

1870.] *Dr. Storer's Reply to Mr. Garrison.* 95THE GYNÆCOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF BOSTON AND  
WOMEN PHYSICIANS; A REPLY TO MR. WM. LLOYD  
GARRISON.\*

BY HORATIO E. STORER.

[Read before the Society, January 18, 1870.]

IN a supplement to the "New York Independent" for Dec. 23, 1869, there appeared a somewhat extended notice of a criticism in the Journal of the Gynæcological Society of Boston for September last. This criticism, the tenor of which seems to have been misunderstood by its commentator, Mr. William Lloyd Garrison, was not so much of the practice of medicine by women, or of the employment of medical women by the community, as of an extraordinary argument for such practice and employment made by Mrs. Caroline H. Dall, of Boston; it having been broadly asserted by her, in print, that the presence of a physician in the chamber of "even the purest" invalid female, must necessarily induce in that female's mind thoughts and longings of an improper character.†

It seemed to the gentlemen composing the Gynæcological Society, devoted as this is to an advancement of the knowledge of the numerous and very important diseases peculiar to women, that an assertion of the kind alluded to was at once unfortunate, unkind, and untrue, and that it might possibly be the means of preventing some, however few, persons, who were not aware of the

\* Immediately upon the copy of the N. Y. Independent containing Mr. Garrison's strictures being received, the above reply was forwarded to its editor, upon Jan. 1, 1870. The letter from that gentleman, declining to allow the Society to publish its answer in the city where it had been assailed, is given in our editorial columns of the present month. In thus refusing a simple act of justice, — for by no fair interpretation can our reply be distorted into anything beyond a statement of the true position of the Society, misrepresented by Mr. Garrison, — the editor of the Independent has belied its name.

† See this Journal, November, 1869, p. 286.

enthusiastic character of its author, and who might suppose that physicians shared her opinion, from consulting their medical attendant as freely and as promptly as occasion might require. At the request of the Society, therefore, its secretary endeavored to state the facts in the case as concisely and as truthfully as possible, and his paper was published in its Journal. There was the less hesitation in doing this, since Mrs. Dall had mentioned by letter that it was her desire that the statement she had made should elicit a free discussion.\* Subsequently, comment upon the action of the Society in noticing Mrs. Dall's assertion was made in the periodical in which her article had appeared; but, though professedly editorial, this comment was of so low and personal a character that it could not be answered. It was evidently not written by a lady of the known delicacy and honesty of Mrs. Dall.

Mr. Garrison's strictures are of a different character. His paper, indeed, is precisely what might have been expected from "the great champion of freedom." A sword like his, after the desperate work of so many years, when it finds its occupation gone, must make employment for itself of one kind or another, for very practice' sake; and bold and most skilful must be the adversary to face its edge, unless, as here, the right be on his side.

This matter of the practice of physic by lady doctors is only a part of the great social problem now vexing the age. Unlike all other sides of that question, however, it has an important peculiarity of its own, its essential turning-point, indeed, which has as yet hardly been appreciated, either by advocate or opponent of the measure referred to. It is simply this, that granting that woman may have, in exceptional cases, all the

\* See this Journal, October, 1869, p. 222.

energy, courage, patience, power of endurance, and opportunities for preliminary instruction that are possessed by the average of medical men, she is yet physiologically unfitted, at very frequent and regular periods of her life, and this whether she be married or single, for an equal or in any way commensurate exertion of body or mind; her mental as well as physical condition being for the time changed from what it may be at other seasons.

It is hardly right to assume that it is from purely selfish or interested motives that physicians so generally object to granting to women the license to practice. They certainly can hardly govern the action of those who, from wealth, position, or age, have nothing to gain on either side. In comparison with the great mass of the profession, there is hardly a physician of any note in this country who favors the movement: Atlee, of Philadelphia, Bowditch, of Boston, and perhaps half-a-dozen others, are all, and these, moreover, are gentlemen extremely impulsive, however high-minded and honorable. The remaining few who are held up to us as representative men are mostly those who, for other reasons, are considered as technically irregular, or who seek the petty profit that may directly accrue from consulting with women, or who are paid indirectly by the surgical practice they receive from their fair associates, or who, like certain hospital attendants and college lecturers in New York and this city, yield temporarily, unwillingly, and but partially, to the outside pressure, hoping that by so doing they may be able covertly to check the frenzy of the bacchantes of the present day.

Mr. Garrison, we are assured, experienced while writing his article all that delightful nervous tremor felt by the knight-errant who prepares to splinter a lance in behalf of an individual, or the abstract idea, of the

weaker sex. Had he looked at the question more thoughtfully, however, he would have descended from the stirrup again ere ever he fairly mounted. We ourselves at the time regretted that so distasteful a duty, as to seem in any way lacking in courtesy towards those whom we profoundly respect, should devolve upon us. Three years, however, of official connection, as surgeon, with a hospital to which lady physicians were also attached, two years' employment of a lady physician as assistant in our private practice, and the having had charge of quite a number of the would-be professional sisterhood as medical and surgical patients, will probably be allowed to have given us as fair an opportunity as Mr. Garrison has had for estimating these medical ladies at their real, practical value.

The charge has been frequently made, — to its danger, indeed, we ourselves pointed many years since, in one of our earlier publications upon the subject of criminal abortion, — that there is an especial liability of women physicians becoming principals in that guilt. That all medical men are immaculate in this respect, no physician will claim; but it will hardly be denied that the increased risk to which we have referred does exist. It is unnecessary in the present connection to do more than refer to the fact.

So far as concerns Mrs. Dall's new and repulsive argument, which is the only point they undertook to discuss, the members of the Gynæcological Society were united in condemning it, and there is probably not a reader of the "Independent," should he or she take the trouble to look it up, who will not do the same. The venerable President of the Society, and our associate in the editorial conduct of its Journal, Dr. Winslow Lewis, well known for his previous courtesies to lady physicians, took no pains to conceal his disgust. And



Dr. Bowditch, to whom we have referred as for the present still giving a nominal recognition to female practitioners, exclaimed, upon being shown the lady's denunciation of the purity of her own sex, that it was "perfectly outrageous for such a thought to have entered her mind," and that, "after it had done so, it should not have been loosed therefrom upon the community." To-day he states to us that he has carefully reperused her article, and that he attaches to it the same stigma.

We have thus called attention to the plain facts in the case. We commend them to the careful scrutiny of Mr. Garrison and those who, with him, are willing to discuss these serious matters quietly and dispassionately. It is very easy in the excitement of controversy to forget the proprieties of debate, and to resort to unbecoming personalities. We ourselves have neither the time nor the inclination for anything of the kind. We would also call to Mr. Garrison's notice the fact that his tilt thus far has been outside the true arena, and with merely the shadow of an antagonist that even he cannot overcome. He has criticised a brief letter to Mrs. Dall, a copy of which was published in the *Journal of the Gynecological Society* for September. This, however, as then stated, was merely the precursor of an article in the *Journal* for November, upon the *Relations of Physicians to Invalid Women*, which Mr. Garrison has evidently not seen. We have requested our publisher, Mr. James Campbell, to forward him a copy. When he shall have read it, and appreciates to what scandalous doctrine he now seems to lend defence, he will probably recall the very pertinent old saying, that it is sometimes better to let sleeping dogs lie.