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Letter from Scotland

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Letter from Scotland

Great oaks from little acorns grow.

This is the first letter from Scotland to THE LINACRE QUARTERLY and I thank you for the opportunity of inviting me to be your correspondent.

I must crave your indulgence for having deviated somewhat from medical ethics for the love of history, but I hope to show something of the influence of Scotland and in particular of the Edinburgh University, in the development of American medicine. I hope the story will interest you.

Scotland is a small country with a population just over 5 million. The scenic beauty of the Highlands and Islands may be familiar to you because it attracts large numbers of tourists from the United States each year. The capital, Edinburgh, is a great centre for commerce, education and the arts and you may know of the International Festival of Music, Drama and the Arts which takes place there annually.

The University, one of the largest and most cosmopolitan in the United Kingdom, dates from 1582, but even before that time there was an organised system of medicine in the city. The Royal College of Surgeons was incorporated in 1505 and had the right to "one condemned man a year be hanged and publicly dissected" was passed until late in the 18th century. Though there had been Professors of Medicine in the University before, it was not until 1726 that the Faculty of Medicine was founded by Alexander Munro, Primus. Munro had studied at Leyden where he had come greatly under the influence of Boerhaave, the most outstanding medical teacher of the time. Much of the credit for the foundation must go to Munro's faith at Leyden and his native Edinburgh. These fine schools were a foundation on which Boerhaave and Adam Smith, who was a medical student, could work.

Thus in Edinburgh the study of medicine grew up very much within the framework of the University and this remains today the most important thing. One has heard criticism in recent years that it is "so academically well taught," but probably the worst educated of this age. The more advanced sciences specialisation increases, the more important it becomes for identification to take place against the unsound background. The University must look to this to prevent medical education from becoming just a high class professional apprenticeship.

William Cullen, the great doctor and medical reformer, held the Chair of Medicine in Edinburgh from 1746 and was the dominating influence on medicine during the 18th century. Cullen was a great scientist and brilliant teacher. He attracted great numbers of foreign students to the Edinburgh School, and students from the American Colonies in increasing numbers. This was given great encouragement by the close friendship which existed between Cullen and Benjamin Franklin. By 1750 students were arriving in Edinburgh from the American Colonies in increasing numbers. This was given great encouragement by the close friendship which existed between Cullen and Benjamin Franklin. It was through Franklin that many students were introduced to Cullen. The system in which the School was held was modelled on that of Edinburgh.

The foundation of the first two medical schools in the United States can be attributed directly to the influence of the Edinburgh School.

The Pennsylvania Hospital was founded in 1751 with Benjamin Franklin as the first president. Medical education dates from 1762, when William Shippen returned from Edinburgh and began to teach anatomy. Shippen was introduced to Cullen by Benjamin Franklin and he graduated M.D. in 1761. With John Morgan he was a principal founder of the Medical School in the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. Morgan was a native of Philadelphia who graduated M.D. at Edinburgh in 1763. In a letter to Cullen in 1764, Morgan propounds his ideas for the founding of a medical school modelled on Edinburgh at Philadelphia. Morgan later became director-general of the Army Medical Department in the outbreak of the War of Independence.

The foundation of the Pennsylvania Medical School came in 1765. Morgan and Shippen were joined by several other Edinburgh graduates. Adam Kuhn of Pennsylvania graduated M.D. at Edinburgh in 1767 and became the first Professor of Botany and Anatomy at Philadelphia. Benjamin Rush graduated M.D. at Edinburgh in 1768. He must be regarded as one of the most colourful medical personalities in American history. He became Professor of Chemistry at Philadelphia. For reasons which I have been unable to trace, Rush, as a medical student of 22, had the undoubted honour of being made a Burgess and Guild Brother of the City of Edinburgh. That Rush was a physician of great stature may be judged by references to him as "the Franklin of America."

However, his campaigns against slavery, war, alcohol and the death penalty led to a decline in his practice. His name is perpetuated in Rush Medical College and of course he is remembered as a signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

It was not an American, however, who was the prime mover in establishing the Pennsylvania Medical Faculty but an Edinburgh man, John Fothergill. Fothergill was a close friend of Benjamin Franklin and of William Penn and it was his influence with Penn which facilitated the establishment of the Pennsylvania School.

Fothergill had strong family ties with America and was a physician of some eminence who wrote on a number of subjects. I had considered him to be one of the first to pioneer artificial respiration with his paper in 1774. Observations on recovering a man dead in appearance by distending the lungs with air," but the case reported in the May issue of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY from the Book of Kings considerably antedates him! Fothergill was keenly interested in politics and worked hard for a reconciliation between the mother country and her American colonies. In 1765 he published his "Considerations relative to the North American Colonies," and in 1774 he met with his friend, Benjamin Franklin, to draw up a reconciliation plan. He was in many ways ahead of his time. Franklin records the meeting in his autobiography: "Dr. Fothergill, with his usual philosophic, expatiated on the miseries of war; that even a bad peace was preferable to the most successful war." On Fothergill's death, Franklin wrote of him: "Our late excellent friend was always propounding something for the good of mankind. If we may estimate the goodness of a man by his disposition to do good and his constant endeavours and success in doing it, I can hardly conceive that a better man ever lived." Surely there can never have been a finer epitaph for any man. When I came across these
The second medical school to be founded in the United States was that in Columbia University. Columbia was founded in 1754 as King's College by a Royal Grant from King George II. A medical faculty was established in 1767 with six Professors, five of whom were graduates of the University of Edinburgh.

Samuel Blvd graduated M.D. at Edinburgh and distinguished himself by winning the coveted Hope Medal. His "Duties of a Physician" is a medical classic and the earliest American publication on medical ethics. He is also distinguished by operating on George Washington in 1789.

John Jones graduated M.D. at Edinburgh and was the first Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at King's College. He performed the first lithotomy in New York and attended Benjamin Franklin in his last illness.

Peter Middleton was born in Scotland and graduated M.D. at Edinburgh. He was Professor of Pathology, Physiology and Materia Medica in that order at King's College. He was the earliest historian of American medicine.

Samuel Band graduated M.D. at Edinburgh and distinguished himself by winning the coveted Hope Medal. His "Duties of a Physician" is a medical classic and the earliest American publication on medical ethics. He was a native of South Carolina and graduated M.D. in 1749.

Benjamin Rush was an Honourary Member of the Royal Medical Society. He was a cousin of George Washington and was introduced to the society by Benjamin Waterhouse, who replied: "I consider this a very important thing to my country, where the dread of smallpox is still very great."

Another Fellow, Lord Buchan, was a cousin of George Washington. While Washington refers to him as "cousin" in a letter to Buchan the word must be interpreted as "kinsman." Certainly Buchan was very proud of the relationship and he entertained many Americans at his famous ancestral home at Dryburgh.

The cosmopolitan nature of the Edinburgh School can be judged by an entry in the Society's minutes for 1784 mentioning members from America, Russia, Spain, Brazil, Sweden and France.

Benjamin Rush was an Honourary Member. One of the most distinguished Honourary Members was Benjamin Franklin. This was remembered in 1956 when the United States Congress struck a medal commemorating Franklin's birth and presented one to the Royal Medical Society.

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