

*Doctress in Medicine.*—The Syracuse Reveille contains a glowing account of the medical commencement of the Geneva (N. Y.) Medical College, at the close of the recent lecture term. Last season much was said of the sensation produced by a female student attending lectures in that institution, Miss Elizabeth Blackwell, who evinced a persevering determination to be regularly educated to the profession. She has finally triumphed, and the Reveille thus describes the public ceremonies, which took

place on the 23<sup>d</sup> of January, when the lady had conferred upon her the degree which she had sought:—"Next followed the presentation of the diplomas. All eyes were fixed in expectation. The young men, in groups of three and four at a time, were called upon the platform, and received their parchment—17 were graduated. Then was called, "*domina* BLACKWELL." Miss B. ascended the stage. The audience held their breath. The president rose, and pronouncing the usual Latin formula, delivered the diploma into her hands. Instead of turning away, she stood a moment, as if something remained to be done, and then, in a modest but audible voice, said—"I thank you, Sir. It shall be the effort of my life, by God's help, to shed honor on this diploma." The feelings of the audience could be restrained no longer, and a round of applause testified their interest in this novel and exciting scene. Professor C. A. Lee then proceeded to deliver the customary address to the graduates. At the close of it he said—"An event connected with the proceedings of this day deserves some notice on this occasion, calculated as it is to excite curiosity and comment, and to be held up as an example for other institutions to imitate or condemn. I mean the conferring of the degree of M.D. upon one of that sex which is supposed to be wanting in the physical if not moral qualifications necessary for the successful practice of the healing art. So far as I am informed, this is the first instance, in this country, or any other, when a female has graduated in medicine, after having gone through the regular prescribed course and terms of study; and, in the present instance, it is my duty to add, without the omission or slighting of any branch of study, and that, too, in so thorough a manner as to leave nothing unattempted or unattained, which it is necessary for one to know, who expects to practise with honor and success in every department of the profession.

"Such an instance of self-sacrificing devotion to science; of perseverance under difficulties and obstacles next to insurmountable; of unremitting, unrelaxing toil, in pursuit of that knowledge so important to, and yet so rarely possessed by her sex—and that, too, for the purpose of mitigating human misery, relieving the sick, and extending her sphere of usefulness in the world—this, I say, deserves, as it will receive, the heartfelt approbation of every generous and humane mind. This event will stand forth in all future time, as a memorable example of what woman can undertake, and accomplish, too, when stimulated by the love of science, and a noble spirit of philanthropy."

Miss B.'s inaugural thesis, on ship fever, is published in the February number of the Buffalo Medical Journal. Its literary merits are above the average of such productions, and it manifests persevering and praiseworthy research.

THE LATE MEDICAL DEGREE TO A FEMALE.

*To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.*

SIR,—In the first number of the present volume of the Journal, I have observed a detailed account of the ceremonies, or which might more properly be called the farce, enacted at the Geneva Medical College by conferring the degree of M.D. upon a Miss Blackwell. Although a glowing account of the transaction is given, we are not informed whether the graduate appeared in appropriate professional costume, or is to make the metamorphosis the subject of another public exhibition, when the refined auditors may not only “hold their breath,” but shut their eyes. Whatever may be the character and acquirements of this individual, it is much to be regretted that she has been induced to depart from the appropriate sphere of her own sex, and led to aspire to honors and duties which by the order of nature and the common consent of the world devolve alone upon men. And I am sorry that Geneva Medical College should be the first to commence the nefarious process of amalgamation. Hitherto an intuitive sense of propriety has induced all civilized nations to regard the professions of law, medicine and divinity as masculine duties, and by the universal acceptance of both sexes, the sterner offices and responsibilities incident to these vocations have been considered most compatible with the physical and mental constitution of the male sex. Woman was obviously designed to move in another sphere, to discharge other duties—not less important, not less honorable, not less angelic, but more refined, more delicate. Within her own province she is all powerful. She is the pride and glory of the race—the sacred repository of all that is virtuous, graceful and lovely. But when she departs from this, she goes astray from her appropriate element, dishonors her sex, seeks laurels in forbidden paths, and perverts the laws of her Maker. When some sudden emergency or imperious necessity requires it, she is justified in rendering temporary aid to the rude avocations of men; but when no such necessity demands her service, the character and usefulness of her own sex, and the general good of society, are best promoted by a proper attention to the duties of her own province. The distaff, the needle and the pencil look better in her hand than the hoe or the scythe, the trephine or the gorget. The course of “*domina Blackwell*” cannot be justified by any urgent necessity. The profession was quite

too full before, and could well afford to dispense with her services. I know we sometimes hear of runaway maidens serving in disguise in the army or on shipboard, but such heroines deserve very little commendation, and the rudest commander has always had a sufficient sense of propriety to discharge such "dominæ" as soon as their sex was known.

Would either of the other learned professions have received and graduated a female? Would any amount of study or learning have gained her admittance to the bar or the desk? Certainly not. Then why desecrate the profession of medicine, and publicly disparage it? If a clique of pseudo-reformers, or some mushroom Thomsonian or hydropathic association, had conferred this degree, it would have been a matter of no surprise, because it would be in perfect keeping with their transactions. As this is first case of the kind that has been perpetrated either in Europe or America, I hope, for the honor of humanity, that it will be the last. And I trust that the high-minded members of the profession will so manifest their disapprobation of the transaction, as to teach other similar institutions the impropriety of following the example.

D. K.

*The late Medical Degree at Geneva.*—The following reply to the remarks in last week's Journal were received too late for insertion in their proper place, and must either be deferred till next week or inserted here in small type. Presuming the writer would prefer the latter course, it is adopted. It will be seen that both writers appear anonymously, but their names are given to the editor.

MR. EDITOR,—D. K., in your last number, seems shocked at the conferring of the degree of M.D. upon a female at the recent commencement at Geneva College. Your correspondent is decidedly behind the age. How long is it since the leading physicians of Boston sent out a circular, recommending the establishment of an institution for the education of females in the art and science of Midwifery? Prof. Warren can enlighten him on this point, should he need information. Are there no female accoucheurs in this country? Are there none in France and Great Britain? Were there none in Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs, about the period of Moses' birth? How was it in New England, in the time of our forefathers? In the 1st vol. of the "Collections of the Maine Historical Society" (p. 235), we read that the General Court held at Wells, July 6th, 1646, "presented Francis Rayus for pretending to act the part of a midwife; the delinquent, examined by the Court, is fined fifty shillings for his offence, and paying the fees, 5s., is discharged." *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutantur in illis.* Has D. K. ever heard of Madame Boivin, M.D., of Paris, the distinguished lecturer and writer on obstetric science? The fact is, there are, and always will be, female accoucheurs; the only question is, shall they be educated? There can be but one opinion on this point. As to females engaging in the general practice of medicine, the idea is absurd; D. K. need have no fears of a rivalry, which he seems to dread, as about to jostle him uncomfortably. The "noxious process of amalgamation" will not be consummated to a great extent in his day. D. K. talks of "the professions of law, medicine and divinity, as masculine duties." Are there no masculine females? Was not Madame Potemkin and Madame Dacier both honored with the degree of LL.D., from one of the first English universities? The records of freemasonry will show, that females have been inducted even into that most honorable order. I see no reason, why, if a female has made the proper acquisitions, and proved herself worthy of the honor, she should not receive the degree of M.D., as well as Mr. D. K., or any other person.

Miss Blackwell, it is well understood, studied medicine for three years in the private office of Prof. S. H. Dickson, of New York, a gentleman whose fitness for judging of the proper personal (medical, physical and moral) qualifications for the study and practice of medicine, no one, it is presumed, will doubt. It is also understood that Prof. D. not only approved, but strongly advised Miss B. to prosecute the study of medicine and qualify herself for its practice; and we are informed it was chiefly in consequence of his flattering recommendation, that she was permitted to attend the courses of lectures in Geneva College, and admitted to an examination for a degree. We honor the college for its liberality; and we believe the profession will sustain it still more generously for the disinterested bestowal of its honors on the deserving, irrespective of sex or condition.

Even admitting the correctness of D. K.'s remarks in general, with respect to woman's unfitness for engaging in the practice of medicine, it would be strange indeed if exceptions did not occasionally occur. From all we have been able to learn respecting Miss B., she is emphatically an exception. "*Exceptio probat Regulam.*"

JUSTUS.

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**THE PRACTICE OF MIDWIFERY BY FEMALES.**

*To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.*

SIR,—Having long been a reader of your valuable Journal, and seeing in the number of July 25th, a short paragraph, headed—“ Empirical School of Midwifery,” and not believing it could be an emanation of your own feelings upon the subject, from the previous impression I had received of your character, I have waited thus long, hoping to see it noticed by some one who entertained more liberal sentiments with regard to it. But instead, I find in your number of Aug. 8th, a long letter (expressing sentiments still more at variance with candor and liberality), addressed to a certain Rev. Dr. ———, without signature, complaining of the encouragement which the clergy have given to the enterprise. Your correspondent states, that he has but a “ pebble in his sling ”; yet a pebble, if guided by a *malicious* hand, may destroy a tender germ just budding into existence. He says controversy is not his calling;

you will perceive it is much *less* mine. Yet as some of his questions seem to demand reply, and as I fear those more competent may shrink from the task, I shall make a feeble effort in defence of my sex, and the cause in which we are engaged—leaving the Rev. Dr. —— to notice his castigation as he sees fit, and the “man who reports himself from 25 Cornhill” to defend himself.

Your correspondent complains that the clergy are favorable to this movement, and calls in question the motives which actuate a “body of so much intelligence and benevolence.” I answer, that it is this very intelligence and benevolence that causes them to feel so deep an interest in the matter, and which prompts them to advocate the good of the community at large, rather than the pecuniary interest of a would-be favored few, who would keep females in ignorance of their own organization, that they might reap the benefit of their consequent suffering. And in the present state of “medical literature,” when every book is filled with technicalities which none but the learned and scientific are expected to understand, to whom are we to look for a precedence in these things, but to those in whom we place the most confidence and trust. Your correspondent thinks that cases of difficult parturition have tended to throw the practice naturally and legitimately into the hands of male practitioners. I would ask if medical statistics have ever shown a greater number of deaths of parturient females, even when the practice was entirely in the hands of females, and when it was considered disgraceful for a male to be present. But is it not rather to be attributed to the diffidence and inquietude which a delicate female must feel in such presence (at a time when of all others she needs to be soothed, and made perfectly at ease), that difficult cases are of such frequent occurrence?

Your correspondent says that those who practise the profession need the experience derived from ordinary cases to qualify *them* to meet the more difficult. But I do not believe a case of difficult parturition ever occurred in which it would not have been more consonant to the feelings of the sufferer to have had a female practitioner, *provided* they could have possessed the *requisite knowledge*; and it is that knowledge we aim at, and claim that we have a right to possess. It is our lack of means for obtaining such knowledge of which we complain. He also states that he has had cases which no *ordinary* female could have managed with safety. Most likely; *ordinary* females should not be engaged in the business. *Ordinary men* are not, or should not be. But let females who have a capacity for the business receive some of the advantages which have been so amply provided for the “lords of creation”; let them be admitted to your college, receive the benefit of your medical lectures, and have access to your extensive libraries, and when they have studied “long enough” let them be critically examined by your professors, and let such only as are competent receive authority to practise, and *ordinary* women would no longer find employment. But if (as your correspondent seems to insinuate) our lecturer does not possess the requisite qualifications for his office, is it “*courteous*,” is it *gentlemanly*, to censure us for what is our misfortune rather than our fault?

Your correspondent doubts the reputable standing of some of the members. We know that wolves sometimes enter the fold in sheep's clothing; but if he knows aught against the character of any one of our number, is it not more candid and gentlemanly to speak plainly, than by such insinuations to injure the innocent with the guilty?

Your correspondent also asks, will the "well-educated and most sensible women engage?" I would answer that there may not be many whose tastes would lead them into the study. But it has always been considered an honorable employment for a *man*, and I trust the time is not far distant when it will no longer be thought a *disgrace* for *woman* to be capable of administering to the necessities of her own sex. And when physiological knowledge shall be more generally diffused among females—when they understand more fully the wonderful organization of their own being—they will no longer remain thoughtless or passive upon so important a subject, permitting your sex to monopolize a branch which a proper sense of decorum *should* proclaim belonged *exclusively* to us. That time will soon come—already the light of physiological knowledge is beginning to dawn upon many who have been groping in darkness, and a spirit has been aroused which will not be allayed until such knowledge shall be diffused throughout the land.

Malden, Aug. 13th, 1849.

Yours respectfully,  
ONE OF THE CLASS.