

Testimonials in favour of Robert Renton, M.D., F.R.C.P.E., for the appointment of inspector-general of lunatic asylums in Scotland, under the contemplated Lunacy Act.

Contributors

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Publication/Creation

[Edinburgh?] : [publisher not identified], [1857?]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/zbmmhuvv>

Provider

Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The original may be consulted at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

TESTIMONIALS

IN FAVOUR OF

ROBERT RENTON, M.D., F.R.C.P.E.,

FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF

INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF LUNATIC ASYLUMS IN SCOTLAND,

UNDER THE CONTEMPLATED

LUNACY ACT.

R35810

LUNACY BILL FOR SCOTLAND.

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR GEORGE GREY, BART.,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT.

SIR,

Entertaining the belief that the Bill for the Regulation of Lunatics and of Lunatic Asylums in Scotland, brought into Parliament by the Lord Advocate and you, will speedily receive the sanction of the Legislature, I beg to offer myself as a Candidate for the office of General Inspector, provided for in that measure.

My fitness for that appointment I conceive to rest on the following grounds:—During the last thirteen years I have been engaged in discharging the duties of Medical Inspector of Lunatic Asylums in the County of Mid-Lothian, with powers, it is true, very circumscribed, and under circumstances somewhat discouraging.

For the manner in which these duties have been performed, I beg respectfully to refer to the opinions of those official au-

thorities who have for the greater part of that period co-operated with me in performing these duties.

With that view, allow me to transmit for your information a few Testimonials kindly given by these parties. I beg at the same time to enclose a very limited number of Testimonials from Members of the Profession, quite numerous enough, however, it is presumed, to enable you to form a judgment as to the claims which I may possess for the office in question.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Very Respectfully,

Your most obedient Servant,

ROBERT RENTON, M.D.

EDINBURGH, 26 HOWE STREET,

6th August 1857.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS BILL.

TESTIMONIALS.

I. *From* JOHN T. GORDON, Esq., *Sheriff of Mid-Lothian.*

SHERIFF'S CHAMBERS,
EDINBURGH, 6th August 1857.

MY DEAR SIR,—I am glad to learn that you intend to make an offer of your services under the New Lunacy Act. There are very few whose general professional acquirements, combined with a long and wide experience in the treatment of the insane, can so eminently qualify them for any duties which such a statute may require. My regret, perhaps, is, that in addressing yourself I cannot speak so strongly as I desire to do. But, at the same time, I sincerely wish not to exaggerate. Many years ago, upon the unanimous recommendation, as I believe, of the Royal College of Physicians, Mr Speirs selected you to accompany himself or the Sheriffs-substitute on inspections of the Lunatic Asylums of Mid-Lothian, and also to act as their adviser and referee in cases of Lunacy which might be under investigation. It seemed to me that I could not do better than to continue an appointment which had been thoroughly satisfactory to my predecessor here. And I do unhesitatingly affirm that our whole intercourse since has more and more strengthened my belief that in so doing I did right. I have invariably received from you not only the most ready and courteous, but the most judicious and skilful assistance which could aid a magistrate in matters sometimes neither very easy nor very pleasant. I shall not be so idle or presumptuous as to allude to your acknowledged

reputation as a medical man. Willingly, however, and upon the best basis of knowledge, let me bear emphatic testimony to the clear discrimination, temperate judgment, and vigilant solicitude which on every occasion characterized your opinions and directions. And I have no doubt that all my colleagues and others who have had opportunities of testing your knowledge and your prudence will amply corroborate what I say. It is, therefore, with a very fearless conviction of your fitness for such duties, established, as it has been, by continuous and varied practice in this particular department of your profession, that I express my ardent hope that qualities and science which deserve alike public confidence and distinction, will not now be disregarded in themselves, or denied room for their useful exercise.

With every sentiment of esteem, I beg to remain, &c.

JOHN T. GORDON.

To ROBERT RENTON, Esq., M.D.

II. *From* PATRICK ARKLEY, Esq., *Sheriff-Substitute of Mid-Lothian.*

EDINBURGH, 6th August 1857.

Since my appointment as Sheriff-substitute in 1848, I have had frequent opportunity of meeting with Dr Renton in reference to cases of Lunacy. I have annually visited with him the various asylums in this county, and can bear willing testimony to the great care and skill that he has invariably shown in investigating into the case of each patient, and into the general management of the various asylums. Dr Renton has also been one of the medical witnesses in most of the proceedings conducted by the Procurator-Fiscal against dangerous lunatics; and in these cases I have always found his opinion most sound and valuable. I do not speak of Dr Renton's high reputation as a medical practitioner,—that can be abundantly certified by others more qualified to do so than myself,—but I have no hesitation in saying, that Dr Renton's great skill and long experience in cases of Lunacy, and also in the inspection of

Lunatic Asylums, eminently fit him for being one of the Inspectors under the Bill now passing through Parliament. It also humbly appears to me, that his past services should very much strengthen his present application.

P. ARKLEY.

III. *From* ANDREW JAMESON, Esq., *Sheriff-Substitute of Mid-Lothian.*

EDINBURGH, 10th August 1857.

DEAR SIR,—As it has not happened to be part of my duty to visit the Lunatic Asylums in this county for a good many years, I have not had the *same* opportunities as the Sheriff and Mr Arkley, of speaking from my own knowledge of the ability and attention with which you have discharged the duties of Medical Inspector of the Asylums during that time. But I remember well that the late Mr Speirs had a high opinion of your qualifications, and placed great confidence in your judgment. In the two or three inspections in which you accompanied me before his death, I had occasion to observe the great care and benevolent attention you paid to that duty. Since that period I have frequently presided at trials of persons who had been apprehended as dangerous Lunatics, at the instance of the Public Prosecutor; and I have had ample opportunity to appreciate the calm and careful consideration, the clear judgment and sound sense, which you brought to these painful inquiries; and which, united to professional experience and a benevolent disposition, made it no less satisfactory than agreeable to have the benefit of your assistance. I am, &c.

AND. JAMESON.

Dr ROBERT RENTON.

IV. *From* MAURICE LOTHIAN, Esq., *Procurator-Fiscal for the County of Mid-Lothian.*

COUNTY BUILDINGS,

EDINBURGH, 7th August 1857.

DEAR SIR,—Understanding that you may offer your services under the new Statute applicable to Lunatics, I take

leave to tender my humble testimony in your favour. I need not say one word in reference to your position in the medical department. That position is too high and well known to call for any testimony whatever. I shall therefore confine myself to what has fallen under my own special observation; premising only, that you were elected by the late Mr Sheriff Speirs, to assist him in his periodical visits of the asylums in this county; that you continued to act with him most satisfactorily till his death; that Mr Sheriff Gordon continued your appointment; and that I feel quite sure that the report which, if called on, he will give in reference to you, will be just what might be expected from your high qualifications and long experience.

In regard, then, to my own observation, I have to mention, that during the last nearly eleven years it has been my duty, as Procurator-Fiscal of this county, to conduct, under the existing Statutes, a great many cases, the object of which was to ascertain the state of mind of individuals, and to have them put into safe keeping, if found to be lunatic. In all these cases I selected you, as one of the medical witnesses, when I could procure you; and it is undoubtedly a very remarkable fact, that though these cases were always defended, and though the aid of some of the most able physicians in Edinburgh was employed in the defence, in no one case was the opinion which I received from you ever found to be erroneous. After the fact which I have now stated, I think it would scarcely be possible for me to overstate my opinion of your high qualifications in the department to which I have referred.

Wishing you all success, I remain, &c.

MAURICE LOTHIAN.

V. *From W. P. ALISON, M.D., formerly Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh.*

HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH,
6th August 1857.

MY DEAR SIR,—I did not know, until I had the pleasure of seeing you to-day, that you were a candidate for the situa-

tion of Inspector of Lunatics and Lunatic Asylums under the new Bill ; and I have already put my name to a letter of recommendation of Dr Skae, who has long held the office of Governor at the Asylum of Morningside. My having done so, need not, as I conceive, preclude my saying as to you likewise, on public grounds, that I believe since, and even before, you received the appointment of Inspector from the late Sheriff Speirs, you have had very frequent opportunities of examining cases of Lunacy in all their bearings, and that your opinion in regard to them has very generally been approved, as sound and benevolent, by all concerned ; and on private grounds I have much pleasure in saying, that I believe for any medical appointment under that Bill a better man than yourself cannot be found in Scotland. This I can say from my knowledge of your conduct in the management of some very complex and embarrassing cases of the kind, as well as in your official situation in connection with the Asylums. I am, &c.

W. P. ALISON.

Dr R. RENTON.

VI. *From* ROBERT CHRISTISON, M.D., *Professor of Materia Medica in the University of Edinburgh.*

EDINBURGH, August 8, 1857.

MY DEAR SIR,—Although I have written other testimonials for gentlemen who are candidates for the office of Commissioner in Lunacy under the contemplated Lunacy Bill for Scotland, this circumstance does not prevent me from also stating my opinion, that your long professional experience as an Inspector of Lunatics under the late and present Sheriffs of Edinburgh, together with your general professional knowledge, and habits of business, give you important qualifications for the office either of Commissioner or Inspector-General, and that I believe you to be well qualified to discharge the duties of either office. I am, &c.

R. CHRISTISON.

Dr RENTON.

VII. *From* JOHN SMITH, M.D., F.R.C.P.E., *Proprietor of, and Physician to, the Lunatic Asylum, Saughtonhall.*

20 CHARLOTTE SQUARE,
6th August 1857.

MY DEAR SIR,—Understanding that it is your intention to offer yourself as a candidate for the office of General Inspector under the New Lunacy Bill, I have no hesitation in saying that I consider you particularly well qualified for so important a duty. You have acted for many years as Medical Inspector of Lunatic Asylums in the county of Mid-Lothian, so that your knowledge of insanity in all its various forms and shades must be great.

A practical acquaintance with the habits and character of the insane, which can only be acquired by frequent or lengthened intercourse with them, I consider quite essential in any one who has the duty of Inspector to perform, as without it serious mistakes may arise in judging of the many difficult and nice points which must necessarily come before them. As you have hitherto given proof of possessing this requisite, the new sphere to which you aspire will afford you a wider field for the exercise of your knowledge and experience.

With best wishes for your success, I am, &c.

JOHN SMITH.

To ROBERT RENTON, Esq., M.D.,
F.R.C. Ph., Edinburgh.

VIII. *From* DAVID CRAIGIE, M.D., F.R.S.E., F.R.C.P.E.; *Author of Elements of Practice of Medicine, 2 vols. 8vo, 1836 and 1840; Elements of General and Pathological Anatomy, 1 vol. 8vo, 1848, &c.*

EDINBURGH, 28 QUEEN STREET,
11th August 1857.

MY DEAR SIR,—If the Bill recently brought by the Lord Advocate into Parliament, for the Proper Management of Lunatics and the Regulation of Lunatic Asylums, receive the sanction of the Legislature, I think that it will be diffi-

cult to name any one better qualified than yourself for performing the duties of Medical Inspector under the provisions of the Act.

I am aware that you had, at an early period of your professional life, visited and examined, along with the late eminent Dr John Thomson, Professor of Pathology, the principal asylums and institutions for the management of the insane in France, Belgium, Austria, and Italy; and I know that these examinations were made by you the subject of much useful observation and reflection on the several forms of insanity, and the subjects of that serious disorder.

It is now thirteen or fourteen years since my friend the late Graham Speirs, Esq., at that time Sheriff of Mid-Lothian, appointed you to the duty of periodically visiting, in company with him, the Lunatic Asylums in this county, and reporting on the state of these establishments, as prescribed by the Act of Parliament; and I know that Mr Speirs always expressed himself highly satisfied with the manner in which you performed those arduous and delicate duties.

It is well known that the able successor of the late Mr Speirs continued to employ those services, which in this department of public duty he had learned were performed in the most able and satisfactory manner.

It is unnecessary for me to offer any opinion upon the manner in which the duties referred to have been performed by you, in company with and under the auspices of Mr Sheriff Gordon. That office, I cannot doubt, will be performed in a more exact and befitting mode by the Sheriff himself, and by those gentlemen who are associated with him in conducting the public business of the county.

But as one belonging to the same profession, as Fellow of the same College, as one who was senior acting Physician at the Royal Infirmary at a time when you were Manager,—I may add as one, who was often consulted, during the years between 1832 and 1844, both by Mr Duff and by Mr Speirs, in cases of ordinary and criminal insanity,—I may be permitted to say, that in the performance of those duties, which I conceive are required of the Medical Inspector of Lunatic Asylums and the occupants of these establishments, wherever caution, vigilance, and judgment are necessary, wher-

ever professional knowledge combined with and regulated by great discretion can be serviceable, I know no one who is more capable than yourself of accomplishing, in an able and satisfactory manner, the duties enjoined by the statute. I remain, &c.

DAVID CRAIGIE.

TO DR ROBERT RENTON.