

Hints on the constitution of dispensaries, with a view of their being rendered of more extensive benefit to the labouring population / John Storer.

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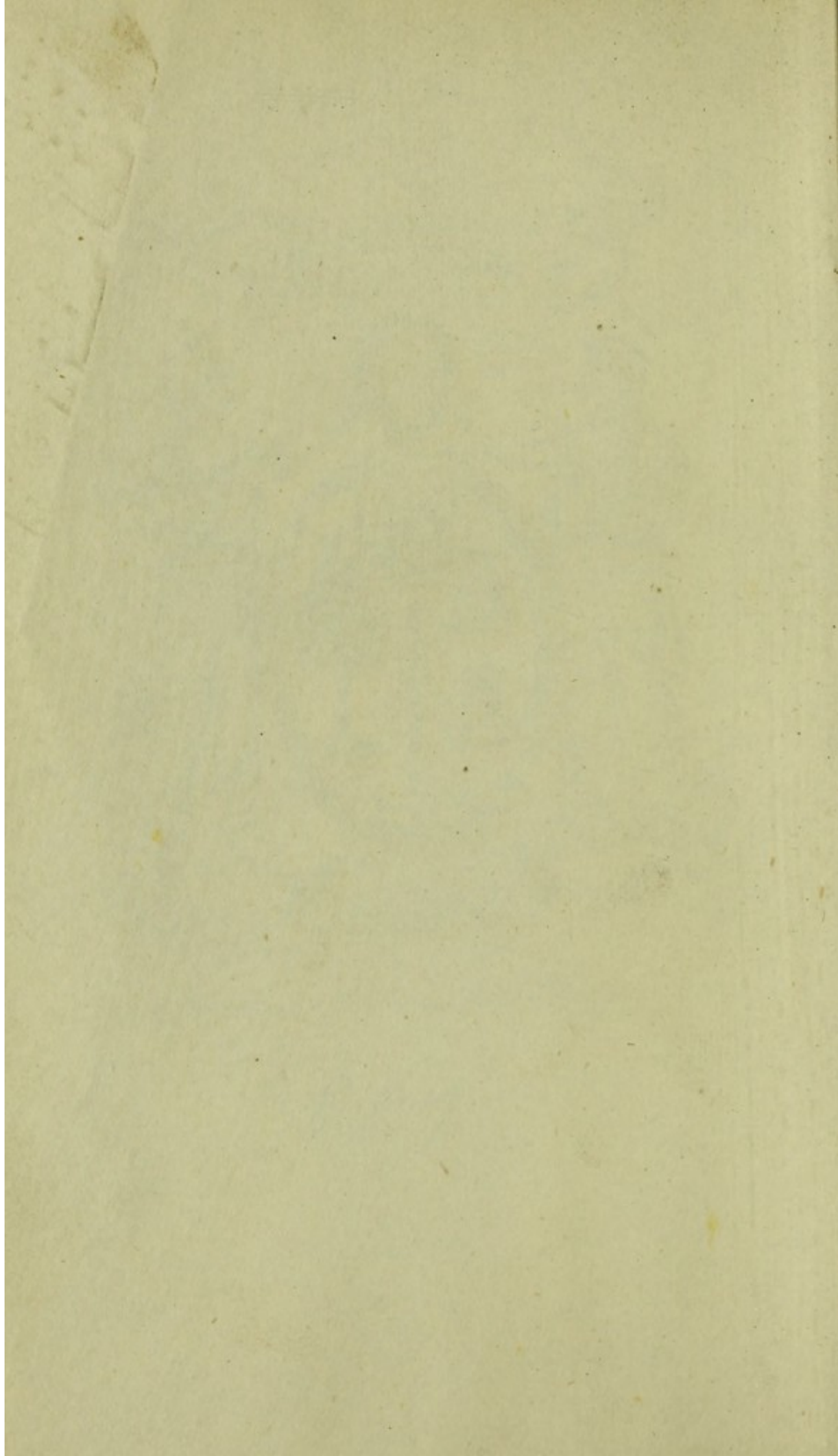
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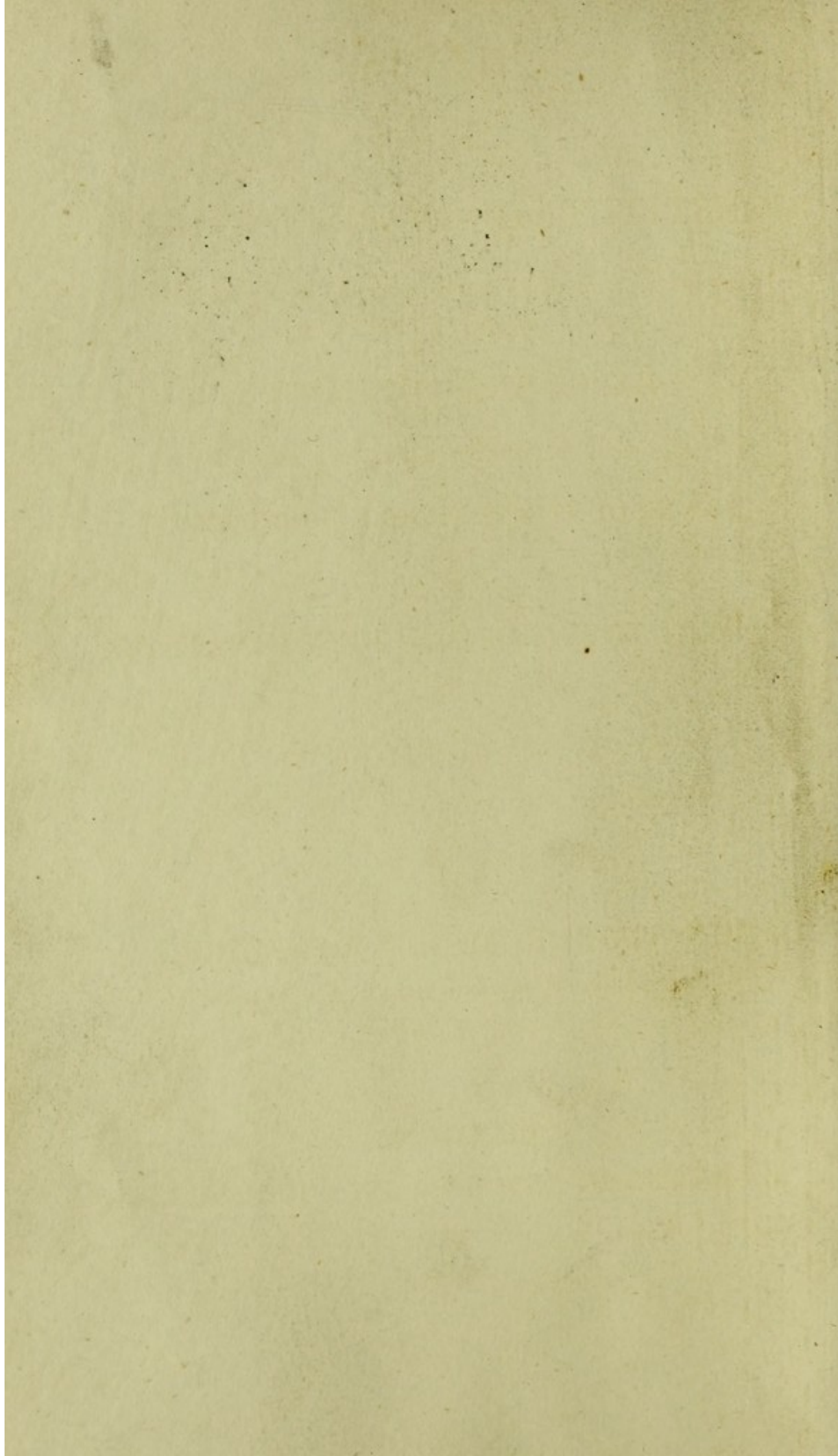






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HINTS
ON THE
CONSTITUTION OF DISPENSARIES,
WITH THE VIEW OF THEIR BEING RENDERED OF MORE EXTENSIVE
BENEFIT TO THE
LABOURING POPULATION,
AND EQUALLY APPLICABLE AND ADVANTAGEOUS TO
TOWNS OF CONSIDERABLE POPULATION;
TO
MARKET TOWNS OF ALL DENOMINATIONS,
AND EVEN
TO RURAL DISTRICTS
CONSISTING OF CONTIGUOUS PARISHES.

BY
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NEAR NOTTINGHAM.

LONDON:
J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY.

1832.

LIST

OF THE

CONSTITUTION OF DISTRICTS

LIST

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LABOURING POPULATION

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TOWNS OF CONSIDERABLE POPULATION

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LONDON:

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1837

HINTS

ON THE

CONSTITUTION OF DISPENSARIES.

THE formidable events that of late years have succeeded one another with unexampled rapidity, and affected, more or less, every quarter of the civilized world; furnish abundant evidence of an intense agitation of the public mind, arising from a collision and conflict of opposite opinions on political subjects. This subject of such general interest, is no longer, as formerly, confined to a small portion of society, engaged more exclusively in politics; it has now reached every rank of the community, and may well be viewed as the characteristic of the present age.

A very slight consideration of so great a change in the condition of society, would suffice to warn us of the fatal effects that so general and powerful an excitement would be likely to exert, in relaxing, or even dissolving the bonds of society. This has, indeed, actually happened in some instances : it therefore becomes the obvious and paramount duty of every state, to be upon their guard against such consequences, and to defend itself by every means that prudence and ingenuity can suggest ; but it is equally obvious, that no means will prove successful, unless they have some correspondence with the prevailing opinions and temper of the times.

The influence and power of a prudent and patriotic government, and the authority of a wise and temperate legislature, may do much towards maintaining the frame of society, under adverse circumstances ; by so acting as to convince the majority of the influential parts of the

community, that their rights are respected, their claims listened to, and their burthens lightened, as far as it is equitable and practicable, consistently with public faith: but after making a full allowance for all that can be effected by the governing powers; it is to the subjects themselves, acting each in his proper sphere and individual capacity, and discharging with diligence and fidelity that duty, which, according to his rank and means, he owes to society, that we must chiefly look, as the most certain and efficacious means of allaying passion and prejudice, and securing the peace and good order of society. This course of conduct, we know but too well from experience, is unattainable in every case; but such a temper of mind, when prevailing generally, with the acts and institutions which naturally flow from it, will do more to effect a union of interest and good-will between the different ranks of which society must always consist, and on which its well being

depends, than all other causes combined. On this conclusion, the mind rests with peculiar complacency and delight; conscious that the most important and beneficial institutions of our own country have sprung from the enterprise, the efforts, and liberality, of private associations or individuals. It is, indeed, a subject of the most lively interest and encouragement, to contemplate the powerful bias that obtains, in the higher and middle classes of society in this country, to assist the wants, promote the comforts, and relieve the infirmities of those, who from poverty or bodily disease are disqualified from helping themselves, insomuch that there is scarcely a mode of inability, or a class of disorder or infirmity, that has not an appropriate charity, in some form, for its relief. These are not confined to the metropolis, where, of course, they are to be found in the greatest abundance; but have been extended to all the provincial towns of considerable population,

and are rapidly finding their way into others.

Happily this bias is not exhausted by administering aid to cases of actual distress, or confined to those of immediate urgency, and which prefers the strongest claims to charitable assistance. It appears to be clearly seen and admitted, that the purposes of benevolence are never more fully, or satisfactorily accomplished, than by exciting and assisting the labouring population to promote, and set a due value on those institutions, which, without detracting from a sense of their independence, or imposing upon them other obligations than those of gratitude, are calculated to procure for them comforts and advantages, otherwise unattainable in their situation. Many institutions of this nature, and directed to the wants of the labouring poor, are already in existence and operation, and many more would be set on foot were the road clearly pointed out. Of that num-

ber, those are well entitled to the first notice that are employed in the cultivation and improvement of the mind, since they lead directly to the attainment of the most solid advantages in future life. Seminaries for instruction, whether in the form of Sunday or day-schools, where the children of the poor are indiscriminately invited, and encouraged to attend, are to be found in the remotest corners of the country. These are not only and chiefly supported by the liberality of the inhabitants, but by the personal exertions of many of all ranks, who are well qualified to superintend, to encourage, and, in many instances, to assist in teaching the children to read the Scriptures, and imbuing their young minds with sound principles of religion and morality.

Next to these, as institutions the most directly conducive to promote economy and good management among the labouring classes, are savings'-banks, which in a few years have already arrived at a

very flourishing condition, and promise greatly to extend their advantages. To these may be added, those greatly improved associations, or clubs, among the labouring population, of which it is the object, by the advance of a moderate premium, in early or middle life, made in one or in many successive payments, to insure the return of a stipulated support under inability from sickness or accident, as well as an annuity in advanced life.

Much pains have been taken by an able and active magistrate of the county of Nottingham, the Rev. J. T. Becher, of Southwell, founded on accurate calculations, to give stability and security to these associations, upon the most moderate rates of payment, that will enable them to fulfil their salutary purposes. It has hitherto been found that associations of this nature, founded on such established principles, have attracted the attention, the patronage, and liberality, of the gen-

tlemen in the neighbourhood, who will not fail, by their encouragement, to maintain the spirit and efficiency of the institution, and by their assistance to guard it against all unforeseen and adverse accidents. Wherever an association of this nature is established with due precautions, we may venture to assert, that it will meet with similar patronage and protection.

These, and a hundred other objects of a kindred nature, dictated by the prevalence of Christian principles, and aided by the rapid advance of science and civilization, go hand in hand in this age and nation, and are multiplying so rapidly, that no year passes without a considerable accession to their number, either in forms, and for objects already known, or for others newly devised. Such a spirit, steadily maintained, cannot fail to form a salutary bond of union between the different orders of society; and although individuals are to be found, upon

whom no motives of this nature will make any impression, it is well calculated to exert an extensive, and beneficial influence on the body of the inhabitants, in a country where good sense and sound thinking constitute the leading features of the national character. A temper like this generally prevailing, can alone give efficacy to the wisest and most salutary acts of the legislature, and there is, perhaps, no other condition of society, so well qualified to add a pillar of stability to our national polity. The writer has been led to this train of thinking by its obvious bearing on the subject, which it is his avowed object to illustrate and recommend. This consists in what he has been led to consider as a very important improvement in the form and objects of a dispensary. Institutions of this kind are becoming every day more frequent, and may be still much extended, to the benefit of the community. The leading objects of a general dispensary,

as hitherto established in many parts of this country, consist in providing medical advice, and occasional attendance, with medicines of the best quality, for the families of the poorer class of the labouring population, that appear to be fit objects of charity. So long as this main purpose of the institution is satisfactorily accomplished, there can be no objection to extend its beneficial influence to another and a no less interesting class of the community, who have hitherto maintained their independence, and provided for themselves and families by their industry and exertions. To them it would be a real degradation to be brought into the lists of pauperism, and admitted as objects of charity. It is therefore proposed, that, in a general dispensary, families of this description should be received, and should constitute a class of free subscribers. These would be entitled, in behalf of themselves and families, to all the benefits of the dispensary, on making

such a contribution to its funds, as may be judged reasonable and expedient, in proportion to the number and age of the different members of the family.

This plan would remove the institution from being merely eleemosynary, and give it the character of a benevolent establishment, of much more extensive utility to the labouring population, to which it ought to be strictly confined. In this form, it would admit of several other improvements, equally to the advantage and satisfaction of both classes of patients. The advantage derived to the labouring poor from dispensaries, where they are already established, has made an impression on the public mind, which is likely to lead to their adoption, very generally, in places of considerable population. It appears, therefore, of importance, that the subject should be investigated and understood, and if, in the present state of knowledge, any improvement can be suggested in the constitution of these chari-

ties, especially such as may extend the sphere of their utility, it ought to be known, that the public may reap the advantage.

The writer has always found this a subject of great interest to his own mind, and having seen and approved the general principles of a proposal, made some years ago by Mr. Smith, a surgeon of eminence and respectability in the county of Warwick, for the benefit of the health of the poor, chiefly in rural districts; he has been led to give the subject his best consideration. The result has been, that he considers these principles carried to the extent, which they easily may, and adapted to the circumstances of different towns, or rural districts; a form of constitution might be given to dispensaries, that would render them of great value to the labouring population of every district, that chose to adopt them. These speculations might have remained as a mere matter of amusement to his own mind,

had not the following incidents led to their being brought into some form, and communicated to others.

In 1830, a proposal was made to the governors of the Infirmary near Nottingham, to permit a dispensary, for the benefit of the town, to be annexed as an appendage to that hospital, and to have their funds in common. On this question, the governors requested to have the writer's opinion sent to them in writing.

The arguments used by the friends of a dispensary, rested on the large population of the town, and its progressive increase; on the numerous catalogue of out-patients that always appeared on the books of the infirmary; and of that number, those who become so ill, as to disable them from personal attendance on the days appointed, could receive but a very occasional and imperfect attention at their own dwellings: add to this, that the constitution of the infirmary precludes the admission of out-patients, on more than

one day in the week. These were reasons of sufficient weight to prove the utility of a dispensary ; but the question of its being incorporated with the general hospital, and to depend on the same fund, was of a very different nature. It was argued that the general hospital, or infirmary, was an establishment of too much importance ; that its beneficial effects had been too generally and extensively experienced in the town, the county, and in the neighbourhood generally, to justify the incurring any risk to its due support, to the prosperity and reputation it had hitherto enjoyed, by any modification of its constitution, necessary to ingraft another public institution upon its basis. It was further worthy of notice, that although the funds, as well as the reputation, of the infirmary, had been maintained for half a century, with a uniformity and liberality, that have fallen to the share of few provincial hospitals in England ; yet that, for a few years past,

its annual revenue has fallen short, by some hundred pounds, of its necessary expenditure: at the same time, the applications for admission are daily on the increase. Notwithstanding the recent addition to the buildings, the admissions are necessarily limited, till further accommodations are provided. Under these circumstances, it appeared to the body of the governors to be unwise, as well as obviously unjust to the distant patrons of the infirmary, to connect it with any merely local institution, however analogous in its nature and object. These reasons led to the rejection of the proposal, which seems to have been generally approved.

The subject of founding a dispensary for the town of Nottingham having thus been brought before the public, no doubt could be entertained that means would be found to carry it into effect in a different form. It was therefore considered by the writer as a fit occasion to put the

views he had adopted into the form of a sketch of a constitution, for what he considered as an improved form of a dispensary. This was sent to the governors of the infirmary, at the meeting held to discuss the question of an incorporation, and was, by them, afterwards submitted to the consideration of a committee, appointed to settle the form, and draw up the rules, by which the future dispensary was to be conducted. It happened by some singular, and, as it proved, untoward circumstances, that no medical person was included in this committee. No public notice has ever been taken of the sketch submitted to it; and as none of its principles were adopted, it may be presumed that it was overlooked, or disapproved by that committee.

After bestowing further consideration on the subject, the writer is confirmed in his original opinion, of the decided preference that is due to the proposed plan, on the following considerations:—That

it appears well calculated to obviate the objections to which the usual form of dispensaries is exposed :—That its beneficial influence promises to be more extensive, and less injurious to the principles and feelings of a large and very deserving class of the labouring population ; that it will greatly facilitate the duty of governors in maintaining the institution within its just limits, and enforcing the necessary regulations ; that it goes to fulfil the purposes of justice due to the medical attendants ; and, in a word, to conciliate a spirit of good-will and kind feelings between all the parties ; and more especially to produce an attachment to the institution on the part of the patients, for whose benefit and satisfaction it is solely intended. If such advantages may be reasonably contemplated, the plan holding out such a promise, merits a due and deliberate consideration ; and if its pretensions can be at all made out, even in prospect, it deserves, and probably will

obtain, a fair trial, in a country where there is a prevailing spirit for extending institutions of this nature, and a disposition to take advantage of every suggestion that bids fair to enlarge the sphere of their utility.

Averse as the writer is to be brought under the notice of the public, at his very advanced period of life, he sees in so strong a point of view, the advantage to the community, of placing these establishments on the best possible footing, that he considers himself called upon to record the reasons that have induced, in his mind, so decided a preference for the plan in question. This becomes the more necessary, that the entire silence of the committee on the sketch submitted to them, leads to the conclusion, that in their estimation, it was of no value, and deserved no notice. Upon this question the public will decide; and will probably consider the subject of sufficient importance to bear, and to call for, deliberate discussion.

Difference of opinion will produce its necessary effect in this, as in all other questions; of bringing the different bearings of the subject more into light, and terminate in its being better understood.

This will require, that we should enter a little further into detail. The dispensary recently established at Nottingham, is founded on the avowed principle of affording relief to those of the labouring poor, who have not been reduced to the necessity of seeking parish relief. Of these, many are, without doubt, fit objects of receiving charitable relief from an institution of this nature; but many more who are not necessarily dependent on public charity, will put in their claim, and will, in most instances, succeed. In the case of a dispensary founded on the usual regulations, and in a populous town, the most vigilant superintendence of a committee of governors, will be opposed in vain, to applications that may be very improper, but cannot be known at the

time to be so ; even to the subscriber recommending the patient, who is understood to be responsible for the propriety of the application, the circumstances are often very imperfectly known, whilst this responsibility will, in general, restrain the committee from rejecting the application. In all cases of doubt, the feelings of governors will, and certainly ought to, lean in favour of the applicants, who are often women or children. But in the ordinary course of business, few cases comparatively will be submitted to the committee ; It cannot be supposed to meet efficiently more than once a week, whilst the dispensary, to answer its purposes, must be open daily, or even hourly, to applications. These must be received, and the necessary assistance administered by the medical attendant, on the spot, apart from all inquiry of the circumstances or qualifications of the patient. It may, indeed, be presumed, that the committee will, at first, as in all new institutions, exercise

an unusual degree of vigilance, and require those to be brought before them, that have been admitted the preceding week. Such attendance will not always be procured; and when it is, the investigation will, in many cases, prove doubtful and unsatisfactory. What then is to be done? what course can a committee follow who have no alternative to offer, but admission on the one hand, or on the other, a complete rejection of the application? They will act as every man of feeling, and who has a discretionary power, would act in such a case—they will accede to the wishes of the applicant, and administer the concerns of a benevolent institution, on charitable principles.

So many of these cases will occur, and the vigilance of the committee will be so frequently defeated, that it must imperceptibly relax, and all the cases that are received in the intervals between the regular meetings of the committee, will

succeed, and become recognised patients of the dispensary on this, and the same families probably, on all future occasions.

Upon no other principle than what has been described, does it seem practicable to conduct the business of a dispensary, in a very populous town, unless it be so constituted, as to admit of some modification, by which those who have no claim to be considered as fit objects of charity, might yet be admissible to its benefits, by a legitimate right, in consideration of a small annual payment to its funds.

From this representation, which a little reflection will show not to be overstated, it may be reasonably assumed, that in a dispensary where the parochial poor are not included as objects of relief, as we have seen to be the case in that of Nottingham, one half of the number admitted will consist of families that have previously been under the care of private medical practitioners, in all cases of or-

dinary illness. It is beyond all question, that the junior members of the medical faculty, derive their chief employment and support from artizans, operative manufacturers, and their families. These young men are just starting in the world, after having incurred a heavy expense in their education, often procured by painful sacrifices on the part of their relations; incited by the confident expectation, that the young men, once qualified, will be enabled, by their own efforts, to obtain an independent support. It may not be generally known, much less duly considered, that to qualify these young men, to render the most essential services to society, as general practitioners of medicine and surgery, the expense is, at least, thrice what it was, thirty or forty years ago; nor is this to be regretted, since the extent of the education, and the attainments that ought to be derived from it, are, at least, equivalent. Is it then a matter of mean consideration, and in

which society ought to feel no concern, that a body of young men educated to an honourable and useful profession, should at once be deprived of a considerable share of that employment, on which they must always depend for their support, during the first years of their practice. If in founding a public establishment, however generally beneficial, such injurious effects were to be inflicted on the interests of any other class or profession, be their place in society what it may, would it not be followed by the most clamorous complaints and remonstrances, so loud and persistent as to compel attention to them, and so just as to require it? That the members of the medical profession have never been incited to this course of conduct, by the neglect which their just interests have met with, is much to their credit, and is a just subject of congratulation to all their connexions. To every member of that profession, it must be felt as a very gratifying reflection, that they

have never brought their private interests into competition with any object of public benevolence: even those junior practitioners, whose case calls peculiarly for consideration, because they must always be the first and greatest sufferers, have been silent; or rather, when the object has been of a nature to render their services available, have been the first to make an offer of them gratuitously. This may be a principal reason why the public attention has never been led to this view of the subject, and why it seems hitherto to have been wholly overlooked or disregarded; the injurious consequences however remain, and are not palliated even by sympathy. What then, it will be asked, is to be done? Must the community be deprived of an important public benefit, because there are a few who suffer from it? Certainly not; but justice ought to be done; and if a remedy can be found compatible with the proper

purpose and prosperity of a dispensary, it ought not to be rejected.

It thus appears that dispensaries, as they have been usually constituted in this country, and viewed as merely charitable institutions, are liable to two great defects, or rather objections.

They are chargeable with an entire want of consideration for the interests of the medical attendants. It cannot be denied that this is justly due to them, as the prime agents and instruments of administering that relief to the objects of the charity, which it is the main purpose of the institution to afford; not as governors, met for an hour in a week, to regulate the detail of the business; but called upon to spend a considerable portion of their time daily, while they unite skill, attention, and personal exertions, in the discharge of laborious and responsible duties. All this they are expected to do regularly, without the offer of any kind of acknowledgment, unless it should

occur to the annual meeting to propose a formal vote of thanks, as a requital for their services.

The second objection, in its direct influence on the relations of society, is of a still graver cast. It is that of offering, without the possibility of due discrimination, to the labouring population generally, that charitable aid in illness, which is unquestionably due to many, under circumstances that render them fit and very deserving objects of it. In doing this, the difficulty is to restrain the boon that is proposed to its just bounds, and to avoid the error, and the serious evil to society, of bringing whole families into the class of receiving assistance from a charitable institution, who have hitherto maintained their independence. It is true, and it is a very gratifying truth, that there is still a class of the labouring population, who set a high value on their independence, and these would not be found among the applicants to the dispen-

sary: but it is equally true, that there are not a few sensualists, who are much more attached to personal indulgence, than to the care and credit of their families ; and will be always ready to accept, and to claim charitable aid in any form, to enable them to make a greater reserve for private gratification. It is more than probable, that the families of persons of this class would be found very generally in the lists of the dispensary, and, as individuals, might be very real objects of compassion. Few things can inflict a greater or more direct injury on the relations of society, than any institution or practice, which has the effect of breaking down that barrier between independence and pauperism, which it is still more the interest of the poor themselves, than of the rich, to maintain. The direful consequences of it are apparent in the present state of the rural population, over a large district in the southern part of England. This has evidently been intro-

duced, by a peculiar administration of the poor laws, under the urgent and unprecedented exigencies of the French war. From that time the agricultural labourers have been accustomed to receive some portion of their wages out of the fund collected by the poor-rate. All distinctions tending to maintain a sense of independence, have been thus confounded; and more than half the labourers of these districts have been forced into the lists of pauperism, without any choice on their parts. Demoralization and disorder has followed as a matter of course; for to all who think or observe at all, it will appear an incontrovertible truth, that wherever a sense of the value of independence is generally cherished by the labouring community; in the very same proportion will morality, order, and decency, be found to prevail.

It is in perfect conformity with this view, that the annexed form of a constitution requires, that every dispensary

should consist of two classes of patients : first, those that are admitted as fit objects of charity on the recommendation of a subscriber, and who are to be supplied with medical advice, attendance at their own dwellings when necessary, and medicine at the cost of the fund ; secondly, those who have hitherto maintained their independence, but are desirous of availing themselves of the advantages offered by the dispensary, in consideration of a small annual payment to its funds, to be received in weekly or quarterly instalments : the amount to depend on the number and age of the members of the family. In consequence of this payment, they insure to themselves and their families all the benefits of the institution, so long as the subscription is paid : this class to be denominated *Free Subscribers*. The sum and conditions of this payment, will be best settled at the formation of each institution.

The obvious advantage to a free sub-

scriber is, that without forfeiting his independence, and the respectability attached to it, he secures to himself and his family medical advice, regular attendance at his own habitation, when necessary, and medicines of the best quality, at a much less expense than would be otherwise within his reach; as it is proposed that the terms should be so adjusted, as to give the free subscriber a fair advantage beyond what would be attainable in private medical practice; he would also, by this measure, obtain as much security as can be given, against one of the greatest and most frequent misfortunes liable to happen to an industrious family; that of being brought into a state of poverty, by the lengthened illness of any one of its members.

In adopting this arrangement, the benefits to the individuals concerned, would be accompanied with an important convenience to the governors, in the increased facility with which the detail of business

would be conducted, especially in those investigations which related to the circumstances of applicants. In doubtful cases, which at first would be numerous, the committee would be relieved of much responsibility by having an alternative to offers where they might otherwise feel themselves obliged to put an absolute negative on the application. Reasoning on the popularity of sick clubs in all parts of this country, it is not too much to assume, that this alternative would be, in many cases, cheerfully accepted, after it became duly understood, since; in this case, it is not merely the head of the family, but all its members, that would derive some security from illness or accident.

It may be objected that the premium would be irregularly paid, and this may be admitted in a few cases; but much might be done to obviate or correct this inconvenience, by decision and punctuality on the part of the committee, at the

commencement. Cases, it is true, are very likely to occur where a free subscriber, from want of profitable employment or other causes, may become disabled from continuing his subscription; but in such cases, the committee would have the best evidence, and the most authentic proof, that he was then become a most worthy object of charitable relief; on the other hand, there would be instances of persons being received into the charitable class, who, from better information, are found to be qualified to become free subscribers, and an opportunity is thus offered to rectify an original mistake.

In reviewing the measure here recommended, of admitting into every dispensary a class of free subscribers, and reflecting on the poverty and destitution to which the most industrious families are often reduced by the lengthened illness of even one member of it, we cannot fail to arrive at the following conclusions.

First. That it cannot in any way interfere to defeat or impair the main purposes of the institution, in offering relief to all fit objects of charity.

Second. That this addition is calculated to extend the sphere of its utility, by the offer of an important benefit to a large and highly valuable class of the labouring population, whilst it has a tendency to raise their respectability in their own eyes, and of their neighbours; and to prevent those unforeseen misfortunes which might reduce them to a condition of pauperism. We must be aware that a plan of this nature would require time to be matured; it must be understood and appreciated before it would be adopted. Few would come forward at first. Many would wait to see how it wrought with others. But the prevalence and prosperity of similar associations among the labouring community, is a proof of a leaning in their favour; and this would be likely to share the same

fate. It would proceed slowly for some time, but would take root gradually, and would be likely to prosper and extend its influence, beyond what we are authorized at present to contemplate. In the mean time the main object of the institution would be conducted, as if no addition had been made to it, only with more facility, as being more easily confined to its proper objects.

Reverting to the subject of the interference of dispensaries, as usually constituted, with the interests of the junior practitioners of medicine and surgery ; it is a question so entirely new to the consideration of the public, that it would be vain to entertain any sanguine expectations that it would make much impression at first. The objection is, without all question, well founded ; is of more importance than has hitherto been imagined, and when dispassionately stated, will obtain a due share of consideration, and will, in the end, make that impression on the mind

of the public, which it so well deserves. At first, it will probably excite surprise, as opposing a very unreasonable objection to an important public benefit. It will be said, that no complaint has been heard, from those whose interests are said to be at stake; on the contrary, they have been the first to offer their unconditional services to every new institution of this nature, as they are now constituted.

The fact is, that the community has been so long accustomed to the gratuitous services of the medical faculty in every form of charitable establishment, where they could be expected or wanted; and habit has so familiarized the thing, that it is scarcely considered as a boon. Be this as it may, it is certainly for the best interests of society, that services so readily obtained, should not, on that account, be undervalued, as appears hitherto to have been the case. If medical men owe certain services to the public, as, indeed, all men do; they are, for the most part,

very ready to acquit themselves of that obligation: but some consideration is surely due to those young men, most of whom have recently finished an expensive education, and are entering into life under circumstances that require their making the best use of their time and talents. Whilst the writer entertains these opinions, and thinks it a matter of justice to prefer this claim in favour of the young practitioner, who cannot do it for himself, he professes to feel a lively interest that the medical faculty, as a body, should continue to maintain, to its full extent, that reputation for disinterestedness and humanity, which has hitherto been conceded to it, and which there is no ground to apprehend is likely to be impaired or forfeited.

We are to regard this, like every other profession, as a body educated for the express purpose of rendering to the community the most valuable and efficient services, and depending for their subsist-

ence on the honourable rewards due to these services. Holding this in view, it may appear a bold assertion, but it is not the less true, and may be maintained without hazard of refutation ; that there is no body of men, be their rank and profession what it may, who have devoted so much time and talent, and encountered so much personal exertion, upon pure motives of humanity and benevolence, for the relief of the indigent and afflicted, as occurs in the daily practice of medical men. We do not mean to refer, in this statement, to the public duties undertaken by them in hospitals, infirmaries, &c., for which they are pledged ; but to the spontaneous exercise of their good will and good feeling, towards objects of distress, which is of daily occurrence, and very generally towards those who have no friend to solicit that kindness in their behalf, nor any witness to make it known.

If this representation be just, and we

solicit a candid and scrupulous examination of it ; no higher encomium can be passed on the members of a profession, who are thus ready to devote a considerable portion of their services, to those who are in the most urgent need of them, and least able to remunerate them.

If this is true now, it is a gratifying subject of reflection, that in the present circumstances of this profession, there is a fair prospect that this standard of moral reputation will be raised rather than lowered. No person can now acquire the qualifications necessary to sustain the character of a medical practitioner, without a complete education. Of this it is no doubt the direct object to attain a sufficient acquaintance with professional science, but the natural, we may say the necessary effect of this, in a well-regulated mind, is a correspondent elevation of sentiment, and a higher sense of responsibility of what is due to himself and to his fellow men. It is the private and

spontaneous exercise of good will and kind offices to those who are most in need of them, and least in a condition to reward them, that is here contended for, as the brightest ornament of the medical character. It does not, however, follow, that there is either justice or propriety in engaging young practitioners to undertake permanent, laborious, and responsible duties, without the means or the prospect of rendering any compensation for them. Custom has given a sanction to this practice, and having been long established, it is followed as a matter of course. It would seem, indeed, to be fully justified in the case of dispensaries, by the ready and numerous offers of gratuitous assistance usually made where such an institution is in contemplation. But before these offers are accepted, which are usually made by junior practitioners, their situation and motives claim a deliberate consideration. The appointment to a public trust is flattering, and is often

the first object of a young man's laudable ambition. The consequence is, that in a populous town more offers are made than are wanted. The candidates are numerous, and the young men are brought into the lists of competition with others of a like standing. It is evident that some must succeed, and others fail; and each is so anxious to obtain that mark of public preference, that he is prepared to encounter any risk to obtain it; and is willing to tender his gratuitous assistance at all hazards. Can such an offer be justly deemed a voluntary act? It is much better entitled to be viewed as a sacrifice to a sense of the high value of professional character, on first setting out in life. The result is, that after probably a warm competition, and some hostile feelings, a few succeed, to the disappointment of others, who must retire with feelings not very friendly to the charity. And to what do the favoured candidates succeed? Truly, to an engagement to

the regular discharge of public and important duties, the punctual performance of which must deprive them of a large portion of that time which other avocations may call for. The fact turns out to be, in plain language, that they are called upon, and expected, to devote to the duties of a dispensary, a portion of time and talent, more than equivalent to ten of the usual annual subscriptions of its best friends; and that at the lowest computation of the value of their services. Can this representation be literally just? and can it have passed under the eye of the most respectable members of society without notice? On the part of the young men, as far as it is a matter of choice and good will, it may be commendable. But does it acquit the public of injustice to men in their situation?

Is it not rather an ungracious task, for a body of respectable and influential persons, such as are usually engaged in bringing forward an institution of this

nature, to impose so great a hardship on another body, who are to bear the burden of the laborious duties incident to it, and who are indeed the life-blood of the establishment, when in its full exercise. To those who bestow a deliberate consideration on the subject, it will appear very questionable, how far there is either good sense or public advantage, in inviting, or even permitting, young men to undertake laborious and responsible duties ; in a word, to bear the chief burden of a public charity, at a time when they cannot be supposed to be in easy circumstances, without any offer or prospect of compensation. Let it be remarked by the way, that this is done by the very act of founding an institution, which takes from them a considerable portion of that class of society, from which they had previously derived, in the character of private practitioners, a large share of their employment and subsistence. It is easy to foresee the sur-

prise, and very probably the indignant opposition, with which these opinions will be met by many. Long prevailing practice, and the habits of society already established, exert much unconscious influence in giving rise to opinions, that under other circumstances, would be rejected. Perhaps the question will be best brought to a fair decision, by putting a hypothetical case.

Let us suppose the community to be engaged in founding an establishment of a laudable nature, and promising in its completion, the most important benefits to the public interests. In the outset of the business, it becomes evident, that the exertions of a particular body of young men, would be essential to the success and prosperity of the undertaking: they were accordingly to be called upon to render their assistance permanently, in the discharge of the executive duties, to the sacrifice of a considerable portion of their time, talents, and attention. We

may further consider them as engaged in some profession, in trade, commerce, agriculture, or in any other employment, medicine only excepted ; we also admit the public services required of them, to be, in all respects, congenial to their usual pursuits. The question to be decided comes then to this, whether such a call as custom has sanctioned, on the part of the public, in regard to members of the medical profession, could with any appearance of propriety, or prospect of success, be transferred to any other class of society ? Such a call, or even expectation, would be held to be, in a high degree, wild and absurd. It would be immediately replied, and that reply would be received by all parties, as reasonable and conclusive, that in all cases involving the interests of society, and where the community are the gainers, a compensation at the general expense is justly due to all who undertake permanent and responsible duties, and is as

much a matter of good policy as of justice. Upon no other rule or principle could the affairs of society be conducted. Accordingly, it has become a maxim, established by universal practice, from the first ministers of the crown down to the lowest servant of the public. Indeed, the title to all property in civilized society, may be resolved in its origin, to the wages or reward of time, talent, and industry.

In saying this, we are far from being disposed to overlook, much less to undervalue, the disinterested conduct of some distinguished individuals in all professions, who are ready to devote their time and services to advance the best interests of society. These form honourable exceptions, but can never be brought forward as a rule, in dealing with a body of men. There are certain principles, common to all classes, involving the very essence of justice, and to which all have an equal, and indisputable claim. It is

true that the members of the medical profession do not appear, hitherto, to have preferred this claim for themselves; their case has been viewed with indifference, and the treatment they have received has been an exception from that experienced by all other classes or ranks in society: indeed, the relation of this profession to society in general, has hitherto been a complete anomaly, compared with the principles that have been observed towards all other orders. It is time that the justice of the public should be appealed to; and such an appeal, as far as it is founded in justice, will never be ultimately made in vain. When duly considered, its reasonableness will be admitted; and the question will be settled finally on a footing more satisfactory to the public, as well as to the profession.

It cannot be supposed, that the practice established hitherto, is to be ascribed to any perversion of the principles of

equity in the minds of the community. It seems more reasonable to suppose, that it had its rise in the forwardness of medical persons themselves, to make an offer of unconditional services in all cases of a benevolent or charitable nature, where they could be found desirable or useful. These are now become so familiarized by time and habit, that, without much reasoning, they are entered into the catalogue of rights acquired by prescription, and are treated accordingly.

Reverting to the question which introduced this discussion, it is hoped that some ground has been established for a reasonable compensation to those medical persons, who undertake permanent and responsible duties in a dispensary. On the other hand, it is fully admitted, that every charitable institution has a just claim to the services of all the executive agents, on the most moderate terms; it is further admitted, that the

experience gained by medical persons in their professional pursuits, as a consequence of a faithful discharge of their duties in a public situation, is of avail by enhancing their reputation as practitioners, and deserves to be taken into the account. It is, therefore, not a remuneration for skill and talent that is considered as due, in cases of this nature, but such a compensation as shall be held to fulfil the principles of justice, while it is admitted to be moderate and reasonable by all parties. It may be doubted, whether even this ought to be insisted upon, in cases of public charity, where means are deficient and cannot be provided; in such cases, the experience of the past would relieve all doubts, respecting the ready acquiescence of medical attendants to discharge their duties gratuitously.

If the general conclusion to which these observations lead, be admitted, it becomes a duty in those concerned in

founding public institutions, where medical aid forms a main part of the object; to give the preference to such a constitution, if such can be devised, as will admit of some such compensation to medical attendants as has been proposed, without defeating the chief purposes had in view.

In the scheme of a dispensary here annexed, it will be found that provision has been made for this, among other improvements; tending to enlarge the sphere of the utility, the popularity, and permanence of these institutions.

The importance of the provision alluded to, will be fully admitted, by all who participate in an opinion, now found to prevail very generally, that in all public establishments, or associations for specific objects, it is highly desirable that the secretary and every other officer or agent, having permanent duties to discharge, should have some regular and fixed compensation, proportioned to the

time and exertions required. This opinion is strongly and irresistibly impressed on the members of committees; entrusted with the conduct and regulation of public establishments and associations, by the difficulties which they daily experience, in enforcing the due discharge of duties gratuitously performed, although convinced that the well-being of their institution depends upon it.

In the sketch alluded to, and to be found in the Appendix, there is also a provision of which the sole object is, the due regulation of medical attendance. It is proposed that in the room of electing individual practitioners, to the discharge of the duties of a dispensary, every regularly educated medical person, residing within the district, who becomes an annual subscriber to the funds, and at the same time declares his willingness to undertake a share of the duties, shall be considered as one of the medical attendants, as long as his subscription is con-

tinued. It ought to follow as a branch of this arrangement; and it will be found a regulation of the most essential value to a dispensary, that every patient of either class, when requiring to be attended at their own dwellings, shall enjoy the privilege of having the attendance of that medical member of the institution, for whom they may entertain a preference. This regulation, in both its parts, may, on a superficial view, be held as of minor importance. Its object is to secure the good will, and co-operation of the medical gentlemen within its circuit; and, surely this cannot be viewed as a matter of indifference, or of small importance, to an institution where the health of the labouring community holds the first place. This will be found to be best accomplished, by placing a dispensary, and the medical attendants attached to it, as nearly as may be, on the footing that obtains in private practice; it is thus opened to all regular practitioners

resident within the district, who are subscribers to the funds, and declare their willingness to take a share in the duties incident to it. Such an arrangement has an obvious tendency to maintain harmony and good feelings ; and cannot interfere with any of the purposes for which the institution is founded. That part of the regulation, which gives to the patient a choice in his medical attendant, cannot be otherwise than gratifying to him, and will be found to increase his attachment to the whole system. It ought, indeed, to be equally acceptable to both parties ; since no other arrangement has ever been found so well calculated to secure confidence on the one part, and attachment on the other. It will have the happy effect of superseding all other regulations on the subject of medical attendance ; and prevent all complaints, which are often difficult to decide. No other means will prove so efficient to encourage the attention and

assiduity of the medical attendants, as that he is conscious of being the object of the patient's choice: nor has experience ever devised any more effectual method, to create and maintain a good understanding between the physician and his patient. It is founded in nature, and will be found equally acceptable and efficacious in all ranks. Upon the whole, this regulation of the mode of medical attendance is held to be of such vital importance in the constitution of a dispensary, such as is here recommended, that, unless it is adopted in any practical trial that is made, the plan will not have justice done to it.

In a subject, hitherto so little canvassed, and so imperfectly understood, it may be proper to review the more prominent points that have been urged, in a brief recapitulation. Comparing the regulations here proposed as a fit constitution for a dispensary, with those hitherto very generally adopted, and now

in actual exercise in different parts of this island, it appears to include several particulars that merit a decided preference. Without obstructing, or impairing that charitable relief to the labouring poor, in which dispensaries originated, and must always continue to be their main object; it holds out to every person or family of the labouring population, not hitherto objects of charity, an inducement, and the means to secure themselves and families, due and regular attention to their health, in medical attention, and a supply of medicines of the best quality, at a more moderate expense than it would be otherwise in their power to obtain, and would thus go a great way to obviate one of the most frequent of those overwhelming evils, which might reduce him to the condition of absolute pauperism. It maintains the general principle of justice to the medical attendants, and places the mode of attendance upon a footing likely to be the most beneficial

and successful in its results, as well as the most acceptable to all parties. These advantages have an obvious tendency to recommend dispensaries to that class of society, for whose benefit they are intended, and, in general, to give them a firmer hold on the public esteem.

The principles were first introduced by Mr. Smith in Warwickshire, as noticed above, with a view to supersede and put down that wretched practice too generally prevalent, of farming out the health of the parochial poor, to any medical practitioner in the neighbourhood, who would undertake it for the smallest annual premium. A vicious competition was thus established, and the frequent result was, that this responsible duty was contracted for, on conditions that would have been ruinous to a medical practitioner, who intended to deal conscientiously in his personal attention to the health of the poor, and in the supply of proper medicines.

This is so clearly seen by the poor themselves, that they rarely made application for relief in the first instance; and their diseases were too often neglected at a period, when they might have been treated with success.

In a few instances, dispensaries have been so formed as to be designated as self-supported. This can never be the case, where a proper provision is made for the relief of the poor, which appears to be desirable in all dispensaries. It is fit that they should be cherished by the patronage, and dependent for the chief part of their support, on the donations and annual subscriptions of the liberal and opulent in their neighbourhood; but it seems also indispensable that they should be encouraged by a parochial subscription from the rates, which should be made a condition, wherever a dispensary is proposed, as a means of bringing the institution under the influence and superintendence of the

parish officers, and giving every respectable inhabitant an interest in the welfare of the institution. Nothing can be better calculated than an establishment of this kind, to be entrusted with the health of the poor of the parish, in conjunction with the other objects proposed. In that case, the parochial subscription to its funds would be a legal claim; and the amount should, in no case, be less than the average of the annual expense incurred by the parish for the last three years, on the score of the health of their poor.

The obvious and incalculable advantage derived from hospitals or infirmaries in the treatment of the labouring population, under severe illness or infirmity, has been so amply experienced in this country of late years, as to lead to their extension, to almost every provincial town of considerable population; and happily such has been the liberal spirit of persons of rank and opulence in favour

of these establishments, that wherever the attempt has been made, under proper circumstances, the means have never been found deficient. This is a point of the greatest interest and encouragement, as a proof of a bias in the leading and influential class of society, to offer every kind of assistance to their poorer neighbours under adverse circumstances. But from the nature and constitution of infirmaries, the demand for such establishments must always be confined to places including a large amount of population. In places of moderate population, dispensaries will be found the nearest and most efficient substitute; and in all parts too distant to derive any, or but very partial and occasional benefit from an infirmary, they cannot fail to render essential service. In all manufacturing districts, accidents from machinery are of such daily occurrence, as to render some provision of this nature of the most urgent necessity.

In the present temper that prevails in this country, there is a promising prospect of a great extension of dispensaries to parts where they have not hitherto been thought of. What is chiefly wanting, is a more comprehensive view and better understanding of the subject; this will ultimately lead to the adoption of such a form of constitution, as may be calculated to discover the extensive and important purposes to which they may be rendered subservient.

The form of dispensary here recommended, will be found equally adapted to populous towns, and to market towns of all denominations, to which they would be found peculiarly appropriate; and where, in most cases, they might be made to include a district, consisting of a circuit of adjoining parishes; nor would they prove less applicable to districts wholly rural, where there was a populous parish, and a large village to constitute a centre.

In every such case, a dispensary pro-

perly formed and judiciously conducted, would prove an excellent, and not expensive, mode of providing for the health of the parochial poor; equally satisfactory to them, and creditable to the parish that adopted it. Had this form of a dispensary obtained the preference in that recently founded at Nottingham; its sphere of utility might have been extended, with great advantage, to the parishes within two miles of the town, including a population not under 15,000, and daily increasing. In these cases, the health of the parochial poor of these several parishes might have been undertaken with great propriety, and included in the operations of the dispensary: of course, this could only be done in compliance with the desire of the parishes; and their willingness to contribute to the funds, the average of their annual charge for the health of their poor; making a just allowance for any future increase of population as it arose.

A plausible objection may be made to the adoption of the principles here proposed and recommended, on the consideration, that dispensaries hitherto founded on the simple footing of charitable institutions, under the usual regulations, have been found to fulfil all their intended purposes satisfactorily; that the principles here preferred are speculative, founded on reasoning and appearance of probability, but unsupported by facts and experience; that when they come to be carried into actual practice, many unforeseen difficulties might arise, tending greatly to impair, perhaps to defeat, the objects proposed. Were this reasoning to be received as conclusive; there would be an end even to the proposal of an improvement on any practice that had prevailed, and proved useful. In the present case there is a powerful presumption in favour of the practicability and facility of carrying it into effect. It has been constructed upon the express

principle of arriving at its salutary purposes, by a union of the interests and inclinations of all who are concerned in its operations; and these elements duly combined, rarely fail to act in unison, and with efficiency. The objection to the system proposed, as being theoretical, is reasonable, and is admitted in its full force; but, it is also to be had in mind, that every projected improvement must take its trial somewhere, for the first time. Happily the scheme here proposed to be acted upon, although recent, is not altogether unsupported by practical facts. Several institutions have been founded on these principles in the county of Warwick, where they were first proposed; but as the knowledge of the writer respecting their details is partial and founded on report, he confines himself to a distinct statement of the particulars of a dispensary upon this model, lately founded in our neighbourhood at Derby, upon a scale of sufficient

magnitude to justify any inferences that the facts may supply. These particulars consist in answers to a set of queries, proposed for the express purpose of obtaining accurate information on the nature, progress, and detail of the institution, and are as follows: "That the dispensary at Derby was opened on the 29th September, 1830.—That it consists of three classes: first, a class of free subscribers: secondly, charity patients: thirdly, parish paupers. Since the 1st of October, 1830, there have been admitted into the first class 500 free members, upon the terms of each member above fourteen years of age, paying one penny a week to the funds, and each, under that age, one half-penny weekly. By this payment, they become entitled to the full benefits held out by the dispensary, in medicines of the best quality, in medical advice, and in attendance at their own dwellings, where the nature of the illness requires it. The payments are

made in advance, on the first Monday of each month. Punctuality in these payments is greater than could have been expected. Of the 500 free members, there are at this time 104 on the books as patients. Of the other two classes, there are 36 now on the books. N.B. The great and important objects of this institution have hitherto been fully realized."

Thus far the replies to interrogatories; but it farther appears, by the book of regulations, that the other principles here recommended as an improved form of dispensaries, are here fully recognized, and more or less adopted; not only in admitting a class of free subscribers, but in giving each patient, attended at home, the privilege of the choice of his medical attendant; and by awarding to each of the medical officers of the establishment a certain pecuniary compensation, which, however moderate, as in such a case it ought to be, yet amounts to a full recog-

nition of the justness of the principle here contended for. The whole form of the institution indicates in the founders, a perfect acquaintance with the present state of knowledge, on the subject of dispensaries, and much sound sense and discernment, in adapting it to the circumstances of the town and its population. If conducted with the same judgment and perseverance, that appears in its formation, there can be no doubt of its proving an incalculable advantage to the labouring population within the sphere of its operation. It may, indeed, prove so to the whole county indirectly ; by holding out an example so worthy of imitation in smaller towns, and so perfectly applicable to all populous places. Had the particulars of the dispensary at Derby been previously known to the writer, he would have been justified in forming a much more sanguine expectation of immediate success in obtaining a class of free subscribers, as well as in estimating the

number of the objects of a dispensary, that would prefer being included in this class, rather than become objects of charitable aid. In this case, the class of free subscribers amounts in number to nearly a fortieth part of the whole population of the town, and is a striking proof of the small proportion of the labouring community that would voluntarily present themselves, as objects of charity at a dispensary. Can the supposition be entertained, that these persons are not fit judges of what is most conducive to their own comfort and well being? or can it be questioned, that an intercourse of this nature between the different ranks of society, and the benefits offered to the labouring community by a dispensary on this principle, should fail to generate, and to maintain, a spirit of good will and kind feelings among all connected with it? But it appears, on further inquiry, that to the example of Derby, that of Sheffield may be added, where a dispensary denominated self-

supported, has been in existence for three years past. It is sufficient for our argument to show, that the general principles here recommended, are fully admitted and adopted in the constitution of that founded at Sheffield, that it includes two classes, one of which consists of free or independent subscribers. The whole of the business of this institution is conducted by the sale of tickets, which are bestowed by honorary contributors, on persons considered as proper objects of charity, and may be purchased by the class of free subscribers, either by the year, or when actually wanted. The validity of a ticket is restricted to six weeks, after being delivered to the surgeon,—under these conditions, there is reason to suspect that the purchase of tickets will very generally be deferred till they are urgently wanted, and that the most advantageous period of treating the patient will have passed over before he is visited. These, and other circumstances, may affect the progress and prosperity of the

dispensary; but it is no part of our purpose to remark on the interior administration of the institution, which may be adapted to its situation; but to show that when the two important points of a class of free subscribers, and some compensation to medical attendants have been proposed and duly considered, they have been received as essential improvements; and adopted as part of the constitution of dispensaries recently established. The denomination of self-supported, as assumed in some instances, can only be received in a very qualified sense, and can never strictly belong to any dispensary; since independent of its charitable objects, the advantages held out, and proposed to be bestowed on free subscribers, must cost considerably more than their subscriptions. It is essential to all dispensaries that they should enjoy the patronage of the persons of chief influence and property in their neighbourhood, and that a large proportion of the funds should be supplied

by donations and annual contributions from honorary members. In every case of this sort, where a new institution is brought forward, if a proper plan of constitution is adopted, so as to promise fair advantages to the labouring population; experience justifies the expectation that the funds will not prove deficient.

To those who are prepared to assent to the views here developed, it will afford matter of regret, that a more accurate and comprehensive view of the subject was not taken as a ground-work for the dispensary lately founded at Nottingham. If we are permitted to reason from the example of Derby, it would follow that a very large portion of the community in Nottingham would have sought the benefits of a dispensary, not by ranging themselves in the rank of charitable patients, and thus forfeiting their sense of independence; but by applying for admission into the class of free subscribers, had such been included in the plan of the constitution.

It seems equally obvious, that the sphere of its utility would have been most usefully enlarged, by including within its operations the parishes within two miles of Nottingham, comprehending a population approaching to 15,000, and which has been rapidly increasing for several years.

There is no example hitherto in this part of the country, of dispensaries formed on this principle, being employed in the care of the health of the parish poor; but such institutions were originally proposed for that express purpose, and doing away the disgraceful practice of farming out the health of the poor to the lowest bidder, as already noticed. Such a dispensary, however, is by its very form, and the mode of conducting medical attendance, peculiarly well calculated to be entrusted with the health of the parochial poor; it would, therefore, be an important article in the frame of the institution, that the governors should be empowered to receive applica-

tions to that effect, from parishes within the district, and to contract for the care of the health of the poor, on an undertaking by the parishes to make an annual payment to the funds, equivalent to the average expense incurred for the health of their poor, for a few preceding years.

If in reviewing what has been stated, unless it can be shown that there is any thing overstated, incorrect, erroneous, or in some other way affecting the validity of the argument, it follows that a dispensary in its most complete and advantageous form, would consist of three classes of patients; the first a class of free members; the second, of charitable patients who are not parish paupers, but too poor to become free members; the third, consisting of the poor belonging to those parishes included in the district, for the expense of which the funds are to be compensated out of the poor-rates of these parishes. Upon these principles, once admitted, the form of administering

each individual dispensary, would admit of being so modified, as to adapt it to the circumstances of the town, or district of country for which it was intended.

The whole practical duties of a dispensary, are included in bestowing such medical and surgical advice and attention to the patients as their state requires ; in dispensing medicines prescribed, and in visiting at their own dwellings, or the workhouses, such of the sick as are incapable of attending at the dispensary. The medical practitioners of the district being expected to take their share in these duties, their number will bear some proportion to the population ; and as the whole business of medical attendance is required to be conducted by the rules observed in private practice, there is reason to conclude that these duties would be performed easily and satisfactorily to both parties.

A dispensary upon this comprehensive principle, would be thus entrusted with

the health of the chief part of the labouring community, whose circumstances would not admit of the expense of medical attendance, on the terms of private practice. If such an institution has peculiar advantages in protecting the health of one part of the population, it possesses the same advantages in every other. It cannot be shown that there is any complication in the detail of duties, or any interference in the different parts, to create embarrassment in the execution. An arrangement of this nature, as the very best that can be devised to secure the health and well being of the poor; could not fail to be received by themselves as a boon, and to reflect credit on the community that adopted it. Being of a public nature, and subjected to the observance and superintendence of the most influential characters, such an institution, involving a subject so deeply interesting as the health of the community, could scarcely be supposed liable

to any mismanagement or abuse, that would not be immediately detected and removed.

It has already been asserted, that this system, with the modifications that circumstances may dictate, will be found alike applicable to populous towns of any size, or to rural districts of considerable population. It may be doubted how far it could be adjusted to the extent of a metropolis, or to provincial towns of overgrown population. It is obvious that in such cases more than one, or even many such institutions would be required to fulfil the objects, and it is also to be anticipated, that difference of opinion would arise respecting the most advantageous stations in large cities ; and some difficulties in becoming acquainted with the real circumstances of the labouring poor in the district. These objections are not insurmountable ; and were the public once deeply impressed with a belief in the efficiency of the system, and

that it was really a subject of the highest importance and utility, that the health of the whole labouring part of the community, who are themselves unable fully to provide the means, should be placed under one and the same simple and efficacious mode of management ; all minor difficulties would disappear, in carrying the plan into full effect. We venture to call it a system of the most perfect simplicity. On a superficial view, a dispensary including three classes of patients, may appear complicated, but this is only in appearance—a little consideration of its nature and duties, would suffice to remove any such impression. Although the patients are of three different orders, there is no distinction in the duties to be performed to every individual when under illness ; every member of each class is on a footing, and each to be treated alike, according to the circumstances of his disease. If the whole number is greater, so is also the proportion of

medical attendants, and the mode of their attendance is regulated in the way most useful, as well as satisfactory to themselves and their patients; to this is to be added an ample provision of medicines of the best quality.

As the whole of this discussion has been undertaken with a reference to the dispensary lately established at Nottingham; the writer cannot consistently withhold the opinion he has formed on that subject. It appears to him that the town of Nottingham with its population, including also the parishes within two miles of the town, is well adapted for the support of a dispensary, upon this comprehensive scale. It would, according to this proposal, consist of three classes of patients—the first being free members, paying a stipulated, but very moderate sum, similar to the practice at Derby, to secure the benefit of the dispensary; the second being charitable patients, because unable to become free members, and

therefore well entitled to the aid of such an institution; the third to consist of the parochial poor, belonging to the parishes within the district, these parishes agreeing to make an annual payment to the funds, equivalent to the average expense they had incurred for the care of the health of the parish poor. While this proposal is submitted to the public, it is at the same time declared, that there is neither complaint, nor ground of complaint, respecting the care hitherto taken of the health of the poor of those parishes. The system observed in Nottingham for many years past, has been liberal, humane, and satisfactory to all parties; and the parish poor are therefore wisely excluded from any claim on the funds of the dispensary, as now constituted. The present system, however, is not exempt from some inconvenience: the duties that fall upon the medical attendant of the poor in St. Mary's parish, are so severe and harassing, that although required to

undertake no other ; the health of several of these persons have suffered so much, as to compel them to abandon the situation, before the term of their engagement had expired; and should that parish continue to add to its population as hitherto, a further expense will be incurred for the health of the poor belonging to it.

Every argument of expediency and utility, and probably also of economy, points to the advantage to be derived from placing the health of the parochial poor, under the care and management of a dispensary. It would then become the official duty of parish officers to observe and watch over the affairs of the dispensary; and the most respectable inhabitants of every parish connected with it, would feel an interest in the due administration of all its concerns. The medical attendants would be sufficiently numerous to lighten the burden to each, and enable him to discharge these public

duties, without encroaching on his more private avocations. The disposable funds consisting of honorary donations, annual subscriptions, together with the payments of the parishes for their poor, would be likely to answer every purpose, and, probably, with more economy. One house, or set of apartments, and one resident and superintending surgeon apothecary, with a stated salary, would be amply sufficient. The chief business of the resident surgeon being in the establishment itself, to prescribe and dispense medicines to the patients who attended; he would not be expected to visit patients at their own dwellings, beyond what he might voluntarily undertake; but he might, with great propriety, be appointed to the department for the vaccination of all the labouring poor and their children; who were presented at the dispensary for that purpose, at the times appointed, and to keep a brief register of their names and cases. In the case that the duty of

compounding and dispensing medicines should prove more than one person could conveniently perform, an apprentice or articted pupil might be allowed, without expense to the institution. The great advantage of this system in a public view, would be that of placing the guardianship of the health of such of the labouring part of the community as are unable fully to provide the means themselves, under one system of liberal management; a measure, in which their own inclinations as well as interests are so fully consulted, that it could not fail to prove gratifying to them, and creditable to the public who carried it into effect; and to whose observation and superintendence, it must, from its public nature, be at all times open. Another consequence to the community, although of a different nature, very likely to arise from a dispensary upon this comprehensive plan, connected with the superior advantage of a general hospital; would be, the establishment of

a medical school on a similar footing to those already existing in several of the larger provincial towns of England. In some of these there are certain branches of medical and surgical education that are taught, and studied by the attentive student, not only at less expense, but with greater advantage, than in the overcrowded schools and hospitals of the metropolis.

Were this subject to be reconsidered at Nottingham, with a general conviction of the superior advantages of adopting a dispensary upon so liberal and comprehensive a principle; there is no reasonable ground to doubt that it would be so conducted, as to exhibit to the public one of the most salutary and beneficial establishments that could be brought into existence for the benefit of the labouring poor. The advantages derived from it would soon be generally known and appreciated, and would be held up as an example worthy of general imitation, and much to the

credit of those who contributed to bring it into notice.

In conclusion, the writer has been induced to take up the subject of dispensaries, conceiving it to be imperfectly understood, and that a further elucidation would be likely to lead to the adoption of certain improvements, that promise to be equally beneficial and satisfactory to a very interesting class of the labouring population.

He hopes that he has not laboured in vain, in the pains he has taken to inculcate the expediency and superior utility of this form of a dispensary. It is a great encouragement to perceive that, in some of the latest, and one of the most prosperous institutions that have been founded, a decided preference has been given to the constitution here recommended, and all its distinguishing principles adopted. In prosecuting this subject, the writer could not avoid advert-

ing to the very singular and anomalous relation which has subsisted between the community and the medical faculty as a body ; in most of those public transactions where their professional services are indispensably required. He perceives the necessity of some change in these relations, and flatters himself that it has been made to appear, that such a change would prove as creditable and satisfactory to the public, as to the medical profession. This is a subject to which none but medical men may be supposed to have given much of their attention ; among these, few advocates are to be found, who would not, by their interference, expose themselves to the imputation of indirect motives. The writer has thought himself justified in advocating the cause of the junior members of his profession ; but he has done it honestly, from conviction, and, in his own apprehension, without partiality. He

has assumed no facts that he did not believe to be universally admitted; the reasons and inferences he leaves at the bar of the public. From his long standing in his profession, (having practised in Nottingham since 1781, and having relinquished all professional pursuits to his junior brethren,) he thinks he has some title to speak out, and to plead exemption from the suspicion of any unbecoming motive. He is certainly unconscious of entertaining any, and thinks the only possible suspicion that can arise is, that of his acting on this point, at the instigation of others. Having foreseen this, he has guarded against it, by being enabled to declare, that this tract is sent to the press without the privacy of one individual of the medical profession. He is, indeed, convinced that none of them are at all acquainted with his particular views on these points, but as far as they are to be gathered from the sketch, at first sub-

mitted to the governors of the general hospital, and afterwards to the dispensary committee, where little notice was paid to it.

A P P E N D I X.

Sketch of the Constitution of a Dispensary, as described in the preceding pages.

A DISPENSARY to be instituted for the cure and treatment of the diseases and infirmities, the wounds or accidents, of the poorer orders of the labouring population, where those who attend at the establishment are to receive advice and surgical treatment, and to be furnished with the necessary medicines of the best quality ; those who are too ill to attend, to be visited by one of the medical attendants at their own dwellings, for the same purpose. The funds for the support of the institution are to be derived from the following sources :

First,—The donations and annual contributions of the honorary members.

N.B. Pains to be taken by its friends and promoters, to obtain the patronage, good-will, and co-operation of the nobility and gentlemen in the neighbourhood, and of all persons of opulence and liberality.

Secondly,—The contributions stipulated to

be paid at stated times, by free members, to insure to themselves all the benefits of the dispensary so long as these payments are made.

N.B. These payments to be settled at so moderate a rate, as to give free members the advantage of medical and surgical advice and treatment, with a supply of the best medicines at an expense considerably under what could be afforded by private practitioners.

Thirdly,—The payment to be made annually, out of the poor rates of each parish, who contract with the dispensary, for the care of the health of the poor belonging to it.

N. B. The amount to be estimated by the actual expense incurred for a few preceding years.—Exclusive of this, an annual subscription to the funds of a dispensary may be justly expected from each parish within its limits, in proportion to its population, in consideration of the numbers of charitable patients who will receive the aid of the dispensary, and who otherwise would be treated at the expense of the parish.

The patients of the dispensary to consist of three classes ;—I. Free members of the labouring class to be admitted by a committee of governors to all the benefits of the institution, on the condition of a stipulated payment at stated times.

II. Charitable patients to be admitted as such on the recommendation of an honorary subscriber.

III. The poor of such parishes as contracts with the dispensary for the care of their health.

GENERAL RULES.

THE management of the dispensary to be in the hands of honorary subscribers of one guinea annually, together with the overseers of the poor of contributing parishes. They shall at an annual general meeting, elect a committee from their own number, to meet at stated intervals, to direct and regulate all the affairs of the institution.

That the committee (three of their number being present,) shall meet at least once a month for the dispatch of business, shall elect a chairman, treasurer, and secretary, to record proceedings, and keep distinct accounts to be signed by the chairman.

That a proper house, or apartments, be provided by the committee for the use of the dispensary, including a room to accommodate the committee, a separate place for keeping, preparing, and distributing medicines, and a wait-

ing-room for attending patients, together with apartments for a resident surgeon apothecary, in all cases where the establishment is in a populous town, and upon a scale to render such an officer necessary. That in place of electing distinct medical practitioners for the duties of the dispensary, all the regularly educated and resident practitioners who become honorary subscribers, and at the same time declare their willingness to take a share in the professional duties, shall be considered as medical officers of the institution. They shall give their attendance at the dispensary, according to some rule of rotation, at the hours appointed for the attendance of patients.* They shall also be liable to be called upon to attend any home patient who is unable to appear at the dispensary, either within or out of the town; it being understood that the individual requiring attendance may, at his option, call in any one of the medical gentlemen attached to the institution.

That the medical officers appoint a committee of their own number to superintend the purchase of medicines, and the fitting up a room for their

* This, and a part of the following rule, is intended to apply to those dispensaries on a limited scale, where no resident surgeon apothecary is thought necessary.

reception, &c., and with power to engage a proper medical assistant, to compound, write directions, and distribute the prescribed medicines, in the room of a resident surgeon apothecary, where that is judged unnecessary.

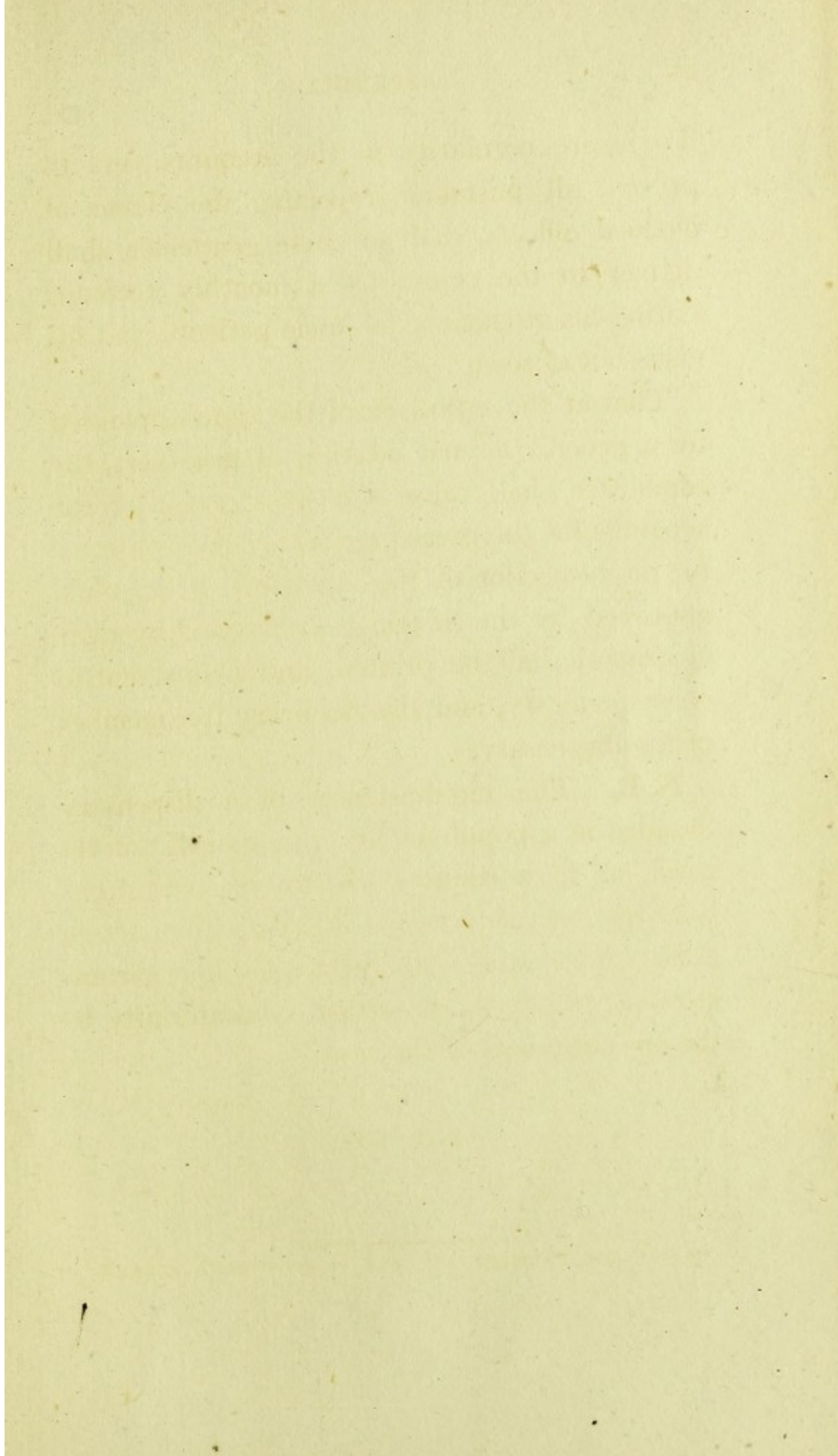
That all honorary subscribers of one guinea annually, and all overseers of the poor for subscribing parishes, shall be managers, and shall be entitled to vote at all annual and general meetings, called for the discussion of special business. Every honorary subscriber and overseer shall have the privilege to recommend patients, whom they believe to be real objects of charity, with such limitation in respect to numbers, as may be settled by a bye-law. The patients of all classes shall be equally dealt with in regard to attendance at their own dwellings, when unable to attend at the establishment, but shall be obliged to attend personally when not disabled. It is expected that the medical officers will accept a very moderate compensation for their services, whether according to weekly attendance on home patients within the town, or for visits at the distance of a mile or more out of town; the rate of each to be settled in a communication between a committee of the managers and medical officers.

To insure regularity in the accounts, and to prevent all mistakes respecting the claims of medical officers, each of these gentlemen shall deliver to the committee a monthly account, stating his attendance on home patients, and his visits out of town.

That at the approach of the time appointed for a general annual meeting of managers, the committee shall cause a clear abstract of the accounts for the preceding year, to be made out for the inspection of the meeting. This, when approved by the meeting, and signed by their chairman, shall be printed, and a copy sent to every honorary, and also to every free member of the dispensary.

N. B. The circumstances of a dispensary founded in a populous town, in a small market town, or in a country district of contiguous parishes, are so widely different, that every point not essential to the principles here recommended, is left to be settled in conformity to the circumstances of the case.

THE END.



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