgeon is directed, in certain cases of difficulty or danger, to submit his patients to examination by the attending and resident physicians, and, in accordance with their judgment of its necessity, to one or more of the consulting physicians or surgeons, whose decision shall in such event be final.

Compliance with your vote would of course relieve me of all responsibility in reference to the treatment of my patients, a responsibility which I could not in justice to them relinquish. It is not, so far as I am aware, the custom among hospital attendants, indeed it would be highly improper, for the decision of purely surgical questions to be submitted to the medical members of the staff. The decision ought not thus to be shifted, even in case it were proposed to do so by the surgeon himself; it surely ought not, as you would now have it, against his desire.

Moreover, the consulting staff, and this I believe to be the case at all hospitals, is attached to an institution not for the purpose of directing the practice of the attending physicians and surgeons, or of vetoing their practice, but to advise and suggest in cases where such assistance may seem required, and of this necessity the attendants themselves are alone to judge. It is not the physician's place to judge as to the necessity in surgical cases, nor the surgeon's to decide upon it in those that are medical. Consultations among medical men are not matters of compulsion; they are made upon the request of the patient or at the desire of the attendant. This is a point with whose merits I am somewhat familiar, having had occasion to discuss it when proposing to the profession the appointment of consulting physicians to asylums for the insane. It was decided upon vote, by the American Medical Association, representing as this does all the hospitals in the country, that the consulting staff are to be called upon only at the discretion of the attendant. So far as my own practice is concerned, if I have a doubt or require advice, I should submit the course I proposed to pursue to the consideration of a colleague, certainly not otherwise. I have no fear that the reputation of the hospital has suffered from any action of mine in this respect.

By your decision, a different course must hereafter be pursued. Either trifling cases, for which the hospital is not needed, can alone be admitted, or severer ones, coming for a certain definite purpose, must have it denied to them. Conformity to either of these alternatives would be alike incompatible with my own self respect, my duty to my patients, and the best interests of the hospital. I am therefore compelled to resign my connection with it. I have more than once, previously to the present time, felt that I was occupying a false and undignified position, as when you voted that no male students should be allowed the advantages I have felt it my duty to them to offer, and the duty of the hospital, as a charity, to extend to the profession at large, and when you ordered that in future no patients shall be admitted to the hospital save those paying their full expenses. By such restrictions the hospital has in reality lost its essential and only claim upon the sympathies of the community, and has been degraded below the level of an ordinary boarding house, where patients can at least obtain such attendance as they themselves may elect.

Having received my resignation, you may consider as gratuitous the remarks I am now to make, and may wish that they had been withheld. The connection that has existed between us has, however, been a public one. It has been severed by your own action, and the changed relation will become a matter of public comment. It is not improper, therefore, for me to say one word more.

Before accepting your appointment, I had for many years felt the need of a public hospital for invalid women; a need that still exists, for with all your large endowments and the promises that have been made to the community, your hospital is not in the proper sense a charity. It was chiefly the expectation that it would be made such that induced me, some three years ago, by identifying myself with it, to act contrary to the advice of many of my most respected professional friends, such gentlemen, for instance, as Drs. James Jackson, Jacob Bigelow, J. Mason Warren, and others of similar standing. As a mere aid to establish any individual reputations, or a means of compelling the success of a measure that was obnoxious to physicians generally, I should

not have given the hospital my countenance. That I have since discovered it to possess both these features, I cannot deny. Having connected myself with it, I was willing that incidentally, and only incidentally to the great end of affording a charity hospital for the diseases of women, the experiment of testing the ability of women to become fitted to practise as general physicians should continue to be tried. My position upon this question, as you may know, has been one of perfectly good faith. I have withstood alike entreaties, overtures, threats, from those who disapproved of my course; for, on the one hand, I have desired to do what little I personally could towards the real enfranchisement of woman, provided this were a means to such end; and, on the other, I have thought that by elevating the few women who might be better educated than the mass of those of their sex assuming medical honors and responsibilities and masculine appellations, our profession might be purged, to a certain extent at least, of many claimants utterly unfitted for its membership. Under these circumstances, I shall probably be allowed, both by those endorsing and those regretting my late position, to have had good opportunities for judging as to these questions.

Since receiving your communication, I have been better able than before to dispassionately consider and weigh the whole matter. You yourselves have freed me from the bonds that otherwise might have restrained me, at least from expressing, if not from forming, an unbiassed opinion. It is sufficient for me to say, that despite certain exceptional cases upon which so much stress has been laid, exceptions in every sense of the word, I think that the experiment has been a failure; and that were there no other reason than for a physiological one, perfectly patent, though its importance has been so much lost sight of, women can never, as a class, become so competent, safe and reliable medical practitioners as men, no matter what their zeal or opportunities for pupilage.

For certain of the professional ladies whom I have met, I have personally the highest respect and esteem. Miss Zakrzewska, the beauty and purity of whose life as already published to the world, I have long seen verified, may well challenge comparison in practice with a certain percentage of my own sex; Miss Tyng, now for two years my assistant in private practice, has such natural tastes and inclinations as fit her, more than I should have supposed any woman could have become fitted, for the anxieties, the nervous strain and shocks of the practice of surgery; and there are others not now officially connected with the hospital, whose names I would mention in terms of similar commendation. Such are however, at the best, but very exceptional cases, and I am driven back to my old belief, the same that is entertained by the mass of mankind, that in claiming this especial work of medicine, women have mistaken their calling; a belief that, contrary to assumptions that have been made by certain interested parties, I have found to be generally held by ladies of true refinement and delicacy, and by the majority of female patients, no matter what their station in life.

I make these statements deliberately, for they are of public interest. I make them with regret, for to some they will give pain. You yourselves have placed me where I could view the matter in a truer light than might otherwise have been possible. Many things have hitherto conspired to warp my judgment; the opposition and violent denunciations of former associates, the knowledge that to my own personal exertions has been owing much of your pecuniary success, and to my own professional reputation, whatever this may be, very many of the applicants for medical and surgical aid, and above all, my habit of never abandoning an experiment until it has been tried to my full satisfaction. The attainment of that point you have now assisted me in recognizing; and in yielding to the irresistible logic of facts, I thank you all for the many marks of confidence I have up to this moment received at your hands, and trust that you may find for my post a successor with as much sincere desire to render good service to his profession and to the suffering poor, as I think I may claim to have brought to it.

Yours very respectfully,

HORATIO ROBINSON STORRE.