

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND INTERREGNUM POLITICS

by

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When Sir George Clark wrote the official history of the College of Physicians he based much of his research on the private annals of the institution.¹ His work centred round the constitutional growth and structure of the College and proved to be extremely valuable in outlining its organic development throughout four hundred years of existence. The very scale of this task meant that the history was often synoptic rather than exhaustive. Thus, of necessity, it failed at certain points to give a full picture of the wider activities and complex relationships maintained by the Fellows, both individually and corporately. One of the periods which received inadequate attention is to be found during the Commonwealth and Protectorate.² To remedy this situation other commentators have since published studies which help to clarify the corporation's history during this period.³

However, certain fundamental questions about the relationship between the College and the government remain unanswered. Why, for example did the administration not reform this monopolistic body which many puritans regarded as socially destructive and professionally corrupt? It certainly did not refrain from taking stringent remedial action in other cases and could easily have reorganized or disbanded the corporation while utilizing the skills of individual Fellows. Instead, the government maintained a stance of benign neutrality towards the College, and on several occasions encouraged it to consolidate its influence. Furthermore, certain anomalies can be detected in the internal politics of the institution which have usually gone unremarked and unexplained.

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¹ Sir George Clark, *A history of the Royal College of Physicians of London*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, vol. 1. (All references in the present article will be to the typescript copy of the Annals of the Royal College of Physicians, Book IV. This copy of the Annals has been translated into English from the Latin original, and is kept in the Library of the College. The present writer wishes to thank the Registrar of the College for permission to use this material.)

² For the sake of clarity the term "Civil War" will be used to denote 1642–1649, the term "Commonwealth" to indicate 1649–1653, and the term "Protectorate" 1653–1660.

³ See especially: R. S. Roberts, 'Essay review: The Royal College of Physicians of London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Hist. Sci.*, 1966, 5: 86–100; P. M. Rattansi, 'Paracelsus and the Puritan Revolution', *Ambix*, 1963, 11: 24–32, and, 'The Helmontian–Galenist controversy in Restoration England', *ibid.*, 1964, 12: 1–23; C. Webster, 'English medical reformers of the Puritan Revolution: A background to the "Society of Chymical Physitians"', *ibid.*, 1967, 14: 16–41, and 'The College of Physicians: "Solomon's House" in Commonwealth England', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1967, 41: 393–412; Theodore M. Brown, 'The mechanical philosophy and the "Animal Oeconomy"—a study in the development of English physiology in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century', unpublished doctoral thesis, 1968, at Princeton University (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 69–2727).

This paper will therefore consider several related aspects of the corporation's history during the Commonwealth and Protectorate. A description of the College's response to pressure in these years of crisis will be followed by an analysis of the changes in membership which caused alterations in the internal political balance. The general conclusions drawn from this analysis will then be tested against a detailed examination of three significant events, namely the elections to membership of Walter Charleton, William Petty and Henry Pierrepont. This should help to determine the nature of any changes within the corporate power-structure and how far they affected its external policies.

I

From 1645 the College was subjected to a growing barrage of abuse. As Webster and Rattansi⁴ have shown, its opponents were a heterogeneous group united only in their hostility towards the College and their support for chemical therapy. Included in their ranks were religious visionaries, social reformers, professional competitors and self-seeking opportunists. In reality the College was failing to deal with a grim medical situation that was especially severe in London. As the metropolis grew, so did the incidence of urban poverty and disease. The College, shielded by its monopoly, had disregarded the increasingly grave situation. Its statutes had served to artificially bolster the interests of a small medical élite which in turn had become divorced from responsibility to the bulk of an expanding population. The rapid spread of Paracelsian and Helmontian doctrines provided a viable, cheap and coherent alternative to the humoral therapy officially endorsed by the College. This alternative was speedily utilized by its diverse opponents.

In 1642, the early removal of royal authority in London left the College powerless to enforce its regulation of medical practice. At the same time censorship ceased to exist. The combination of these two factors opened the gates and released a flood of vernacular literature aimed at popularizing the doctrines of Paracelsus and Van Helmont. These works often contained bitter criticism of the College and its statutory monopoly. The tenor of this criticism can be indicated by quoting the words of Nicholas Culpeper: "The Heathen shall rise up in Judgement against you, and condemn you; For had they dealt so basely with you, as you have done with this Nation, all your skill in Physick might have been written in the inside of a Ring. Colledg, Colledg, thou art diseased . . ."⁵

Very often reformers saw analogous faults in the universities, the legal and the medical professions. Thus John Webster attacked all three in his work of 1654, saving a few choice remarks for the physicians: "Is this the office of a Physician? is only riches got by hook or crook, whether the Patient receive benefit or none, live or dy, the sole end of their profession? and must these things have the countenance of Law, and confirmation by Charters? must these things be cryed up, while the sincere and faithfull

⁴ It would be redundant to deal at length with this opposition to the College, since it is fully described in the excellent articles of Webster and Rattansi quoted in note 3 above. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Webster for his advice throughout the preparation of this article.

⁵ Nicholas Culpeper, *A physical directory; or a translation of the dispensatory made by the Colledg of Physitians of London*, London, Peter Cole, 1651, 'The Epistle Dedicatory', Sig. A1^r. For Culpeper's biography see F. N. L. Poynter, 'Nicholas Culpeper and his books', *J. Hist. Med.*, 1962, 17: 152-167, and David L. Cowen, 'The Boston editions of Nicholas Culpeper', *ibid.*, 1956, 11: 156-165.

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endeavours of simple and honest-meaning men, are disdained and trampled upon? . . .”⁶ In his criticism, John Webster typified many of his fellow protagonists who, along with the unrestrained apothecaries, posed a grave threat to the future of the College.

In the face of this hostility the College remained strangely quiescent.⁷ During 1647 the Fellows marginally liberalized their statutes to counter the most damaging claims of the anti-monopolists. Harassment of their most powerful rival, the Apothecaries Company, was ended. In 1649, to still the charge that it completely rejected all chemical therapy, the College set up a laboratory and appointed an official chemist, William Johnson.⁸ Apart from Johnson’s limited publications the College did nothing to defend itself in print against the calumnies of its antagonists. Almost incidentally a few works appeared which included refutations of these hostile onslaughts. For example Seth Ward, when replying to John Webster’s attack on the academics, maintained that: “. . . Surgery as well as Physick, hath even in our time been extremely advanced, this place hath given late instances of both; . . . And the Colledge of Physitians at London is the glory of this Nation, and indeed of Europe, for their learning and felicity, in the cures of the desperate Ulcers and diseases, even of the Cancer . . .”⁹ Another equally welcome defendant of the College was the alchemical writer, Elias Ashmole: “But to contract the Rayes of my Prospective to our owne homes, the Phisitians’s Colledge of London doth at this day nourish most noble and able Sons of Art; noway wanting in the choysiest of Learning; And though we doe not, yet the World abroad has taken notice of sundry learned Fellowes of that Societie, as Linacres, Gilbert, Ridley, Dee, Flood etc. and at present Doctor Harvey . . .”¹⁰ However, apart from the kind words of a few well-disposed authors, and the comments made by Johnson in his semi-official works, no attempt was made to defend the College in print.

There are several puzzling aspects in this picture of attack and limited response. First, in the face of such active hostility, which seemed to endanger its security through sheer vociferousness, why did the College remain so passive? The suggestion that it hoped quiescence would allow it to escape the attentions of critics or the government is clearly unsatisfactory; the College was villified so widely that it could scarcely be shielded from this unwelcome attention by a cloak of self-maintained silence. Inactivity or subtle manoeuvres far from being shrewd policy were more likely to precipitate

⁶ John Webster, *Academiarum examen or the examination of academies*, London, G. Calvert, 1654, p. 72. For an analysis of this work and its background see Allen G. Debus, *Science and education in the seventeenth century: the Webster-Ward debate*, London and New York, Macdonald-Elsevier, 1970.

⁷ For a description of the defence put forward by the College see Webster, ‘English medical reformers . . .’, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 19–20. The new statutes of 1647 are analysed in Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 278–281.

⁸ For remarks on Johnson see Rattansi, ‘The Helmontian-Galenist controversy . . .’, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 9–10.

⁹ Seth Ward, *Vindiciae Academiarum*, Oxford, L. Lichfield, 1654, pp. 35–36.

¹⁰ Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum containing severall poetickal pieces of our famous English philosophers, who have written the hermetique mysteries in their owne ancient language*, London, N. Brooke, 1652, p. 460. For Elias Ashmole, see C. H. Josten, *Elias Ashmole 1617–1692, his autobiographical and historical notes, his correspondence and other contemporary sources relating to his life and work*, 6 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966, and the review of the above by Allen G. Debus, ‘Alchemy and the historian of science’, *Br. J. Hist. Sci.*, 1967, 6: 128–138.

disaster if the necessary public defence failed to appear. On the other hand there is no immediate explanation for the growth of antagonism towards the College *after* the reduction of its more monopolistic traits. It is even more difficult to explain this aggressive crescendo when the College's inability to regulate medical practice even in the capital is taken into consideration.¹¹ Why then was the quarry so passive and the hunters so anxious when the final blow seemed to be imminent?

II

At this point a look at the relationship between the College and the government might help to dispel some of the confusion raised by these problems. Throughout this period there was little outside interference in the College's affairs. It carried on as normal during the Civil War and in all outward appearances quietly accorded full authority to the *de facto* government. In 1644¹² the Fellows subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant, probably accepting that this was a necessary evil. Naturally they tried to avoid unconstitutional taxation. However, a fair proportion of them were assessed as individuals, and their traditional exemption from taxes was disregarded. For example, in December 1643 Sir Matthew Lister¹³ was assessed at £500, and in November 1644 Dr. Lawrence Wright¹⁴ was forced to pay out £345 in taxation. There was a further, and partly successful, attempt to tax some of the Fellows in 1650 which was only halted when Alderman Eastwick stepped in to defend the privileges of the College.¹⁵ During the Commonwealth the government only rarely encroached on the corporation's rights. On the most notable occasions, in November 1656 and December 1657, the Fellows had to obtain new charters, in the course of some ordinary litigation.¹⁶ Apart from these instances the government seems to have treated the College with an almost studied indifference. Is it possible then, that the key to this situation lay not in the relationship between the civil authorities and the College as a corporation but in the interrelationship between the government and individual Fellows?

One important aspect of its history which has so far lain uninvestigated is the character of those Fellows who became associated with the College during the Interregnum.

¹¹ Throughout this period the College was unable to regulate medical practice in London. Whilst superficially it appeared to do so, in reality it was powerless to enforce its will on the unruly apothecaries and aggressive empirics. Hence, on 9 April 1655 there was a discussion in the College about restraining "the daring practices of the apothecaries" but nothing could be done owing to the "not inconsiderable difficulties" involved. See *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 64.

¹² See Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 275.

¹³ For Lister see William Munk, *The roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London*, vol 1, London, Harrison, 1871, p. 119. Details of Lister's assessment are to be found in *The Calendar of the Committee for the Advance of Money, Domestic, 1642-1656*, London, H.M.S.O., pp. 186, 1280. It would appear that Lister's shrewd manipulation of his property to avoid taxation nearly came to grief in 1650.

¹⁴ For Wright, see Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, pp. 169-170. Details of his assessment are to be found in *The Calendar of the Committee for the Advance of Money . . .*, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 487. Among those Fellows who were assessed in a similar way were Thomas Winston, Theodore Diodati, Othowell Meverall, John Clarke, Francis Prujean, Peter [?] Chamberlain, Sir Maurice Williams, Richard Catcher, John Bathurst and William Fraizer. This list is certainly not complete, since it covers only the properties of men in the south-east. Notwithstanding it represents a figure of nearly one-third of the total number of Fellows.

¹⁵ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 28, on 26 September 1650.

¹⁶ See Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 282-283.

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In keeping with the profound changes outside its walls, a corresponding change took place in the corporation's new recruits. Of the thirty-seven Fellows recorded in an official list of 1650 only eight were left alive at the Restoration.¹⁷ This meant that over three-quarters of the Fellows were replaced within a decade. In addition the statutory changes of 1647 increased the acceptable number of junior members of the College from six to twelve. It is therefore reasonable to assume that natural wastage and numerical expansion along with medical and political developments led to a significant evolution within the College. An investigation of the careers of some of the more influential Fellows elected during the Interregnum should throw light on this development.

One of the most important recruits for the College was Jonathan Goddard.¹⁸ A candidate in 1643, he became a Fellow in 1646 and soon emerged as a figure of note amongst his colleagues. This influence stemmed from his close connexion with the army and with Oliver Cromwell. During 1649, after several years practice in London, Goddard was appointed first physician to the Parliamentary Army, and in that capacity accompanied Cromwell to Ireland. In June 1650 he went with his friend and master to Scotland, subsequently tending Cromwell during his serious illness. To reward his activity and at the personal request of Cromwell, Goddard was appointed Warden of Merton College, Oxford, on 9 December 1651,¹⁹ and was incorporated D.M. on 14 January 1652. In October 1652 as Chancellor of the University, Cromwell made Goddard one of his four advisory delegates at Oxford, and in the Barebones Parliament of 1653, Goddard sat as the sole representative of the University. On 3 November 1653, he was sworn into the Council of State along with Cromwell and twenty-three of his colleagues. Almost immediately he took up his duties as a member of the Committee for Lunatics,²⁰ which paralleled his role as adviser to the Hospitals' Committee.²¹ Thus by 1653 Goddard had become an indispensable servant of the government and a man with the highest political connexions. From this date he also spent much time at the College. He is recorded in the Annals as being present at most of the regular meetings.

Another Fellow who was substantially involved with the government was Daniel Whistler.²² This brilliant young doctor played a leading part in the provision of medical services for the navy during the years of the Commonwealth, maintaining close contact

¹⁷ These statistics are based on the biographies contained in Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above; this figure for the maximum number of Fellows which was seven more than the statutes of the College allowed for officially, comes from the list of Fellows, candidates and licentiates who were present at the Comitia Trimestria on 30 September 1650. See Annals, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 29.

¹⁸ For Goddard (1617–1675) see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above; Sir Humphrey Rolleston, 'Jonathan Goddard M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S.', *Ann. med. Hist.*, 1940, 3: 91–97, and *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: 1651–1652*, London, H.M.S.O. (henceforward C.S.P.D.), p. 251, 13 June 1651 "Dr. Goddard to be recommended to the Universities' Committee to be made master of a college, and Sir Hen. Vane is desired to acquaint them that Council, in consideration hereof, have given him a smaller sum than they would have done, for his care in the Lord General's Sickness."

²⁰ *C.S.P.D. 1653–1654*, p. 237, 8 November 1653. At the same time, Goddard was placed on the committee for the mint.

²¹ *C.S.P.D. 1652–1653*, p. 332, 17 May 1653. For Goddard's membership of the informal group which met in London between 1645 and 1649 to discuss new ideas in natural philosophy, see P. R. Barnett, *Theodore Haak, S'Gravenhage*, Mouton, 1962, pp. 75–83.

²² For Whistler (d. 1684) see J. J. Keevil, *Medicine and the Navy, 1200–1900*, Edinburgh and

with the Council of State through the Admiralty Committee. In 1655²³ Cromwell chose him as his personal envoy to the king of France, thus indicating the high regard he had for Whistler. George Bate,²⁴ a more senior Fellow also supported the new administration and was employed by the Council as one of its regular physicians. In 1653 for example he was sent most urgently from London to Portsmouth where General Blake lay seriously ill.²⁵ Bate was also one of Oliver Cromwell's personal doctors. Similarly, Thomas Wharton was a Fellow with high-level contacts.²⁶ In 1646, after Oxford's surrender to the parliamentary forces, Wharton was created D.M. at the direct request of General Sir Thomas Fairfax. For his part Thomas Coxe²⁷ was deeply involved in the administration of medical matters during the Commonwealth, being a physician to the parliamentary army, controller of St. Katherine's Hospital in London, and a trusted adviser of the Council of State. This short list makes it clear that the College, through some of its younger Fellows, developed close links with the government on an individual level during the Interregnum. In addition these links were further reinforced by certain of the older Fellows.

The records of the Council of State show that Lawrence Wright,²⁸ senior College councillor and a Fellow since 1622, was repeatedly consulted over the condition of prisoners or malignants kept in custody.²⁹ In May 1651 he accompanied George Bate to help treat Oliver Cromwell in Scotland, and was handsomely rewarded by the administration for his efforts.³⁰ During 1652 he advised the Council on the provision of medical practitioners for the army in Ireland,³¹ and two years later he helped choose an apothecary suitable for service on a government vessel.³² In 1656 his son Henry was added to the Official Committee for Trade.³³

John Bathurst,³⁴ a Fellow from 1637 and another senior member of the College, was also a devoted servant of the parliamentary administration. He was chosen as personal physician to Cromwell who subsequently placed full trust in his advice on medical

London, E. and S. Livingstone, 1958, vol. 2, pp. 13–20; Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, pp. 230–232, gives a biased account of Whistler's later years; see also E. Clarke, 'Whistler and Glisson on rickets', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1962, 26: 45–61. Whistler became a candidate in 1647 and a Fellow in 1649.

²³ *C.S.P.D. 1655–1656*, p. 235, 10 July 1655. "Order—on report that his Highness has pitched upon Dr. Dan Whistler to go from him to the King of France . . .".

²⁴ For Bate (1609–1669), see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, pp. 211–212. Munk's account is again highly biased.

²⁵ *C.S.P.D. 1652–1653*, p. 199, 6 March 1653.

²⁶ For Wharton (1614–1673), who became a candidate in 1647 and a Fellow in 1650, see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, pp. 237–239. One of Wharton's close friends was Elias Ashmole. For this see C. H. Joston, *op. cit.*, note 10 above, vol. 1, pp. 70–71 and Index.

²⁷ For Coxe (d. 1685) see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, p. 228. Coxe was a candidate in 1646 and a Fellow in 1649. See note 97 below. For Coxe's relationship to St. Katherine's Hospital see *C.S.P.D. 1653–1654*, p. 180, and *C.S.P.D. 1658–1659*, p. 379.

²⁸ For Wright (1590–1657) see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, p. 169. He became a candidate in 1618 and a Fellow in 1622.

²⁹ For example see *C.S.P.D. 1650–1651*, p. 179, when Wright certified the health of Jenkins the preacher.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 214 and 250. Wright's payment was £200.

³¹ *C.S.P.D. 1651–1652*, p. 112, 20 January 1652.

³² *C.S.P.D. 1653–1654*, p. 564, 30 October 1654.

³³ *C.S.P.D. 1655–1656*, p. 162, 5 February 1656.

³⁴ For Bathurst (1607–1659) see Munk, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, pp. 206–207.

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matters.³⁵ In the early years of the Protectorate he became a physician to the navy,³⁶ and in 1656 was elected a burgess for Richmond, Yorkshire, to serve in the parliament called by the Protector. Paul de Laune, who had been a Fellow since 1618, was elected on 22 June 1643 to serve as physician to the parliamentary army under the Earl of Essex.³⁷ After losing his professorship at Gresham College in 1654, de Laune accepted from Oliver Cromwell the appointment of physician-general to the fleet and in this capacity was present at the taking of Jamaica. Another Fellow who was probably sympathetic towards the parliamentary cause was Thomas Sheaf.³⁸ He was elected in 1637 and joined de Laune in service under the Earl of Essex in 1643.³⁹

When put together, the weight of this biographical evidence suggests a modified picture of the balance of political affiliations within the College. Far from temporizing, or reluctantly accepting the new order, a significant number of its Fellows were active servants and supporters of the parliamentary cause in the Civil War and of the government during the Protectorate. In addition there were other Fellows whose predilections are not known but who might easily have swelled the ranks of these government supporters.⁴⁰ Thus, the College's apparent failure to defend itself may well have been due to the relationship of particular Fellows with the government. It is likely that, prompted by its experience of individuals, the government was prepared to tolerate the continued existence of the institution on the grounds of utility. For it probably seemed to the administration that the College was an element of stability in a volatile medical world. Furthermore it was staffed with a fair number of valuable servants and could be allowed to continue without reform if its behaviour proved reasonable. For their part it is likely that these Fellows accepted the conditions tacitly imposed by the administration and strove to control College affairs to ensure that at the least an official posture of willing compliancy and the avoidance of notoriety was adopted.

If this interpretation is correct it should adequately explain the pattern of affairs within the corporation. To see if this is the case an examination will be made of the issues surrounding three crucial elections at the College during this period. Charleton,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206. It was Bathurst's medical certificate that led Cromwell to overrule Sir Harry Vane's objections, and obtain from the Council the order for Sir Richard Fanshawe's liberation from imprisonment at Whitehall.

³⁶ *C.S.P.D. 1653-1654*, p. 104, 25 August 1653. Dr. Whistler, in writing to the Council, said "I doubt not but Ipswich, where most of the sick are, will be sufficiently cared for by Dr. Bathurst, of whose ability and care I have good assurance."

³⁷ See *Annals*, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, volume 3, p. 541. For de Laune (d. 1654) see *Munk*, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, pp. 160-162.

³⁸ For Sheaf (1607-1657) see *Munk*, *op. cit.*, note 13 above, p. 206.

³⁹ *Annals*, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, volume 3, p. 541. Letter from Othowell Meverall to the Speaker, ". . . for the providinge of physitians to be forthwith hastened away for the service of the Army, I called yesterday being Monday an assembly of as many of our society as co[u]ld be gotten together The proposition was received with much Alacrity, and two gentlemen elected instantly by the generall assent of all present viz. Dr. Delaun and Dr. Sheaf both fellowes of our Colledge and approved physitians."

⁴⁰ For example, Nathan Paget, a candidate in 1643 and a Fellow in 1646, was the intimate friend of John Milton, and cousin to the poet's third wife. From this connexion it could reasonably be inferred that Paget's sympathies may have been similar to Milton's. Another Fellow who might well have been sympathetic towards the parliamentary cause was Samuel Collins, who was admitted a candidate and a Fellow in 1651. This idea is suggested through his election to a fellowship at New College, Oxford, by the favour of the parliamentary visitors. It was unlikely that the visitors would choose as one of their "intruded" Fellows a man of heterodox religious or political opinions.

Petty and Dorchester, the three men concerned, all posed problems for the College authorities. The reaction of the College to each election is, for the historian, a valuable indication of the nature of its internal politics.

III

After an early career at Oxford, Walter Charleton was made a physician-in-ordinary to the king in 1642.⁴¹ The appointment came when he was only twenty-two years old, and owed much to the support of William Harvey, an associate of Charleton's from 1642 to 1646. This close tie with the royal person reflected the young doctor's strong Royalist sympathies. On 6 July 1649⁴² Charleton presented himself at the College of Physicians to initiate the procedure which would lead to his election as a candidate. Later, when informed that he was a royal physician, the College proceeded with great caution since traditionally such practitioners were exempt from the normal process of examination: "He asked to undergo the first examination to be admitted into the number of candidates. However, since he afterwards stated that he was physician extraordinary to the King the matter was judged by voting with counters whether or no he could be admitted into the College without any examination. The affair was referred to scrutiny so that it should not be refused by any one opposing. He had not visited."⁴³ If the College had bowed to the exercise of such a traditional prerogative it might well have offended the government. Ultimately this proved the most important consideration⁴⁴ and Charleton had to proceed through the normal course of examination before he was elected as a candidate on 8 April 1650.

At this point it is necessary to examine the initial relationship between the young doctor and the institution. The most important factor was his association with Francis Prujean who was President of the College from September 1650 to October 1655. Charleton expressed deep gratitude for his patronage and in 1652 dedicated his book, *The darknes of atheism*⁴⁵ to his distinguished friend. If some of the other Fellows objected to his Royalism, the support of his patron most likely smoothed away any opposition. However his election apparently failed to cause controversy and this was probably due to another attribute which Charleton possessed at that time and which made him a useful and even attractive recruit. In 1650 he published three Helmontian works of which one was in Latin and two were in English.⁴⁶ These last were the earliest translations of Van Helmont's work to appear in England and for this reason alone Charleton must have gained some notoriety. As far as the Fellows were concerned the

⁴¹ For Charleton's biography see the present author's article, 'Walter Charleton's early life, 1620–1659, and relationship to natural philosophy', *Ann. Sci.*, 1973, 30: 311–340, in which all the early biographical data is noted and examined.

⁴² See *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ By 8 February 1651, the College treated a similar problem with an air of brusque certainty: *ibid.*, p. 33: "Dr. Coledon asserted that he was avoiding the examination on no other ground than [that] of the privilege of a Royal Physician-in-ordinary."

⁴⁵ Walter Charleton, *The darkness of atheism dispelled by the light of nature: a physico-theological treatise*, London, W. Lee, 1652.

⁴⁶ W. Charleton, *Spiritus Gorgonicus vi sua Saxipara exutus, sive de causis, signis et sanatione lithaeos diatriba*, Leyden, Elsevir, 1650; *A ternary of paradoxes . . .*, London, W. Lee, 1650, and *Deliramenta catarrhi: or the incongruities, impossibilities and absurdities couched under the vulgar opinion of defluxions . . .*, London, W. Lee, 1650.

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young doctor's membership of the College would help to back up the claim that they were fully conversant with the theory and practice of iatro-chemical medicine. Thus William Johnson mentioned that the College was regarded favourably by: "Dr. Charleton, a Learned Physitian, a favourer of Van Helmont".⁴⁷ In 1650 Charleton, through personal connexions, or through his position as a radical author, was probably acceptable to most of the Fellows in spite of his staunch Royalism. Five years later, however, this acceptance had changed to rejection, a change of heart which when examined closely proves to be quite consistent.

Throughout these years Charleton was often absent from the College. The Annals record that he only attended two regular meetings during this whole period. On both occasions he petitioned the College over questions of medical ethics. On 6 December 1650 he complained to the committee that a Dr. Cassell had criticized his treatment in front of a patient.⁴⁸ The committee promised an investigation of the affair, and quietly let it lapse. Fourteen months later Charleton again appeared, this time asking that the College support his prognosis and therapy in a case which led to the death of a pregnant gentlewoman, Mrs. Weldon. From the certificate which is included in the Annals it appears that the College gave a judgment which was entirely in favour of the young doctor.⁴⁹

By 3 May 1655, however, the picture had completely altered: "Dr. Charleton was also proposed as a Fellow, but since there were certain things brought forward in objection, less than worthy in a future fellow, more generally, however, than would merit absolute confidence, it pleased us to defer the matter to the next Comitia Trimestria, and meanwhile to investigate the whole affair with the evidence of witnesses; so that without longer delay a decision might finally be reached concerning the exclusion from or admission into the Society of this Candidate."⁵⁰ The next development came eight days later at the monthly committee meeting: "Dr. Wedderbourne and Dr. Charleton, summoned, presented themselves. The former censured the latter for the crime not only of harmful practices against himself, but also against the Society itself and good sense. Dr. Charleton branded him in turn with falsity and arrogance. Indeed it seemed that neither was free from blame, but our Candidate was held to be the more serious and was renounced for it, wholly without hope of obtaining favour with us for the highest rank."⁵¹

This account does not clarify the exact nature of Wedderbourne's quarrel with Charleton. However, it produced bitter feeling between the two men and led to strong censure from the College, which was unable or unwilling to make an immediate decision. In spite of their earlier resolution the Fellows failed to reach agreement over the

⁴⁷ W[illiam] J[ohnson], *Three exact pieces of . . . phioravant . . . and Paracelsus his one hundred and fourteen experiments*, London, G. Nealand, 1652, in 'Short Animadversions upon Noah Biggs' (British Museum Reference: E. 642).

⁴⁸ See Annals, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 42-43, 5 March 1652. "Be it knowne to all . . . that we the Censors of the College of Physitians of London, being particularly informed by Doctor Charleton of Mrs. Welden's case: doe, upon beleefe of the Narrative, judge, that the physicke he ministered unto her, was fitt for her malady, and in probability no cause of her abortion, which we have cause to be testified by our Register, Baldwin Harvey."

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 65.

case at the next major committee meeting on 25 June. Instead, the Annals record the following cryptic comment: "Then also there took place the unexpected death of one, and of the other by contagion a propos of the previously decided affair of Dr. Charleton."⁵² The immediate dispute between the two doctors seems therefore to have been centred round a medical issue. Behind it might have lain a history of competition and personal rivalry which originated from their common appointment as physicians-in-ordinary to the king.

A final crisis however was precipitated on 14 July 1655. Another special committee was called which aimed to settle the issue of Charleton's status once and for all. Quite clearly a section of the College was not prepared to let him remain even as a candidate and thus forced through a final decision: ". . . the affair of Dr. Charleton came once more into question, and was at last decided by this compromise. Verily, that he should not be again proposed as a Fellow, but rather be proposed entirely, for trial by secret vote. This trial having been made, twelve out of seventeen were found gain saying."⁵³ This was a crucial event, and more than Charleton's election or his medical ethics hung in the balance. It is absolutely clear that the Fellows were split over this symbolic decision, and after repeated debate they arrived at this final, "compromise" solution. It is recorded with equal clarity in the Annals that the voting went five for Charleton and twelve against. The key to this dispute and to the fluctuating balance of power within the College may well lie in the nature and composition of these two opposing groups.

Naturally, since the Annals do not report the pattern of individual voting, it is impossible to state categorically which of the Fellows present voted for or against Charleton. However, if their biographies and political affiliations are examined a very interesting picture begins to emerge. Gathered in this meeting were a number of staunch government supporters including George Bate, Jonathan Goddard, Ralph Bathurst, Thomas Coxe, Daniel Whistler and Thomas Wharton. This represents a powerful and influential caucus which made up one-third of all those present. In addition Nathan Paget and Samuel Collins, from what is known of their backgrounds, might well be included in this group. On the other hand Francis Prujean the President, George Ent one of Charleton's close friends,⁵⁴ Baldwin Hamey a devoted Royalist, and John Micklethwaite⁵⁵ would probably have voted for Charleton if they behaved in a way consistent with their careers and past beliefs. This leaves only six Fellows to be accounted for out of the eighteen present. Of these six only Christopher Merret and William Staines⁵⁶ were men of any prominence in the College. It was probably one of

⁵² Ibid., p. 66.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵⁴ Charleton dedicated his work, *Natural history of nutrition, life and voluntary motion . . .*, London, H. Herringman, 1659, to George Ent in glowing terms.

⁵⁵ For Hamey, see Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 193. See also J. J. Keevil *The stranger's son*, London, G. Bles, 1953, which is a detailed biography of Hamey. ". . . Micklethwaite, on his part, was knighted by Charles II, to whom he was physician-in-ordinary after the Restoration. His practice was mainly amongst the aristocracy." Cf. Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, pp. 219–221.

⁵⁶ Christopher Merret was a close friend of William Harvey, who nominated him as Library Keeper for the new library which he had just donated to the College. He was obviously a trusted College official at this stage. See *ibid.*, pp. 240–247. Staines was elected a candidate in 1639, and a Fellow in 1641. He became important in the affairs of the College after the Restoration. See *ibid.*, pp. 213–214.

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these who gave Charleton his last affirmative vote. The other may well have been the Fellow who abstained from voting.⁵⁷ The four remaining Fellows, John Wilby, Edmund Trench, John King and Luke Rugely, who was an Helmontian, were all, according to Munk's account, fairly anonymous. The one factor which is common to each of them is that they all became Fellows between 1648 and 1654. In other words, they were elected at the end of the Civil War or during the Commonwealth period, and this factor may have been reflected in their political views. Whether this was the case or not, there is a strong possibility that they would have followed the lead of such politically influential men as Goddard and Bate whose goodwill could well prove invaluable for their future careers.

Therefore, an interesting and indeed likely interpretation of the events surrounding Charleton's rejection is that the Fellows who were most deeply involved with the government used the situation to override the authority of the more senior men who by constitutional right and established tradition should have moulded the policy of the College. Charleton's election inadvertently provided these government sympathisers with the opportunity to direct policy along lines dictated by private persuasion and general caution based on medical, intellectual and political grounds. However the reasons why they had now come to regard Charleton as a liability need to be explained.

Between 1650 and 1654 Charleton went through a drastic intellectual conversion. In 1652 he published a major work, *The darkness of atheism*. Instead of advocating the beliefs of Van Helmont, Charleton indicated that he had become a fervent disciple of Cartesian and Gassendian theories. It was this book which was dedicated to Francis Prujean, and which presumably received his approbation. By 1654, with the publication of his fifth book, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltonia*,⁵⁸ Charleton had become a passionate adherent of atomism. It was at this point that he publicly rejected his former beliefs, pouring scorn on the efficacy of the weapon-salve, and the vitalistic concept of a World Soul which lay behind Helmont's theory of sympathetic medicine.⁵⁹ However, his new ideas were regarded with increasing horror by many people, whatever their religious persuasion. Despite a lengthy and vigorous defence, Charleton was tarred with the brush of atheism along with notorious figures like Thomas Hobbes and Margaret Cavendish. Not surprisingly, he may well have been regarded as a monster by moderates like Goddard and Whistler. In addition his medical competence was now in doubt and his usefulness to the College as an advocate of chemical therapy had recently disappeared. His friends, probably less shocked by Charleton's *avant-garde* ideas, since they were quite in vogue amongst many of the Royalist intellectuals in Paris and London,⁶⁰ were unable to shield him from the almost inevitable results. With the prospect of this now unacceptable and notorious candidate becoming a Fellow, a group

⁵⁷ Eighteen Fellows are recorded by name in the Annals as being present, and it is stated that seventeen votes were cast. Presumably one Fellow abstained.

⁵⁸ Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltonia or a fabrick of science natural upon the hypothesis of atoms . . .*, London, T. Heath, 1654.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Helmont was now rejected as "Hairbrain'd and Contentious". *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁰ For example John Evelyn, who returned to London from Paris in 1652, published his translation of Lucretius, *T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura interpreted and made English verse by J. Evelyn Esq.*, London, G. Bedle & T. Collins, in 1656. This work was partly aimed at popularizing atomistic theories and repeatedly praised Charleton's books of 1652 and 1654. For a discussion of Charleton's place in the development of English atomism see the present author's article 'Walter Charleton's

consisting of government sympathisers and those Fellows most aware of current dangers probably came together and voted for caution and common sense. Charleton's allies would naturally have opposed them for personal and more general reasons and as a consequence the College was deeply divided.⁶¹

IV

This tentative picture of caution and self-policing is borne out by a number of other factors. First of all there is Walter Charleton's attitude to the College after his personal rejection. As might be expected he complained about the actions of certain of his fellow doctors: "I have reaped no other fruit of all my labours in that long and difficult work, but most severe, inhumane, uncharitable, unjust censures . . . [with some people] scandalizing me for negligence in the duties of my Profession, and invading the certainty of all its Rules and Maxims, while I wholly addicted myself to the Innovation of its Fundamentals . . . for from the time I first published that Physiology you mentioned, even to this very day, I have been embroil'd in as many troubles and distractions as malice, persecution and sharp adversity could accumulate upon me."⁶² Yet despite this bitter feeling towards some of his colleagues, he only had praise for the scientific work carried out by Fellows of the College like Glisson and Harvey.⁶³ He even advocated the role of this "venerable society" in protecting the public interest.⁶⁴ A later work reveals that he maintained his relationship with old friends like George Ent. Quite clearly, then, his ambivalent attitude towards the College matched the causes and conditions of his rejection and he can be regarded as perhaps the earliest casualty in the intellectual war which raged over the issue of atheism in the last half of the seventeenth century.

There is also evidence that the College was soon split over another important issue, the question of controlling unlicensed empirics. In this dispute, which lasted from March to May 1656, the candidates angrily demanded that the empirics be brought under control.⁶⁵ A special committee was created to deal with the problem, but was soon divided over the wisdom of trying to prosecute illegal practitioners: "There were present Dr. Alston, the President, and a number of others assigned to this business.

early life 1620–1659 . . .', op. cit., note 41 above, and other sources quoted therein. For an excellent study of the rancorous seventeenth-century debate over this topic and of the notoriety of figures like Margaret Cavendish and Hobbes, see Samuel L. Mintz *The hunting of Leviathan*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, especially pp. 39–62.

⁶¹ This division was echoed by Francis Prujean in the speech he gave at the end of his presidency, when he "exhorted all the Fellows to mutual good-will and concord". *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 68. It is reported that he "cheerfully relinquished" the post of President.

⁶² W. Charleton, *The immortality of the human soul demonstrated by the light of nature*, London, H. Herringman, 1657, pp. 10–11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–43. This lengthy description of the scientific work carried out at the College is analysed in C. Webster's article "The College of Physicians, "Solomon's House" in Commonwealth England", op. cit., note 3 above.

⁶⁴ Charleton, *The immortality of the human soul* . . ., op. cit., note 62 above, p. 41. "And, were the civil Magistrate but half so careful to reform, as these Doctors have been in detecting those publick abuses, the City of London would soon find, by happy experience, that Physicians are both as willing and able to preserve health, as to restore it."

⁶⁵ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 72–73. The candidates, who would have resented paying their dues to the College in order to practise when others were doing so freely, clearly played an important part in this dispute.

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There was a bitter dispute about the mountebanks and empirics to be restrained, where it was seen differently by others.”⁶⁶ Most probably the caucus of government supporters and politically conscious Fellows realized the dangers implicit in the suggestion. It might well have outraged the opponents of the College and forced the administration to take drastic steps since the action could have been interpreted as an attempt by the College to resuscitate its defunct monopoly. These Fellows therefore maintained their policy of caution, which led to a compromise decision aimed more at saving face than at any forceful activity.⁶⁷ Although the question was raised again in May, nothing came of it and the candidates seem to have resigned themselves to the situation.

By 1657 this policy had begun to pay dividends. On 4 May, Dr. George Purvis, leading a deputation from the newly constituted College of Physicians of Edinburgh, arrived and asked to examine the statutes of the corporation in London. Earlier, in December 1656, several Scottish doctors had petitioned Oliver Cromwell for permission to establish an institution similar to the College of Physicians of London. Given the widespread hostility towards the very existence of such a body in the English capital, the Protector’s readiness to consider such action is a mark of his feelings towards the London College. He subsequently accepted the idea, and “referred [it] to Mulgrave, Lambert and Lisle to send for Dr. Wright and other experienced physicians, to consult and report”.⁶⁸ Events moved swiftly and by mid-January they replied that agreement had been reached between the Edinburgh doctors, the civil authorities of that city and other interested parties.⁶⁹ On 17 February, when the paper-work had been completed, the Attorney-General was ordered to draw up a patent for Cromwell’s signature. The signed patent gave the College in Edinburgh powers equal to those of its English sister.⁷⁰ It had the right to legislate and regulate medical practice over the whole of Scotland, with power to examine and license apothecaries and surgeons. That this college was short-lived is not essentially relevant; however it is significant that the government was willing to support the establishment of a body identical to the College of Physicians in London. A clearer expression of approval could not have been made. As a result, a buoyant feeling of hope can be detected in a letter sent by the Fellows in London to their colleagues in Edinburgh: “. . . crafty knaves, mountebanks, quacks, barbers, old women fortune-tellers, and others of that kind of bullcalf, with the gold of hoped for immunity glinting, laid hold upon our solemn mysteries But Apollo saved us: true reverence, that is, for so renowned a profession, and the invincible authority granted to us long ago by . . . the highest powers, for the most part beat down freedom to practise medicine outside the law, and its glory will soon (as we hope) be wholly restored to so noble and necessary a profession. . . .”⁷¹ Whilst the letter hardly

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73. The discussion took place at a *Comitia Minora Extraordinaria*, on 25 April 1656. An ineffectual compromise was reached which shifted the onus of detection and prosecution on to the shoulders of the Beadle, a man with little power of authority.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁸ *C.S.P.D. 1656–1657*, p. 183, at a meeting of the Council of State, 2 December 1656.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁷⁰ This patent, and the circumstances relevant to it are described in, *Historical sketch and laws of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, printed for the R.C.P.E., 1925, pp. 32–33. See also John D. Comrie, *The history of Scottish Medicine*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., London, The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, 1932, volume 1, chapters 10, 11 and 12.

⁷¹ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 87. The letter was sent under the signature of George Ent.

gives the true reasons for this recovery, it does at least show that early in 1657 the future looked more promising for the College. However, this policy of retrenchment was not allowed to lapse as the election of William Petty a year later indicates.

V

A striking comparison can be drawn between the College's handling of Walter Charleton, and its subsequent treatment of William Petty. This other young doctor had pursued a brilliant career by the time he was elected a Fellow of the College on 5 April 1658.⁷² Both the date of that election, and the protracted events which led up to it are significant. Whilst there is not sufficient space to fully itemize Petty's career,⁷³ a few salient biographical details will throw into relief the nature of the issues surrounding his election.

William Petty was born in May 1623. At the age of fifteen he joined the merchant navy, by now a precocious youth who had demonstrated extraordinary aptitude in a wide variety of mechanical trades. Stranded in France ten months later, the young man entered the Jesuit College at Caen, where he remained for five years. He returned to England in 1642, but soon left for the Low Countries, to avoid involvement in the Civil War. Petty said that by 1643 he had mastered: "the Latin, Greek and French tongues; the whole body of common arithmetic, the practical geometry and astronomy; conducting to navigation, dialling etc; with the knowledge of several mathematical trades"⁷⁴

These intellectual achievements and his resourcefulness of character greatly assisted him during the next stage of his career. In May 1644 he enrolled at Leyden University to study medicine.⁷⁵ This proved to be a decisive step, for by that time Leyden was a progressive medical centre,⁷⁶ and the general intellectual climate was unusually stimulating. This experience undoubtedly gave Petty his knowledge of anatomy which, when linked to his mechanical aptitude, produced in him a brilliant capacity for anatomical exposition. Leyden also gave him that medical skill and knowledge of natural philosophy on which he was able to capitalize when he returned to England. In 1645 he travelled to Paris, where he became a member of the philosophical group that congregated round Sir Charles Cavendish, brother to the Duke

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷³ The fullest account of Petty's life is to be found in E. Strauss, *Sir William Petty: Portrait of a genius*, London, Bodley Head, 1954. This work is based on the sources used by Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice in *The life of Sir William Petty, 1623-1687*, London, J. Murray, 1895. For a list of some additional material see the present writer's review of Sir Geoffrey Keynes, *A bibliography of Sir William Petty, F.R.S.* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), in *Br. J. Hist. Sci.*, 1973, 6: 321-322.

⁷⁴ Fitzmaurice *op. cit.*, note 73 above, p. 5, quoting Petty's letter of 14 July 1686.

⁷⁵ For a brief account of the medical and botanical school at Leyden, see William T. Stearn 'The influence of Leyden on botany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Br. J. Hist. Sci.*, 1962-1963, 1: 137-158. Petty's enrolment is recorded in R. W. Innes-Smith, *English-Speaking students of medicine at Leyden University*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1932, p. 181.

⁷⁶ For evidence of the innovative tendency of Leyden Medical School by this date, see G. A. Lindeboom, 'The reception in Holland of Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood', *Janus*, 1957, 46: 183-200. See also, G. A. Lindeboom: 'Medical education in the Netherlands (1575-1750)' in C. D. O'Malley (ed.), *The history of medical education*, Los Angeles, California University Press, 1970, pp. 201-216.

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of Newcastle.⁷⁷ The following year Petty returned to England and set about building a career. It took several years before his activities were rewarded.

In 1650 Petty gained his degree as D. M. at Oxford, and on 25 June was proposed and elected a candidate of the College of Physicians.⁷⁸ This was followed by his election as a Fellow to Brasenose College, Oxford, in September of the same year, and his employment by the university four months later as Tomlins lecturer in anatomy. However, Petty did not stay long at Oxford and during 1651 and early 1652 he often returned to London to search for more active promotion. In the early summer the Council of State made him chief physician to the army in Ireland⁷⁹ and he arrived there to take up his duties in September 1652. The young doctor pursued his work with admirable efficiency, but after two years changed his occupation and took up the challenging task of surveying the country. Once completed, the “Down Survey” established him as a figure of some importance in the Irish administration. By the end of 1657 he was clerk to the Council in Ireland, sat on the committee for the distribution of lands and had become Henry Cromwell’s private secretary. Altogether this stage in his life can be regarded as one of meteoric progress which stemmed from his energetic and specially talented nature. However this impressionistic record presents the young doctor in one-dimensional fashion. To fully understand his relationship with the College of Physicians it is necessary to look at three underlying, but significant, aspects of his career: his character and beliefs as a medical practitioner, the nature of his political connexions, and his subsequent position as an influential figure in Irish and hence English affairs.

William Petty’s views on medical practice and medical institutions were typically unusual. As he made clear in an early letter to the Cambridge philosopher, Henry More, he had little interest in the radical dogmas of Paracelsus or Van Helmont⁸⁰ which were helping to transform the medical world in London. To a certain extent he supported traditional medical theory,⁸¹ whilst being entirely willing to include

⁷⁷ For a description of the activities of this circle see J. Jacquot, ‘Sir Charles Cavendish and his learned friends’, *Ann. Sci.*, 1952, 8: 13–27 and 175–191.

⁷⁸ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 27.

⁷⁹ Petty’s employment by the Council of State followed reports of a desperate shortage of trained medical personnel in Ireland, as noted by the Council on 28 November 1651. See *C.S.P.D. 1651–1652*, p. 38. As a result, and on the advice of Sir Maurice Williams, personal physician to Strafford in Ireland and a senior Fellow of the College of Physicians, two doctors, Denham and Goldsmith, were sent over to Ireland. Denham was a licentiate, but Goldsmith had no relationship with the College. For this see *ibid.*, p. 132. On 10 May 1652 Petty was selected as chief physician to the army, and personal physician to Lt. General Fleetwood, at a salary of one pound per day, with the proviso that he was allowed to practise privately. See *ibid.*, p. 236 and p. 613.

⁸⁰ See C. Webster, ‘Henry More and Descartes: some new sources’, *Bri. J. Hist. Sci.*, 1969, 4: 359–377, especially 369–370. In this letter of late 1648 or early 1649, Petty states “I have wearied myself in running through . . . Galens, Campanellas Helmons, Paracelsus and Descartes their Imaginary principles, and find much witt and phancy in them all . . . but doe now look upon the best of them, as Nut Shells in comparison of the knowledge of the slibber sauce experiments I judiciously and selectly made . . .”.

⁸¹ See the Marquis of Lansdowne, *The Petty papers*, New York, Kelly Reprint, 1967, p. 167, no. 127; In this “Scheme for a Medical Essay” which he presumably intended to use for educational purposes, Petty indicates substantial reliance on Hippocrates and Galen, especially the former. In his treatment of the famous case of Anne Greene at Oxford in 1651, his therapy centred on traditional methods such as bleeding, and used classic pharmaceutical products with no chemicals in evidence; see *ibid.*, pp. 157–167; and *Newes from the dead, or a true and exact narration of the miraculous*

in his medical practice those innovations which appeared beneficial after careful experiment. What evidence is presently available suggests that Petty maintained a consciously pragmatic approach towards medicine, stressing the role of observation and personal experience above that of mere tradition or novelty.⁸² In addition there evolved in his mind a healthy scepticism as to the curative value of contemporary medicine in general.⁸³ Whilst this attitude was idiosyncratic it would not necessarily have been unacceptable to most members of the College. Furthermore it is quite clear from the account of his election as a candidate that Petty was easily able to meet the standard requirements for admission which called for a detailed knowledge of traditional therapy. However, if his private theories on medical practice appeared sufficiently orthodox, his published ideas on medical institutions presented a challenge to one of the fundamental beliefs of the College: its claim to the exclusive right of regulating and licensing medical practice throughout the country.

In 1648, a remarkable pamphlet which advocated radical changes in the educational system was published under the aegis of a leading puritan reformer. Entitled *Advice of W.P. to Mr. Samuel Hartlib for the advancement of some particular parts of learning*,⁸⁴ the pamphlet represented one section of Hartlib's wide-ranging programme for social reform.⁸⁵ As part of his proposals for a new educational system, Petty describes in circumstantial detail his plan for a clinical teaching hospital. This design holds a unique position in English literature, and is especially notable for its descriptive clarity. One of the most radical aspects of this new hospital and the one which openly challenged the exclusive claims of the College was that: "It should be granted by the State, that whosoever hath served his respective time in the Nosocomium, and hath a Certificate thereof from the Society, shall clearly be licensed to practise his profession in any place or Corporation whatsoever, notwithstanding any former Law to the contrary".⁸⁶

In 1650, despite such strident and heterodox opinions, Petty seems to have been accepted without qualms by the College. It may even have been to his advantage

deliverance of Anne Greene . . ., Oxford, T. Robinson, 1651. It was the case of Anne Greene that gave Petty some notoriety as a doctor, early on in his career. Seth Ward, in op. cit., note 9 above, p. 36, gives the "recovery of the Wench after she had been hanged at least half an houer" as a noteworthy example of contemporary medical advance.

⁸² See Lansdowne, op. cit., note 81 above, p. 168. In the "Scheme for a Medical Essay" Petty outlines one of the clearest descriptions of a rigorous, experimental approach to medical problems to be found in seventeenth-century medical literature.

⁸³ Lansdowne, op. cit., note 81 above, pp. 169-179. In some notes on "The study of the art of physicians", probably compiled later on in his life, Petty asks the question "Whether of 1,000 patients to the best physicians, aged of any decad, there do not dye as many as out [of] the inhabitants of places where there dwell no physicians."

⁸⁴ Although Petty's name does not appear in the pamphlet, it was undoubtedly written by him and probably published independently by Hartlib, see Geoffrey Keynes, op. cit., note 73 above, pp. 1-3.

⁸⁵ For an excellent description of this programme for social reform see Charles Webster, *Samuel Hartlib and the advancement of learning*, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

⁸⁶ *Advice of W. P. to Mr. Samuel Hartlib for the advancement of some particular parts of learning*, London, 1648, p. 11. Petty continued to believe that the establishment of such a hospital was necessary, see William Petty, *Reflections upon some persons and things in Ireland . . .*, London, J. Allestrye, 1660, p. 164. "And let him institute such an Academick Hospital in Dublin, for the study and administration of Medicine, as himself heretofore did both desire and describe."

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that he had those connexions with puritanism and Commonwealth which Hartlib and his circle provided. The suspicion that he was regarded as a potential Fellow of increasing political value is reinforced by the College's behaviour in the protracted circumstances which led to his election in 1658.

On 14 July 1655 William Petty was proposed as the next Fellow in the place of Walter Charleton: "Dr. Charleton having been passed over in this way, the Candidate first after him was Dr. Petty, who had for a long time been absent, but from public command, and had asked the College through letters that he should not be defrauded by his enforced absence. Wherefore he was proposed as a Fellow in the place of Dr. Bennet, and it was decided that no-one was to be passed before him, provided that he should present himself within six months and that he should fulfil the requirements, or give reasons to be approved by the College for longer delay. Under these conditions he had the vote of none against him".⁸⁷ Petty, however, failed to comply with these requirements. Nearly one year later when the College needed to fill the vacant fellowship already allocated to him it was decided that: "Since a period of six months had been granted to Dr. Petty last year, so that during that time he might return to England and solicit a vacant place among the Fellows, and since he had sent by letters addressed to the College neither any reason for so long a silence nor for delay in Ireland, another certainly might with good right have been chosen in his place. It seemed proper, nevertheless, to deal more kindly with him and to reserve the place destined for him for some considerable time longer still, so long as he should offer good reasons within due time for his absence and silence."⁸⁸

Petty was therefore treated with great lenience especially when it is remembered that in 1649, Peter Chamberlain and William Goddard were ostensibly deprived of their Fellowships under a new statute providing against absenteeism.⁸⁹ In fact by 1656 Petty himself had not appeared at the College for over four years. Nonetheless, the protracted saga of his election was allowed to continue. On 22 December 1657 the next episode took place: "The complaint about the absence and silence of Dr. Petty was renewed therein. This decision was at last agreed upon that he should be granted a further delay for a period of six months, and if meanwhile he should solicit the Fellowship of the College, leave should be granted to him to be elected by a proxy, who should perform his duties and pay his fees."⁹⁰ Quite clearly another member of the College was becoming restless at the delay. This was probably the candidate next in line for election, who wished to claim the allocated but as yet unfilled Fellow-

⁸⁷ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 67. Previously, Dr. John Baber had "wearied us [the committee] with a great flow of words to show that he ought to be placed before Dr. Petty in admission to the Society, but since his reasons were invalid, the petition was held to be invalid". See the *Annals* for 25 June 1655 (p. 65). Baber had powerful friends, especially Colonel John Lambert, and it is a mark of Petty's rank that he was not ousted in his absence by Baber's attempts; for Baber, see Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 259.

⁸⁸ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 76.

⁸⁹ See Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 288, and *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 16, 21. In Chamberlain's case, the reasons for dismissal were complicated by a history of earlier quarrels with the College over his various schemes for licensing midwives and public baths. See J. H. Aveling, *The Chamberlens and the midwifery forceps*, London, J. and A. Churchill, 1882, especially pp. 30–80; J. J. Keevil, 'The Bagnio in London 1648–1725', *J. Hist. Med.*, 1952, 7: 250–257, and *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 10–11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

ship. It is noteworthy that such disdainful behaviour on the part of the young Fellow-designate should have been accepted so mildly by this august medical institution. Equally notable is the willingness of the College to suggest an unprecedented break in constitutional tradition by proposing that Petty's election could go forward in his absence. This unusual event duly took place as proposed on 5 April 1658: "Dr. William Petty, after leave of longer absence mentioned before, letters having been written to that end, was made a Fellow by the votes of a majority and was admitted to the place due to him. Dr. Coxe moreover immediately offered himself as a surety for the payments due to be made."⁹¹

This careful statement could be interpreted in several different ways. The most likely interpretation is that a majority of the Fellows decided to elect their absent and uncommunicative colleague without his knowledge or active participation. This would explain the cryptic comment "letters having been written to that end". At the same time the election may have been hotly contested by a critical or legalistic minority. Whether this was the case or not, the constitution of the College was tardily upheld when Petty finally presented himself on 25 June 1658. At this point he was solemnly and formally elected a Fellow.

Several obvious questions are raised by this remarkable case of procrastination which is unique in the history of the corporation during the Interregnum. First, why did the College tolerate such flagrant abuse of its statutes and eventually reward that abuse with official promotion? Second, why was the election pushed through at that particular time? Both these questions can be answered by looking at the political connexions and personal importance of William Petty and at the dangers and uncertainties implicit in the rapidly evolving political scene of 1657 and 1658.

Even from an early date in his career, Petty could rely on the help of influential friends. His original entrée into the company of such people probably stemmed from the influence of Samuel Hartlib, whose contacts in government and reformist circles were unusually extensive. By 1655, the date when he was first eligible for a Fellowship at the College, Petty was a man with wide personal connexions of his own. For example, in 1650 he gained his Fellowship at Brasenose on the recommendation of Lt. Colonel Kelsey,⁹² then Governor of the town and later one of Cromwell's Major-Generals. In the same year he was elected Professor of Music at Gresham College "by the Interest of his Friende, captaine John Graunt . . ."⁹³ who was an influential figure in the City of London. In 1653 the Council of State wrote to Brasenose College on his behalf demanding that he should not suffer as a result of his long absence "for the public service".⁹⁴ Once in Ireland Petty became a trusted servant of

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92. As with many of the entries, this statement exhibits a sense of caution, and a desire to avoid any indication of internal feuding or factionalism.

⁹² A. Wood, *Fasti Oxoniensis ed., Bliss*, Oxford, F. C. Rivington *et al.*, 1820, p. 156. According to Wood, Petty was created a Fellow of Brasenose by virtue of a dispensation from the delegates of the university, "because they had received sufficient testimony of his rare qualities and gifts from Colonel Kelsey . . .".

⁹³ G. Keynes, *op. cit.*, note 73 above, p. 87, quoting John Aubrey's account of William Petty.

⁹⁴ *C.S.P.D. 1653-1654*, p. 208. Council of State memorandum 20 October 1653, "[item] 13. To write to the master of Brasenose College, Oxford, that Dr. Petty's longer stay in Ireland is needed for the public service, and to desire him that nothing may be done in Pettye's absence to his prejudice, either in disposing of his fellowship or any benefit accruing thereby . . .".

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Charles Fleetwood, the commander-in-chief of the army and Lord-Deputy from 1654 to 1655.⁹⁵ Therefore, whilst the College chose Petty through the normal process of election by seniority in 1655, it must also have regarded him as a useful recruit for political reasons. Two years later he would have seemed even more useful, since he had become a trusted servant of Henry Cromwell⁹⁶ whose *de facto* rule of Ireland led to his appointment as Lord-Deputy in 1657. Thus, far from rejecting him for what in another case was intolerable behaviour, the College probably accepted Petty's conduct for reasons of political expediency. Many of the leading Fellows who made up the majority which voted for his election under such irregular circumstances were probably sympathetic towards him for professional and personal reasons. On the day when his election by proxy was suggested and when it was duly enacted there was present a controlling number of Fellows who were government supporters. For example, key men like Goddard, Glisson, Bate, Whistler and Wharton were all there. Dr. Coxe, who had links with both the army and with Ireland, stood as financial guarantor for Petty.⁹⁷ In the final analysis it appears likely that the group which rejected Charleton was also responsible for Petty's election, on the basis of shrewd and consistent attitudes.

The timing of his election can also be explained on the grounds of political expediency. Despite the solid backing of a phalanx of government supporters, the College appeared to be slipping once more into jeopardy in late 1657. At that point recurrent political crises took place which an ailing Protector found increasingly more taxing to manage. These crises threatened the stability of a government which relied on and was relied upon by men like Goddard and Whistler. To add to these general political problems there was, c.1656–1657, a movement amongst the College's professional opponents to establish a rival college of "chymical physitiens", a proposal which became a short-lived reality soon after the Restoration.⁹⁸ In December 1657 the situation therefore appeared acute and it is likely that those who controlled the affairs of the College were doing all they could to ensure its continued safety. William Petty, trusted as he was by Henry Cromwell and many Irish grandees, would have seemed a useful part of this insurance policy. Since these Fellows probably hoped for a continuance of the current dynastic control, his relationship with Oliver's son must have appeared as another factor guaranteeing security. Given the possibility of immediate political chaos the *ad hoc* basis of Petty's election was a necessity dictated

⁹⁵ Petty, *Reflections* . . . , op. cit., note 86 above, p. 161 ". . . my Lord Fleetwood, in three years time, could discover nothing unworthy his great love towards the Dr. . . .".

⁹⁶ See John Ward *The Lives of the professors of Gresham College*, London, J. Moore, 1740, p. 220, quoting a letter from Henry Cromwell to John Thurloe, principal Secretary of State, dated 11 April 1659, which expresses great faith in Petty ". . . He has curiously deceived mee these four yeares, if he be a knave . . .".

⁹⁷ In June 1643, the Earl of Essex wrote to the College of Physicians on his behalf. See *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, vol. 3, p. 541. Coxe continued as an army doctor, became a Fellow of the College in 1649 and a Censor in 1652. See Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 228. His connexion with Ireland is not clear, but that it existed can be gleaned from the vague reference to him in the minutes of the Council of State for 31 July 1656. See *C.S.P.D. 1656–1657*, p. 48, item 38. It is possible that for a while Coxe worked as doctor to the army in Ireland, with William Petty as his colleague.

⁹⁸ For information on this subject see Sir Henry Thomas, 'The Society of Chymical Physitiens: an echo of the Great Plague of London, 1665' in, E. A. Underwood (ed.), *Science, medicine and history*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 56–71. See also Webster, 'English medical reformers . . .', op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 35–39.

by circumstance. Ironically, in December 1657 it was impossible to predict that Petty would by the autumn of 1658 become a liability rather than an asset.⁹⁹

VI

A further indication of this political awareness can be drawn from the occurrence of another unusual election which took place at the College on 22 July 1658. On that day, "The most noble man, the Marquiss of Dorchester, was proposed for election as an Honorary Fellow, and all the Fellows present voted most joyfully for his admission. . . . The Marquiss, in a brief indeed but vigorous speech, plainly acknowledged the excellence of the medical profession, and the honour and glory bestowed upon him by the College. At the same time, he set his name to our Statutes, and he promised that he would, to the utmost of his strength, preserve the constitution and dignity of the College safe and sound. . . ." ¹⁰⁰

Henry Pierrepont¹⁰¹ was a man with a fascinating political and intellectual background. Despite his position as a privy councillor to Charles I, he compounded for his estates in 1647. Almost immediately he retired to the country and began to satisfy his omnivorous appetite for books and knowledge. Such intense study led to severe debilitation and in 1649 he was forced to go to London to seek medical treatment. Amongst his doctors were William Harvey, Sir Francis Prujean and Charles Scarborough, all Fellows of the College of Physicians. These practitioners nursed him back to health and as a result he developed a passionate interest in medicine.¹⁰² This interest caused Pierrepont to experiment widely in botany, chemistry and anatomy, activities which he shared with Walter Charleton and John Evelyn. Alongside this personal involvement with experimental natural philosophy and medicine, Pierrepont showed continuing interest in the College of Physicians. In 1655¹⁰³ he donated one hundred pounds to the College library which at that point was expanding rapidly. Then, three years later, he became the first Honorary Fellow ever elected to the College. The belief that this event was solely due to the admiration of the Fellows for his financial generosity, his rank or his medical erudition is, perhaps, a little naïve. This belief fails to explain why Pierrepont was elected at that particular time under such unusual conditions.

At first sight Henry Pierrepont would not appear to have been a particularly

⁹⁹ In 1658 and 1659, after the death of Cromwell, religious and political extremists including Petty's arch-enemies, Sir Hierome Sankey and Benjamin Worseley, wished to destroy Henry Cromwell's Irish administration. They used their attack on Petty as a stalking-horse for their attack on Cromwell. Hence in *Reflections upon some persons and things in Ireland*, op. cit., note 86 above, p. 57, Petty says "One was Reason of State, viz. to pull me down by oppressing, and to cripple my very naturall power for the future, by defaming me: and perhaps they did even this (if I may so say without vanity) in order as a small beginning to pull down the government itself, . . .". After the demise of Richard Cromwell's government, faithful servants of the administration often became *personna non grata* politically.

¹⁰⁰ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, vol. 4, pp. 93–94.

¹⁰¹ For Henry Pierrepont's life (1606–1680) see *Dictionary of National Biography*; W. Munk, op. cit., note 13 above, pp. 282–292.

¹⁰² For Pierrepont's interest in medicine see the present author's article 'Walter Charleton's early life 1620–1659 . . .', op. cit., note 41 above, especially notes 92 and 95.

¹⁰³ *Annals*, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 64, 9 April 1655; Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 285, gives an inaccurate description of Dorchester's gift.

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valuable patron for the College. His wealth aside, in political terms he was probably regarded as a liability for most of the Interregnum. Despite early acceptance of parliamentary rule he could not erase from his past the role he played as adviser to Charles I. Nor was his marriage to Lady Katherine Stanley in September 1652 a wise move politically, since in 1651 Katherine's father, the Earl of Derby, was executed for Royalist activities carried out in the Civil War. This alliance certainly increased the political dangers for the marquis during the early years of the Protectorate. Nonetheless, Dorchester was to a certain extent shielded from the worst repercussions of his earlier career, through the intercession of his brother William,¹⁰⁴ a prominent parliamentarian and confidant of Oliver Cromwell. Dorchester's position slowly became more stable¹⁰⁵ during the course of the Protectorate as it became clear that he posed no personal threat to the administration. However in the last months of Oliver's life a marked improvement took place in Dorchester's political fortunes. While the Protector's health slipped into irreversible decline,¹⁰⁶ the importance of those men who were close advisers to his sons and who held the reins of authority grew commensurately. William Pierrepont, private adviser to Oliver Cromwell, friend to St. John and Thurloe was believed to exert great influence on the formulation of policy. Whether this was true is not important; exterior parties generally believed him to be powerful and took decisions accordingly.

It was probably no coincidence that Henry Pierrepont's election to the College of Physicians took place in July 1658. Nor was it coincidental that the official journal of the Protectorate when reporting this election praised him fulsomely for giving the aristocracy of England, "A noble example how to improve their time at the highest rate for the advancement of their own honour, and the Benefit of Mankind".¹⁰⁷ The realities of politics also dictated the clear emphases contained in Dorchester's inaugural speech with its underlying air of apprehension. This oration was a powerful statement of his belief in the excellence of the College and a formal promise to use his now considerable influence to defend it during the difficult months ahead. As in William Petty's election, but this time with the undivided support of all the Fellows, the College was almost certainly motivated by political expediency though now there were the additional fears of professional rivalry. Exceptional dangers, it would have been argued, demanded exceptional remedies. Pierrepont's election, far from being "a promotion for the College"¹⁰⁸ as G. N. Clark has maintained, was instead a shrewd political act intended to vitiate future threats to its security. It was in the last resort a defensive gesture as opposed to an expansive mark of recovery.

¹⁰⁴ For William Pierrepont (?1607–1668) see *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁰⁵ By 1657 Pierrepont was secure enough to afford others protection as well. Hence Walter Charleton dedicated his heterodox work, *The immortality of the human soul*, to Dorchester, in the following terms "I ought not to have permitted this Treatise to venture abroad into the Common Aer, without that Advantage and Protection, which your, and only your Patronage can give it", op. cit., note 62 above, The Epistle Dedicatory Sig. b2R.

¹⁰⁶ The last illness of Oliver Cromwell had a profound effect on the current political situation. Thus Ivan Roots in *The Great Rebellion 1642–1660*, London, Batsford, 1966, p. 231, says: "Events of 1658 must be read in the light of the condition of a man eking out the last tiny reserves of physical and emotional stamina. . .".

¹⁰⁷ *Mercurius Politicus*, London, M. Nedham, 22–29 July 1658.

¹⁰⁸ Clark, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 285.

VII

Despite the deliberate veil of secrecy drawn over their internal affairs by the Fellows and the resulting evasiveness of the College records over the voting pattern, a number of conclusions, some certain and some probable, can be drawn about the changing policy and political balance of this institution during the Interregnum.

Given the weight of evidence the view that the College of Physicians was a medical body which generally kept aloof from the politics of the period becomes untenable. It is also misleading to regard it as an essentially Royalist institution which was reluctantly forced to temporize because of circumstance alone. Far from being calm and detached, it was deeply immersed in the politics of the day. At certain stages political controversy fragmented the monolithic nature of support shown to the College by the Fellows and proved to be deeply divisive. Out of this controversy there probably emerged a loose group of government sympathisers and moderate puritans who strove to control the policy and actions of the College at crucial points in its history. The elections of Charleton, Petty and Pierrepoint were just such occasions. It cannot be regarded as coincidental that the College survived relatively untouched and even prospered during the Commonwealth. It did so not only because of individually shrewd decisions on the part of its officers, but also because the balance of power swung internally in favour of Fellows either sympathetic to the government or highly sensitive to those dangers which threatened the very existence of the College. For its own part the government reciprocated this sympathy and caution by not interfering with an institution which many regarded as monopolistic, inefficient and corrupt.