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GEORGE BUSHE AND THE "RUTGERS MEDICAL FACULTY"

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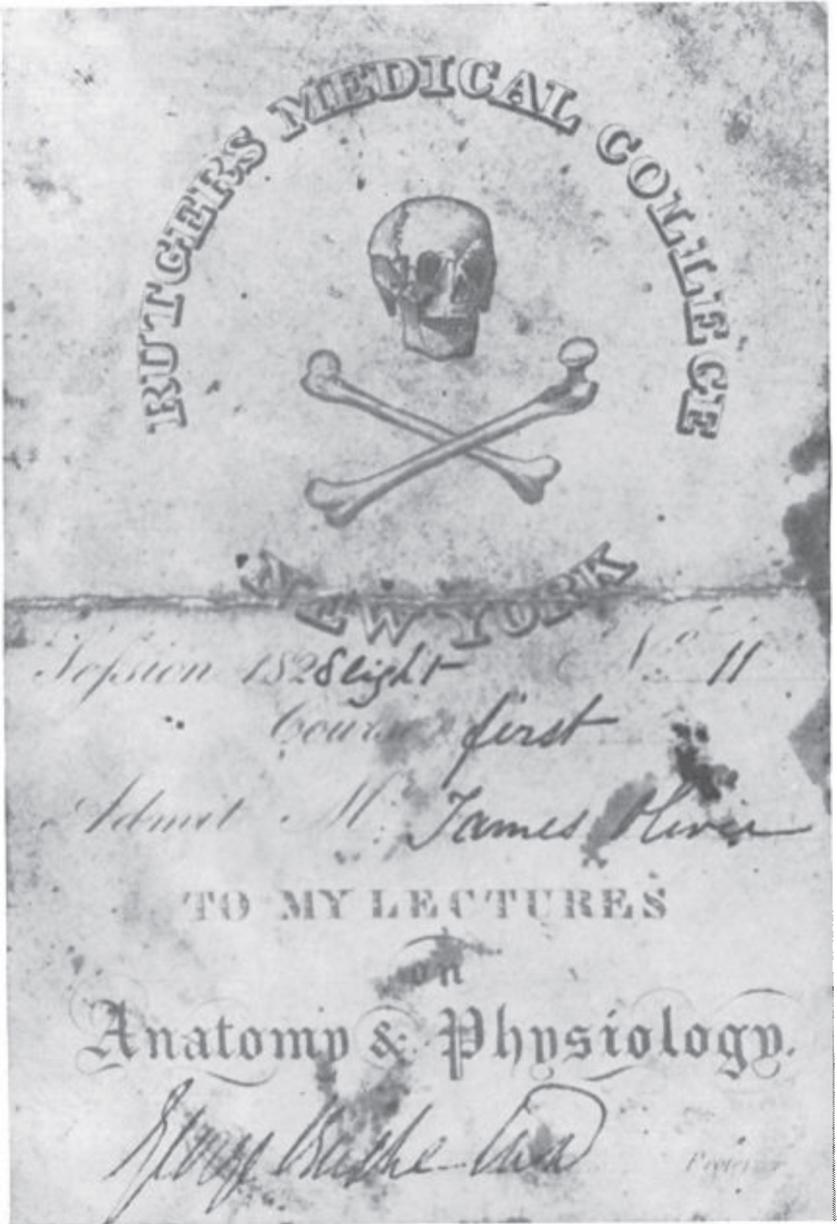
DR. GEORGE MACARTNEY BUSHE, of Dublin, was Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the medical school in New York usually referred to as the "Rutgers Medical College"¹ for only two years from his arrival in America in 1828 to the demise of the College in 1830. His tenure, though brief, was interesting both for the processes of recruitment and contractual arrangements involved and for the intra-faculty struggle which was precipitated shortly after his appointment.

I

When Bushe's predecessor in the chair of anatomy, Dr. Samuel D. Godman, became ill, the "Rutgers Medical Faculty," under the leadership of David Hosack and including John W. Francis, Valentine Mott, and William Macneven, needed to find a replacement who would both fill the place of that well-known anatomist and exceptional lecturer² and measure up to their own outstanding (though

¹ The medical school in New York known as the "Rutgers Medical College" had an affiliation with Rutgers College at New Brunswick for only the year 1826-27. Thereafter it affiliated with Geneva College but the faculty retained the name of the "Rutgers Medical Faculty." Their building continued to be called the "Rutgers Medical College" long after the college had ceased to operate. The story is told in the author's *Medical Education: The Queen's—Rutgers Experience, 1792-1830*, recently published by the State University Bicentennial Committee and the Rutgers Medical School.

² See E. R. Long, *A History of American Pathology* (Springfield, 1962), pp. 47-49, 56.



Lecture ticket issued to James Oliver by George Bushe.
(Rutgers University Library)

contentious) reputations in the profession. "Who have you in N. York that would risk his reputation to succeed Godman or compete with J. A. Smith?" queried an alumnus of the Rutgers Medical College.³ The question was well put, for just as it was written, Godman's successor had been selected—in London.

The Rutgers faculty, through its Registrar, Dr. Francis, had asked for the assistance in London of Granville S. Pattison, then Professor of Anatomy at the University of London. Pattison, with the advice of his even more eminent colleagues, Charles Bell, William Lawrence and Benjamin Travers (altogether the very foremost anatomists-surgeons of London) examined the claims of various candidates with "The most mature deliberation." Unanimously they "nominated Dr. Bushe to the Chair."⁴

Dr. Bushe, Pattison pointed out, was then about 30 years of age, had attained his A.M. at Trinity College, Dublin,⁵ where he had distinguished himself as a scholar, had been a "house pupil" of Mr. Todd, the Professor of Anatomy at Dublin, and his demonstrator, and had zealously studied anatomy at Paris for two years. Later, in military service, he had been placed in charge of the "anatomical establishment" at Chatham, "and the splendid museum he has collected in a few years, speaks volumes in favour of his zeal, his ability, and his industry." At Chatham, too, he had the responsibility of lecturing to the young medical officers.

Pattison traveled to Chatham (and requested £13/0/0 expense money for the trip from Dr. Francis) and was impressed sufficiently with Bushe to invite him to London. There Dr. Bushe successfully

³ A. D. Spoon to John W. Francis, August 13, 1828. New York Public Library, John W. Francis Papers. J. A. Smith M.R.C.S. (London), had been Professor of Anatomy and Surgery and of Anatomy and Physiology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. He was to become President of that college, and of the College of William and Mary. *College of Physicians and Surgeons . . . Catalogue of the Alumni, Officers and Fellows, 1807-1880* (New York, 1880), p. 145.

⁴ The report from Pattison is in a letter, Granville S. Pattison to John W. Francis, August 14, 1828. Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers. Accounts of all four men are to be found in the *D.N.B.* E. H. Dixon, who had studied under Bushe, later named Bell, Lawrence, and Benjamin Brodie as the men who had recommended Bushe (*The Scalpel*, 4 [1852], 466). This was repeated by H. A. Kelly (H. A. Kelly and W. L. Burrage, *Dictionary of American Medical Biography*, New York, 1928, p. 180) but it does not agree with either the Pattison letter or with the advertisement of the College that announced that Bushe was taking Godman's place (see fn. 6).

⁵ Bushe's name, however, does not appear in G. D. Burtchell and T. U. Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinensis* (Dublin, 1935).

encountered the critical appraisal of Pattison's colleagues. "We did not, however, consider ourselves justified," Dr. Pattison wrote, "in electing him until we had heard him lecture." Dr. Bushe delivered two lectures, "the result of which was our determination in his favour."

Certainly Dr. Bushe had proved his mettle, but anyone familiar with such letters will appreciate Dr. Pattison's final hedge:

I do not pretend to say that Dr. B. is as yet a complete lecturer. As a teacher his experience has not been great. But as he has a superior education, great anatomical and pathological knowledge, and the most perfect self-possession, we are decidedly of opinion that after a little more experience in Teaching he will become a very eminent Professor.

Pattison had apparently been given considerable authority, for in a postscript to his letter he noted that Dr. Bushe planned to sail to New York on September 1st, and he advised Francis that he might "advertise immediately." Indeed, the announcements of the forthcoming school term, dated September 29, 1828, advertised the appointment of Bushe, the method of his selection, and the eminence of his selectors.⁶

The self-possession which Dr. Pattison had noted in Dr. Bushe undoubtedly served him well when the time came to discuss salary with his new employer-colleagues. Bushe was certainly aware that he had been "sent from London"⁷ and his contract, now in the Rutgers Archives, was indeed a favorable one to him.

Since there was no corporate body—the College had failed to get a charter—Hosack, Mott, and Francis personally contracted with Bushe to guarantee him an income of \$2600, \$3000 and \$3500 in each of the next three years successively. That is to say, if Dr. Bushe did not receive at least the designated amount from his student fees—and the practice was the general one by which the professor's income was derived not from salary but from student fees—Hosack, Mott, and Francis guaranteed to make up the difference.⁸ In fact, for 1828-29 they paid him an additional \$680, and for 1829-30 an

⁶ Broadside, "Rutgers Medical Faculty-Geneva College," September 29, 1828. Rutgers Archives, Medical School Papers.

⁷ George Bushe to John W. Francis, July 25, 1829. Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

⁸ Except that any deficit they had to meet in the second year was to be paid back by Bushe in the third year. There was no third year.

additional \$2000, the receipts for most of which were endorsed on the original contract. Dr. Bushe thus did quite well, although his income was reduced slightly by his agreement to go along with the rest of the faculty in paying the interest on the cost of erecting the college building.⁹

II

Bushe had reluctantly agreed to this interest payment "to prevent further dispute," perhaps because he would have had to take on Dr. Hosack himself, a formidable foe even for a self-assured young Irishman. Perhaps, however, it was because he had just come through a drawn-out controversy with his colleagues.

On December 7, 1828, Dr. Bushe wrote to Dr. Francis asking him to inform the faculty "That the young subject [cadaver] some time since brought into the College, has been removed by the porter without my permission." On the same day Alexander F. Vache wrote to Bushe¹⁰ in response to a letter to him from Bushe which had questioned Vache's conduct in the dissecting hall. Vache contended that he had done nothing to violate any of the prerogatives of the anatomy department with regard either to the hall or the cadavers used. He was responsible to Dr. Mott, the professor of surgery, he contended, and Dr. Mott alone could claim control over his own apartments.¹¹

The polite tone of Vache's letter did nothing to appease Dr. Bushe. He dashed off a letter to Dr. Francis.¹² On a huge sheet of paper, its large, bold strokes bespeak the "irascible temper" ascribed to Bushe later by an otherwise doting former student.¹³ The letter requested that it, and certain other letters, including Vache's, be transmitted to the faculty. "As professor of An'y, I am bound to control the operations in the dissecting hall," he insisted. Yet he could not, as the letter enclosed indicated, control Dr. Vache, a man who really had no connection with the College.

⁹ George Bushe to John W. Francis, July 25, 1829, Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

¹⁰ Both letters are in the Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

¹¹ Vache was personal assistant to Dr. Mott and held no official college position. He was later, however, to speak of himself as "demonstrator of anatomy" in a letter to the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. U. of P. Archives, Medical Faculty Minutes, III (1828-1845), November 3, 1829, 65-67.

¹² George Bushe to John W. Francis, December 8, 1828. Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

¹³ Dixon, p. 466.

If I am not to control Dr. Vache [he continued] I will not control others in said hall; nor will I enter it. I can not be insulted in the execution of my duty. . . . If persons are permitted to bring subjects [cadavers] into Rutger's [*sic*] College, its best hopes will be frustrated. If persons dissect in the hall, who do not belong to it, my income will be diminished. If I cannot control my pupils I cannot instruct them, and if I am not protected in my duty I cannot perform it. Without you issue a satisfactory order confirming my powers in the dissecting room, and distinctly mention Dr. Vache's name, I will perform but my imperative duty, and abandon my room of practical anatomy to a demonstrator.

The real antagonists, however, were Dr. Mott and Dr. Bushe, and it devolved upon Drs. Francis and Macneven, as a faculty committee, to adjudicate the dispute. Their report,¹⁴ dated the very next day, indicated that they had examined the documents and had "listened patiently to the several representations made by the respective parties." The blame lay, they contended, with the "injudicious interference and mis-apprehensions of a third party," probably Vache, although he was not named. "No injurious imputations were intended and . . . no hostile feelings at present exist," they concluded, and gave "as their deliberate opinion that the interests of the College and the individual advantage of the parties themselves will be best promoted by the Board accepting this Statement of the issue of the case."

If we can assume that the date on this report is correct (the report would better fit into the chronology of events if it bore the date of December 29 or January 9 rather than the date of December 9 which it unmistakably bears), the committee was much too sanguine much too soon. The ill-feeling had not disappeared, and the hope that the matter would be forgotten went unrealized. On December 27, 1828, Bushe informed his class that because of a grievance "unnoticed" by the faculty to whose attention he had called it, he would cease his evening lectures and confine himself to one lecture a day on descriptive anatomy. He referred the students to the faculty and invited them to "investigate" the nature of his grievance.¹⁵

This the students undertook to do, and a committee of seven addressed a most polite and tactful letter to the Registrar.¹⁶

¹⁴ The Report is in the Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

¹⁵ W. Channing, *et al.*, to The Registrar of the Medical Faculty of Geneva College, December 29, 1828. New York Public Library, John W. Francis Papers.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

First the committee asked if there were circumstances, which they, in the interests of the class, could investigate "with propriety." If so, they wished to report the facts to the class and "to recommend such measures, as they may deem expedient to relieve the class under their present privation." The committee recognized the delicacy of their situation between their "constituents," and the Professors, and averred that they

would explicitly disclaim & cautiously avoid any interference in the prerogatives of their teachers—& still less would they hazard the charge of impertinence, by inquiries into private or individual differences.

They therefore requested the Faculty "to favour them with such information as they might think accordant with the above views, & particularly as to the practicable early adjustment of existing differences." They commented, finally, that if "that one" advantage "which had been its chief boast of fame among rivals far & near" were to be lost, the College would be reduced to mediocrity.

The events of the following month cannot be reconstructed, but Dr. Bushe went down to defeat. On January 28, 1829, he had orally agreed with Dr. Francis that Dr. Mott might have what Bushe "did not consider him entitled to," but the next day, wanting the last word, he wrote to explain why he had given up. In ill grace, he spoke of Mott's ability "to trumpet the sound of injustice," and peevishly boasted that despite his concessions he could still hold his ground "as a man of some little science, and teach people to discriminate between things and men." If not, "I may fairly dismantle myself of all pretensions," he concluded.¹⁷

Dr. Bushe continued his work at the College for the final year of its existence and unquestionably measured up to the reputation of his predecessor. The esteemed Dr. Samuel D. Gross of Philadelphia met Bushe at a party given by Dr. Hosack. "There were two to whom I was especially attracted," Gross was to recall, "Dr. George Bushe and John W. Francis." He had heard Bushe deliver, on the previous morning,

an excellent discourse on the anatomy of the hip-joint, in which he referred, in glowing terms, to the labors of Bonnetus, Morgagni, and

¹⁷ George Bushe to John W. Francis, January 29, 1829. Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

other pathological authorities, with which he seemed familiar. The hours passed rapidly and pleasantly, the attention of every student being rivetted to the subject. The lecture was able and animated, abounding in flights of genuine eloquence.¹⁸

When the College closed, Bushe decided to remain in America. Perhaps the financial unpreparedness, which he gave in 1828 as one reason for deciding not to settle in this country,¹⁹ was the reason he could not leave. The next few years were lean ones for him and it was said that he "barely escaped starvation" before fortune smiled on him.²⁰

He turned to surgery and tried his hand at medical journalism. Finally he attained "a brilliant reputation as a bold, dashing operator."²¹ His boldness, it was rumored, was a consequence of economic necessity and he "often used the knife where a conservative surgeon would not have interfered."²² But he has been credited with "meritorious achievements" as a surgeon²³ and his *Treatise on the malformation, injuries, and diseases of the rectum and anus* (New York, 1837) was said to have been "long considered the ablest work on the subject in any language."²⁴

But the smile of fortune proved fleeting. On May 18, 1837, he of the "glorious eye and superbly intellectual face," died of consumption in his thirty-ninth year.²⁵

¹⁸ S. D. Gross, *Autobiography* (Philadelphia, 1887), I, 90.

¹⁹ George Bushe to John W. Francis, July 25, 1829, Rutgers Archives, Medical College Papers.

²⁰ Kelly. His account is based on that of Dixon's, which is unreliable in several details. It is difficult to think of Bushe starving at least in his two years with the Rutgers faculty when his income was at least \$2600 and \$3000 a year. (See above.) It also needs to be noted that at his death in 1837 he left what the auctioneer advertised as a "valuable library . . . comprising a selection of the best works of anatomy, surgery, and medicine" of English, French and American publication. The catalogue ran to 23 pages. *A catalogue of the valuable library of the late Dr. George M. Bushe . . . which will be sold at auction by Cooley and Bangs . . . July 13, 1837* (New York, 1837). Moreover, on June 24, 1836 he made out a will (leaving all personal and real property to his wife), indicating that he had attained some estate. The will is to be found in Record of Wills in the Office of the Surrogate of New York County, Book 76, p. 340.

²¹ Kelly and Burrage, p. 180.

²² Gross, pp. 90-91.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁴ H. A. Kelly and W. L. Burrage, *American Medical Biographies* (Baltimore, 1920), p. 179.

²⁵ The description is Dixon's, p. 465. The date of death is from the New York *Evening Post*; Kelly and Burrage gave 1836 as the year of death and Dixon puts it at "about twelve years" before 1852.