

**LETTER TO LADIES IN
FAVOR OF
FEMALE PHYSICIANS
FOR THEIR OWN SEX**

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Letter to Ladies in Favor of Female Physicians for Their Own Sex by Samuel Gregory

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SAMUEL GREGORY

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LETTER TO LADIES,
IN FAVOR OF
FEMALE PHYSICIANS
FOR THEIR OWN SEX.

BY SAMUEL GREGORY, A.M., M.D.,
*Secretary of the Female Medical Education Society, and New England
Female Medical College.*

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274 WASHINGTON STREET.

1854.

TO THE LADIES.

THESE pages are addressed to you, ladies, because it is your welfare chiefly that they were designed to promote; and upon your influence and aid must depend, in a great measure, the success of the object recommended.

By a candid consideration of the testimony herein presented, you will, it is hoped, be induced to encourage the education of suitable females to share in the duties of the medical profession, especially those that pertain to their own sex.

This course will introduce among the female portion of the community, generally, a better knowledge of the means of preserving and restoring health—a knowledge which their own physical well being, and that of the race, demands that they should possess. By thus extending their intelligence and usefulness, in a sphere so peculiarly appropriate, they will not only enjoy the satisfaction of accomplishing greater good, but will strengthen their claims to honor and esteem.

Every one, who is at all acquainted with this subject, must be aware that great inconvenience and unnecessary suffering, mental and physical, result from confining this knowledge and these qualifications to male physicians, on account of the delicate relations which exist between the sexes, and the proper regard of which is indispensable to the best interests of society.

With a deep conviction of the importance of the object presented in these pages, it is earnestly commended to the favor and support of the intelligent, benevolent, and Christian women of the community, by

THE AUTHOR.

BOSTON, January 1, 1860.

P R E F A C E

T O T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N .

THIS Letter has long been out of print, and its republication has been neglected because its place has in part been supplied by the Annual Reports of the Female Medical Education Society, and other documents. But many good judges think the professional education of females will be promoted by the continued circulation of the work, and it is accordingly republished.

Great progress has been made in the cause of female medical education within the four years since the date of this letter. Institutions for the purpose have sprung up, and the object has become familiar to the public mind, and a matter of interest throughout the country. The New England Female Medical College, located in this city, and conducted and sustained by the society above named, has become known as one of our permanent and important institutions, and, through the legislature, has received the sanction and pecuniary aid of the commonwealth. Many of its graduates are already reaping the rewards of their professional success, and it has become a settled question that the exercise of the healing art is henceforth to be a sphere of employment and usefulness for women.

The author deems it but a just and proper acknowledgment to say, that his confident expectations of the approval and aid of those to whom these pages were addressed have not been disappointed, and that this enterprise has been greatly indebted for its remarkable success to the influence and cooperation of many excellent and intelligent ladies. The written commendations and opinions of female authors and eminent teachers — Mrs. Sigourney, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Willard, Mrs. Phelps, and others — have gone abroad, and done efficient service in securing public favor for the object; many have contributed pecuniary aid, and prompted others to do so, and the grant of five thousand dollars from the legislature is to be attributed in no small degree to the influence of the thirty or forty of the principal ladies of this city, who sent in their petition in aid of the petition of the directors of the institution.

With such proofs of their interest and influence the author, with renewed confidence, commends to the women of the country the cause of female medical education.

S. G.

Boston, September 12, 1854.

LETTER TO LADIES.

It is not a recent or hastily formed opinion on the part of the writer that there ought to be a class of females, thoroughly educated and qualified to act as medical advisers and professional attendants, in those departments of practice which relate particularly to their own sex—the daughter, the wife, the mother.

To show upon what grounds his convictions rest and to what credence his opinions may be entitled, it is perhaps necessary, and therefore excusable, to allude to the means he has had for obtaining information upon the subject and the measures that have been adopted to communicate that information to the public. It is the custom, and a very good one, too, for the graduating class in Yale College, whatever may be their prospective professions or pursuits, to receive some lectures from professors in the medical department of the institution. Under these circumstances, in 1840, the author, by the lectures and by reading, made himself somewhat acquainted with the subjects of anatomy and physiology and with the history and the principles of the healing art. From the interest thus acquired in these subjects, he has given to them more or less attention from that time to the present. It struck him as rather singular that the department of the profession termed *midwifery*—a feminine occupation, as its name implies—should be exclusively in the hands of males. But on further research it appeared that it was not so, to the

same extent, in any other country, and that in our own it was an innovation, dating back considerably less than a century, and was, moreover, seriously and strongly objected to by some of the most eminent medical authorities.

In 1845 the writer prepared a small work at the request of his brother, George Gregory, by whom it was published, on the unfavorable tendencies and results of some of the existing customs, among them the employment of men in the duties in question. The next year the same publisher, who is an indefatigable promoter of this enterprise, published another pamphlet exclusively upon this subject, entitled "Facts for Married Men." These two publications, being extensively circulated, served to enlighten and convince many and prepare the way for further effort. Accordingly, in July, 1847, the writer commenced preparing a work which should more fully present the question. He also in the following month, in this city, commenced advocating the subject of female medical education in public lectures to gentlemen, and separately to ladies. The work mentioned, the present title of which is "Female Midwifery Advocated," was published in the following January; since which time twenty thousand copies have been put in circulation.

This, with numerous lectures in various cities and towns, and the aid of many of the public journals, (for which the writer here expresses his heartfelt thanks,) has to some extent introduced the subject to public attention.

The demand thereby created for professional women required, of course, that something should be done towards providing a school for their instruction. A number of women were found to form a class; and, with the expenditure of much time and effort, a physician of suitable qualifications and of approved standing in the profession was engaged as lecturer; and the first term commenced November 1, 1848, and continued three months. The second commenced in April following. Twenty women have been instructed; and they have attended above three hundred cases of midwifery, and with the most satisfactory success.

A tenfold larger number of women might have been collected into the classes and instructed but for the want of the means to make the subject known to the public, to furnish the lecture room, and to carry forward the enterprise generally. In fact, to accomplish what has been done has required pretty much the entire sacrifice of the author's time and labor for the past two and a half years. But the way is in some measure prepared; a demand has been created; and, if a thousand women were this moment qualified, they would receive a cordial welcome and liberal encouragement in the cities and towns of New England alone.

Such is the increasing reluctance to call on gentlemen for these services that danger may be apprehended from trusting to ignorant and incompetent women if others are not provided. The following incident will serve as a specimen of the feeling that exists:—

The wife of a young gentleman, a member of one of the prominent families in this city, being about to be confined some months since, was unwilling to employ a man to wait upon her, and she feared that she should give offence to some of the medical friends by employing one of the professional midwives. In these embarrassing circumstances she asked her nurse if she would not officiate, so that it might appear accidental. The nurse shook her head, and said she would not dare to; she had, to be sure, been with physicians a good many times on these occasions, and, *having been caught* in two or three instances, she had had to manage alone; "but," said she, "that was vastly different from *taking* the responsibility." "Well," replied the heroic young woman, in a position infinitely more serious to her than was General Jackson's to him when he uttered a like expression,— "well," replied she to the nurse, calling her by name, "if you will stand by me, and do as well as you can, *I will take the responsibility.*" She did; and all resulted fortunately. The husband called on one of the medical friends and said to him, "Well, doctor, we have an heir at our house. The affair came off rather suddenly, and I believe is pretty much over;

but the folks would like to have you call in and see them, if you please." The physician called, and, having made proper inquiries, expressed his gratification, addressed the nurse by his own title, and took leave by saying, "All right: good morning, doctor."

Now, without any implied reflection upon those who do not take such responsibilities as this lady did, it must be allowed that she exhibited a most lovely and admirable trait of character; and any physician who should not be better pleased with it than with a *fee* ought not to call himself a medical *gentleman*.

One more example, from many others that have come to the knowledge of the writer. A slight and delicate young woman, in Augusta, Maine, whose friends thought from this circumstance that she must have a medical man attend on the occasion of her confinement, resolutely refused to consent, and said "No" to all their entreaties and fearful prognostics; and finally, to put an end to their unreasonable urgency, she very emphatically said to them, "If you bring a man into this room, and I have strength, when he comes in at one door I shall go out at the other." They then, of course, desisted; and she was carried safely through her trials by the matron, who gave me the fact. There is a promise in the good book — "She shall be saved in childbearing if she continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety."

The Bible only declares, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." This torture of modest sensibilities is a wicked and superfluous infliction, for which no sanction can be found in the examples or precepts of Scripture; no, nor in the customs of any nation of heathendom. It is neither Christian, pagan, nor human.

A book has been published on the women of the Bible; but it omits to mention some of them who are worthy of great commendation. The names of two of these are Shiphrah and Puah, who Dr. Clarke, the commentator, thinks were the instructors and superintendents of the "Hebrew midwives" generally. Pharaoh, it will be remembered, commanded them