

**An exact representation of the very uncandid and extraordinary conduct of Dr. John Coakley Lettsom, as well previous to, as on, the day of election for physician to the Finsbury Dispensary : with some remarks on the establishment of the New Finsbury Dispensary / by Thomas Skeete.**

### **Contributors**

Skeete, Thomas, 1757-1789.  
Jackson, Seguin Henry, 1752-1816  
Merriman, Samuel, 1771-1852  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

### **Publication/Creation**

London : Sold by J. Fielding, and at the New Finsbury Dispensary, 1786.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ns3bfj3x>

### **Provider**

Royal College of Surgeons

### **License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. 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](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

AN EXACT  
REPRESENTATION  
OF THE

Very uncandid and extraordinary Conduct

OF

*Dr. John Coakley Lettsom,*

AS WELL PREVIOUS TO, AS ON, THE DAY OF  
ELECTION FOR

Physician to the Finsbury Dispensary.

WITH SOME

REMARKS

On the Establishment of the

New Finsbury Dispensary.

---

By THOMAS SKEETE, M. D.

---

*Thou com'st in such a questionable shape,  
That I will speak to thee.* SHAKESP. HAMLET.

*I cannot tell  
What heav'n hath giv'n him, let some graver eye  
Pierce into that: but I can see his pride  
Peep through each part of him.* SHAKESP. HEN. VIII.

---

L O N D O N:

Sold by J. FIELDING, Pater-noster Row, and at the New Finsbury Dispensary, St. John's-street, Clerkenwell. 1786.

\* \* The Profits of this Pamphlet will be appropriated to the Service of the New Dispensary, St. John's-Street, Clerkenwell.

REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONERS

OF THE LAND OFFICE

AND

THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE 14TH MARCH 1861

AND

IN ACCORDANCE WITH

THE LAND ACT, 1861

BY THE COMMISSIONERS

OF THE LAND OFFICE

AND THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE 14TH MARCH 1861

AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH

THE LAND ACT, 1861

BY THE COMMISSIONERS

OF THE LAND OFFICE

AND THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE 14TH MARCH 1861



# INTRODUCTION.

---

**A**S it is several weeks since I declared my intention, at a public meeting of the Subscribers of the Finsbury Dispensary, of making known the whole of the proceedings relative to the very extraordinary conduct of Dr. Lettsom, as well previous to, as on the day of election for a Physician to that Charity; and, as the persons more particularly interested in the contents of this Pamphlet, are sufficiently aware of the design of it, any explanation or preface on the subject may, perhaps, appear unnecessary. I must request, however, to be indulged with a few words.

Nothing can be more disagreeable to my feelings than to appear before the public in a controversy of this kind. I sincerely regret the necessity of it, but I could not persuade myself to permit a man in a public situation, and in the practice of a liberal profession, to be guilty of the most unwarrantable duplicity and indelicacy of conduct, without exposing it. It appeared so very inconsistent with the good order and government of the society of Quakers, that any one of their body should officiously intrude himself into the concerns of others, and, in order to render himself conspicuous, encourage opposition and contest, under the pretences of charity and humanity, that I determined to represent the affair to the public, hoping that it may serve as a lesson in future, and that others may experience a greater consistency of conduct from Dr. Lettsom, than I have done.—I was thoroughly satisfied



tified that real charity does not exist in an ostentatious display of every guinea bestowed; and, lastly, I was willing to reprobate one, among the various contrivances or means by which an attempt is made to impress the public with an idea of self-importance and consequence, and from thence to acquire or preserve popularity.

In all these respects, and in many others, how different is the conduct of Dr. Lettsom from that of the Physician, to whom *he wishes to be thought* the successor, and whose memory is deservedly esteemed. His charity was of the most private kind, and the public did not become familiar with his name by means of the daily papers, or by his busy interference in Dispensary elections.—But it would be foreign to the subject, and at any rate, perhaps, improper in this place to draw any further comparison. I shall only observe, therefore, that an accurate statement of facts, with the order in which they occurred, has been my principal object.—I leave it to the candid reader to determine the degree of credit which is due to them, and to form his own conclusions.



## R E P R E S E N T A T I O N

O F

## Dr. Lettsom's Conduct, &amp;c.

**I**N the beginning of August last I was informed by a friend that Dr. Rogers had expressed his intention of resigning his office of Physician to the Finsbury Dispensary, and that a vacancy would soon be declared—I immediately resolved to offer myself a Candidate to succeed him; and, as soon as I found, from different officers of the charity, that it might be done with propriety, I entered upon the canvass with earnestness and activity. Finding that Dr. Lettsom was one of the Vice Presidents, suspecting that he was known to many of the subscribers, and being aware of his desire of rendering himself *conspicuous on such occasions*, I made the earliest application to him for his vote and interest, to which I received the following reply: “ That it was the first information he had received on the subject; that he



had a good opinion of me, and thought me a proper person for such a situation; that he had every reason to think he should vote for me, but would not absolutely promise to do so; that he could foresee no opposition; believed I should have to go quietly over the ground, and had very little doubt of my success. *With regard to his INTEREST, he expressly observed, that it was not his intention to exert it on such an occasion; for that on a former election he had reason to think the governors were displeased with the claim which he had made upon them, in consequence of his having subscribed largely to the charity, and that he had therefore determined in future not to interfere.*"

In this way the interview might have ended, had I not suggested, upon his questioning me whether any one was likely to start as my opponent, the probability of Dr. Meyer's becoming a Candidate. Of this Dr. Lettsom seemed doubtful, but added, that if he should offer himself, being under a promise to him, he must give him his *vote* in preference to me. He did not, however, in the remotest manner possible, give me reason to suppose, that he would come forward actively in his behalf; indeed, such a declaration would have been so totally incompatible with what he had just before asserted, that had it been made, I could not have failed immediately to have offered my remarks on so glaring an inconsistency. I rested satisfied therefore,



fore, that although he might *vote* against me, it would only be the vote of one person; and pleased myself with having made some progress, by ascertaining, that his *interest* at all events would not be exerted to my disadvantage. So perfectly persuaded was I of this, that being asked on the two first days of my canvass by several of the subscribers, whether I was *favoured* by Dr. Lettsom, I replied, that he had expressed his satisfaction at my offering myself a Candidate; and had given me some reason to expect his vote, if a gentleman to whom he had promised it did not appear; but that at any rate he had said he *would not interfere in the election*, and consequently that there was little to apprehend from any restraint that he might otherwise lay on those with whom he was privately acquainted, or who would wish to be guided by his opinion. As a further proof of the same thing, I observed to them, that Dr. Lettsom had pointed out to me different persons in the Charity to whom he advised me to apply as speedily as possible, in order not only to secure their votes, but, from their respectability, to lay the foundation of many others that would naturally follow them. He particularly mentioned the Reverend Mr. Sellon and his family, whose interest I fortunately obtained at an early period, and which has proved highly beneficial to me.



Several other persons were also named by him as proper objects of immediate application, but whom I do not now recollect. These are circumstances so striking, that to any man of common sense they must appear a strong confirmation of my assertion, that he declared he would not interfere: how was it, indeed, possible to conceive, after such professions, that he could even have had a wish for the success of another? for, had he intended to exert his interest for Dr. Meyer, or any other person, why should he put me on a plan which would have a great tendency to defeat himself?

After this interview I requested a friend, who appeared to have some influence with Dr. Lettsom, to apply to him in my behalf for his vote; which gentleman the next day kindly informed me that he had seen him, and that he had given him reason to understand that Dr. Meyer *had refused being a Candidate*, but that, as he thought a contest would prove beneficial to the charity, he still declined the positive promise of his vote. The next afternoon I received the following letter from Dr. Lettsom, inclosing another from Dr. Meyer to him.

“ DEAR DOCTOR,

“ I mentioned, when I saw thee, that I  
 “ should not oppose thy interest, provided Dr.  
 “ Meyer did not offer, to whom I had long  
 “ promised



“ promised my services. This day, and not  
 “ before, I received the inclosed, in which he  
 “ calls upon me to fulfil my promises.

“ I am, &c.

August 3d, 1786.

“ J. C. LETTSOM.”

With regard to Dr Meyer's letter, to which he refers, I immediately returned it without taking a copy; indeed, I thought it at the time an indelicate thing in Dr. Lettsom to send it to me. It was chiefly for the purpose of declaring his intention of becoming a candidate, claiming, in strong terms, the promise of Dr. Lettsom's services. This the Doctor conceived would be at least some apology for the steps he was about to take; for he must have been conscious that there would be an inconsistency in his conduct, and that I should take notice of it. If he had really promised his services to Dr. Meyer on any occasion of this kind, which must have been the case from the claim which was made upon him, was it not natural that he should apprize me of it fully when I first mentioned the vacancy to him? Unless he was very luke warm in his friendship, or his memory was uncommonly defective, how is it possible, under such circumstances, that Dr. Meyer could for a moment escape his recollection. If he was really in his remembrance at the time that he was flattering me with a prospect



spect of success, he was guilty of a most unwarrantable deception, because he was encouraging me in the pursuit, merely with a view to a contest, in which he would at last have an opportunity of displaying a triumph. Why did he not, more especially upon my mentioning Dr. Meyer's name, tell me openly, that he should probably be induced, contrary to his inclination and former assertion, publicly to interfere in his behalf? No such expression escaped him; for I well recollect, that he only said he should in that case give him his *vote*. Why did he not, in the letter which I have inserted, make some declaration of his intention to interfere publicly, instead of using the vague and artful term of *services*? Could any one, at that time however, after his declaration not to interfere, put any other construction on the word *services*, than that of his making use of private recommendations to his particular friends? I must confess notwithstanding, that I had my suspicions. Several instances of Dr. Lettsom's inconsistency had been mentioned to me, and I therefore thought proper, in my answer to his letter, to remind him of the conversation which had so recently passed between us; from which I flattered myself, or had reason to hope, that he would not take an active part against me, though there was now no prospect of my having his vote.



In a few days afterwards, I found that there was a public recommendatory - letter in circulation, of which the following is an exact copy.

“ To the Governors of the Finsbury-Dispensary.

“ AS I have been with your excellent Institution, from its Commencement and throughout its Progress, to the present Moment, endeavouring to promote its Success, I cannot but feel a Solicitude in whatever may interest its future Prosperity.

“ Impressed with a Sense of the important Duties of a Physician, I recommend Dr. John Meyer, of Throgmorton-street: He is a Member of the Royal College of Physicians; and, were any other Recommendation of his Abilities necessary, my long personal Acquaintance with him entitles me to add, that his uncommon Erudition and his medical Knowledge equally render him qualified for that important Office.

“ Sambrook-Court, Basinghall-Street,

“ August 4, 1786.

J. C. LETTSOM.”

An application so very pointed, independent of Dr. Lettsom's declaration, that he would not interfere, could only have been justified, from him or any other individual, by a conviction  
that



that I was an improper person for the situation ; but as he had previously said, and has been since pleased to say, that he believed me fully qualified, it was consequently improper, if not unjust ; for if both the candidates, on an occasion of this nature, were equal to the situation which they solicited, the Charity could not suffer in either case.—Hence, as far as its *prosperity* was concerned, for which Dr. Lettsom *expresses his solicitude*, it was a matter of indifference which of them should prove successful.

The appearance of this recommendatory letter, induced me to call upon its author, in order to make him acquainted with my sentiments, and in particular to inform him, that I thought he had deceived me ; that he had acted contrary to his declaration, and that, as I had given my friends, and several of the subscribers to the Dispensary, reason to think that he was not to interfere ; I considered myself called upon, both for their satisfaction, and in my own justification, publickly to declare his conduct, and more especially, that if through his interference I should lose the election, I would then make known his want of candour in print. I meant at that time, merely in form of a short Advertisement, to have stated that my friends and myself had been put to a good deal of unnecessary trouble, by the uncandid and inconsistent conduct of Dr. Lettsom. The circumstances, however, which have since occurred,  
are



are so numerous and striking, and several of them have been so capitally displayed in public, that nothing short of a Pamphlet could have conveyed an adequate idea of their *merit*, or have served, in a sufficient degree, to transmit them as a *brilliant example* to posterity.—Let us then, in the first place, take a view of the reception with which I was honoured; for any interview from one so much occupied as the Doctor frequently *appears* to be, must, undoubtedly, be esteemed an honour.

The threat, as he termed it, of making known his conduct, seemed at first to irritate him, and he hastily insinuated, that it would rather have the effect of increasing, than of diminishing his exertions.—He observed, that it had been remarked by the late Dr. Fothergill, that he was pen-proof; said, that he should make no public reply; and added, that he had been pretty well accustomed to attacks of that nature; one of the last of which was very abusive. To this I replied, that it was not my intention to deal in abuse; that I meant to rest the matter on simple facts, and more particularly on his declaration, that he would not interfere; which I repeated to him in his own words, urging the inconsistency of his conduct, and observing, that I thought it candid to state to him, as early as possible, the steps which I had resolved to take, in case I should lose the election.—He now became more cool, and, as



if sensible of the force of what I had alleged, attempted to justify himself by saying, that he had not thus publicly interfered till an old friend of Dr. Meyer had deserted him, meaning a gentleman much respected in his profession, who has always entertained a friendship for Dr. Meyer, as well as a high opinion of his abilities, but who having recommended me to such of his friends as were subscribers several days before he heard of Dr. Meyer's intentions, could not, although he regretted the contest, with propriety withdraw his assistance. At another instant Dr. Lettsom endeavoured to justify his conduct on the principle of a warmth of friendship for Dr. Meyer, and of his having formerly promised him his services; but it is no difficult matter to account for his conduct on very different motives. We sometimes meet with men extremely desirous of conferring favours with a view of acquiring power and consequence; and this principle of vanity is so great with some, that they are always seeking out for objects on whom they may bestow their patronage. If not otherwise interested, they occasionally prefer men who are respectable, and even superior to themselves in useful knowledge; but they do this not so much with the idea of rewarding merit and abilities, as with the expectation of increasing their own importance, and this importance they conceive to be greater, in proportion to the difficulties which they overcome in effecting their



their purpose. In this point of view I consider Dr. Lettsom's late interference. An opposition, or contest, was necessary to complete his triumph, and this he effectually secured, by allowing me to make so great a progress before he exhibited himself, that I could not with propriety relinquish the pursuit. I am very ready to admit, that Dr. Meyer was intitled, in preference to me, to Dr. Lettsom's vote, and such private services as he could render him among his friends. So little acquainted was I, indeed, with Dr. Lettsom, that I had no claim upon him even for his vote; and, had he openly declared at the first interview that he should use all his exertions for Dr. Meyer, it is impossible that I could have been displeased with him. It is highly probable that I should have declined in that case offering myself a Candidate, as I have been always averse to the fatigue and expence of a contested election.

But to proceed with the interview, at which a gentleman well acquainted with Dr. Lettsom, and friendly to me, was present. The displeasure occasioned by my declaration of making known his conduct appeared in a short time to have totally subsided; and, whether with a view, at the instant of averting future inconvenience, or from a genuine *mildness* and *philanthropy* of soul, it may be difficult to determine, but the Doctor was pleased to say many civil things; paid me several compliments; offered to declare to the Committee of the Dispensary, that he



thought me fully capable of the situation; and, with a persuasive eloquence, *peculiar to himself*, wished me to be satisfied with the idea of losing the election; urging at the same time, with a GREATNESS of soul, his disposition of serving me on any other occasion. Such, in fact, was his interest, according to his own account, that there could be little doubt of my succeeding to the first vacant dispensary. As a word of comfort, he also hinted, that there were several dispensaries preferable to the *Finsbury*, though with only *one-half the salary*. I listened with attention, but expressed my determination of pursuing the present object. At the same time I could not help being surprised at the presumption of an individual, however great his influence, in supposing that he could have the public so much at his command as only to speak the word and be obeyed. He was further heard to say during the canvass, that he had nothing to allege against me in my profession, but was displeased at my continuing to oppose his wishes at the Finsbury Dispensary, where he had always taken the *lead*; that if I would submit for the present, he would make a point of bringing me in at one of the others. I have good reason, indeed, to believe, that the Doctor frequently speaks of these institutions as being totally subservient to his wishes and commands. Dr. Lettsom, at length before the interview, ended, condescended more than once, placidly, to inquire, “what would satisfy me?”

I told



I told him that it was then too late to withdraw his letter, as it had circulated pretty generally, but that I thought I had a right to expect he would take no further steps against me, and that in particular, having been informed of his intentions of promoting a plan for the raising a large sum of money to make new subscribers, I trusted he would give up those ideas, and submit the event to the fair and regular choice of the old subscribers.

He laughed at the idea of the large sum of money ; confessed that he had said in a joking way to a friend of mine, that one thousand pounds would be sported, but that it was without meaning, and concluded with observing, that *there was then a paper on the table, to which he pointed*, submitting to him a proposal for making a number of new votes, but which could not be done without his assenting to something which was required of him ; *and this he had refused* ; he added, that he had made no *personal applications* ; had scarcely seen Dr. Meyer since the publication of the letter ; and that, if he was *even disposed to offer him the assistance of his purse, he would not accept of it*. In short, before we parted, the Doctor was so civil to me, that I flattered myself my interview had been productive of the desired effect, and that he would not further interfere. The appearances were on the whole so favourable, and the gentleman who accompanied me was so much



much of that opinion, that I was induced to hasten to the different printers, in order to correct an expression in one of my advertisements, which was rather severe, and which, if it had been permitted to continue, might have proved an excuse for the sudden revolution of conduct which succeeded it. In a day or two afterwards I was justified in restoring that expression, for such was Dr. Lettsom's duplicity, that, notwithstanding all his civility, his apparent indifference with regard to Dr. Meyer, and his question, "What would satisfy me?" more than once repeated, he expressed himself much displeased, on the succeeding day, at my having threatened him, as he termed it, in his own house; said, that he was determined, in consequence of it, to take the most active part against me, and intreated several persons to assist him in the effectual accomplishment of his design.—Five hundred pounds at one time, a thousand at another, and, lastly, the sum of three thousand, were all speedily boasted as being in readiness, if required.

So intent was Dr. Lettsom, at this period, upon the object; and, as it would seem, so determined to punish the offence, which upon *further reflection* he found I had committed, that he attended at the various committees for regulating Dr. Meyer's election. He was also heard frequently to say, during the canvass, that he would at all events make certain of the election,



election, however great the expence; and with that *modest forbearance*, which is his peculiar characteristic, exulted to some of the old Governors, who were *my friends*, in this commanding superiority. Inspired with the ideas of victory, he thought of little more than the field of battle, and occasionally entertained his friends, I am told, by comparing his money to a numerous and well equipped regiment of soldiers, himself being the general. To what a pitch must his imagination have been heated, when he fancied himself ornamented in the martial dress, ready to take the field; *one species of vanity*, to which he had before been an entire stranger! To his great credit, however, be it spoken, his charity soon got the better of his heroism, and, conceiving it dishonourable (no man being nicer in points of honour than the Doctor) to attack me with a body of troops, superior in number and discipline to mine, thought it more equitable, considering my profession, to exert his medical, rather than his martial skill. He therefore, it is said, humorously compared his guineas to *golden pills*, 300 of which he prescribed for me, as the first dose on the day of election, *to be occasionally repeated, till the effects were fully produced*. I am sorry, in this way, to interrupt the principal circumstances of my narration, but these remarks of the Doctor's, if they were really made by him, appear to constitute so good a specimen of the slight smattering



tering of wit which forms a part of his character, that I could not, in justice to him, suppress them. Besides, they may afford some little relief, previous to the attention, which will be required in the more serious relation of what is to follow.

Notwithstanding the different reports of the large sums of money to be employed against me, I persevered in my applications to the different subscribers, and still flattered myself with some prospect of success, especially as many of my friends, though they highly disapproved of the principle which admitted it, had declared their intentions of becoming subscribers, if necessary, on the day of election to serve me.

About a fortnight previous to the election, several persons, who had a good opinion both of Dr. Meyer and myself, proposed a plan, which they thought would not only prove beneficial to the institution, but satisfactory to the candidates and their friends: this plan was, that an attempt should be made, if the Governors at large acquiesced in the propriety of the measure, to elect both. The terms suggested were the following: That as the salary was far from being the principal inducement, it should be divided between the two, and thus the expence of the charity remain as if one only were elected: that in consequence of such indulgence, the friends of the Candidates should be answerable for three or four hundred new subscribers, which would tend very much to the advancement



ment of the institution, and would effectually remove any objections on the part of those Governors, who were desirous of an accession of money from the usual course of the election. It was observed, that although some had flattered themselves that 600 l. or 800 l. would be gained by the contest, yet, that 300 l. or 400 l. with the preservation of harmony and unanimity, would be preferable; that the business would be better done, and would be much easier to the Physicians themselves. For my own part, I readily approved of the idea, and it seemed agreeable to such of my friends also as had an opportunity of hearing it. I was not a little surprised when I found, that upon its being stated to Dr. Lettsom, he had totally rejected it. Had it been carried into execution, the dissensions which have since taken place would have been avoided, and there would have been such a co-operation of interests as might have proved highly conducive to the welfare and permanency of the institution.

But this did not accord with the consequence of Dr. Lettsom. Under such circumstances he would have gained no victory. He would not have appeared in the elevated situation of Vice-president at a contested election. He could not have exhibited his *bundle of bank-notes*, or his *banker's check-book*. He would have lost his *lead* in the Dispensary. He therefore trampled on peace to gratify his vanity, and



from too great an anxiety and rashness in extending his conquests, has probably laid the foundation of future disobedience in all his *territories* \*.

There were many of the subscribers of the Finsbury Dispensary, indeed, who, on the first appearance of Dr. Lettsom's letter of recommendation, were sufficiently aware of his motives; they declared, with an independency of spirit, worthy of imitation, that they would not permit him to dictate to them; and some, to whom he was quite unknown, considered it so great an insult, that he should presume to nominate their Physician, that although otherwise disposed to serve Dr. Meyer, they determined on this account to oppose him.

The eyes of all, it is to be hoped, will now be so far opened, that in every future election they will exercise their own judgment, and not submissively bend to the inclinations of an *individual*; for if his numerous contributions to the Dispensaries be really connected with charitable motives, he ought, in strict propriety, to be more cautious in presuming upon them, and should by no means expect a return by having the office of Physician or Surgeon *at his disposal*.

When money is *publicly lavished, by a man in a professional situation*, his motives are always to be suspected. Real charity and benevolence

\* By the Doctor's territories I mean the various dispensaries at which he has exhibited himself in the election of officers, &c.



demand no other return than the satisfaction of the inward man. They are always silent, and delight not in *the parade of patronage*. Their *delicacy* is shocked by the applause of the multitude, and *their very existence* totally extinguished by the *puffs* of a News-paper.

These reflections naturally lead to a consideration of Dr. Lettsom's conduct on the DAY OF ELECTION, which will form the most interesting part of this little narrative. Most of the facts hitherto mentioned rest on the authority of individuals. They can only derive weight, or have their due influence, in proportion to the credit which different persons may be disposed to annex to the representations of myself, and a few others. It is possible, therefore, that assertions may be made with a view either to disprove them, or weaken their force.—But it is very different with the scene which will now open. This was a public exhibition. It excited an attention from its novelty, which only served to heighten the disgust, occasioned by the representation, and rendered the impression so forcible, that it can never be totally obliterated. Never before did an individual exhibit himself in such a variety of characters, obviously incompatible with each other.

Dr. Lettsom, by his avowed opposition to me, and by his declaration to different persons, that he was determined, by the force of



money, to carry his point, was highly improper for any situation in which impartiality and strict justice, with regard to me, were required. He notwithstanding exhibited himself in the character of *judge*, by filling the chair at the election; a measure so very unprecedented, and shockingly indelicate, that most of those who were present expressed their surprise, and many immediately resolved carefully to watch his proceedings. Never did the Doctor, in his exertions for popularity, so strangely mistake his ground! The parties concerned are invariably excluded, if not by their own feelings, by the suggestions of others, from all situations in which an impartial decision is required; and where could such a decision be more necessary than from the chairman or president of a contested election? It seemed strange, therefore, that Dr. Lettsom, although a Vice President, should be permitted to take the chair, when the Treasurer of the Dispensary, and various others, not only of character, but of moderate sentiments, were present.—A few persons, indeed, conceived that he meant by his *moderation* and *impartiality* to atone for his former conduct; but we shall soon find to what an extraordinary pitch he aggravated it. Behold him then seated in the chair, in the presence of a respectable number of the subscribers to the Dispensary, with his son, a boy, apparently of twelve or thirteen, at his



his elbow, (*excellent lesson of humility!*) ready to assist him in the skilful management of the means, by which he was to obtain success.

It was not sufficient for Dr. Lettsom that he should be a *witness* to the overthrow: he was determined to be the *principal agent*, by which he unfortunately degraded himself from the character of Judge, to one little short of that of Executioner; for without the slightest civility or respect to the numerous subscribers who were waiting to give their votes, and several of whom were immediately obliged to go into the country, or were called away by particular business: I say, without regarding these, totally unmindful of decency and good order, and in direct violation of the rules prescribed on such occasions, he speedily occupied the balloting glass, and, with an inconceivable dexterity, proceeded to call over a list of *proxies*, for each of which he gave a vote; but which proxies had neither been paid for, nor the receipt for the money, according to the usual custom, produced.

The *impartial* President little suspected that this *equitable method* of proceeding would have been called in question. It was enough for him that a guinea should afterwards be paid for each of the names at his leisure; but however convenient or ingenious his plan might have proved, it was so unprecedented, that several persons objected to it, and insisted that a receipt should be produced with each of the new proxies,  
before



before any of them could be considered as votes. The simple form of objection, or disapprobation, was inadequate however, to the effect. An act of violence only could restore things to their proper channel. A gentleman, whose conduct was highly applauded on that occasion, was in fact only able to intercept the communication between the President's *hand* and *the glass*, by forcibly placing his hat over the latter. The Doctor, provoked at any measure which seemed levelled at the *dignity of his purse*, gave strong indications of passion and displeasure; and drawing from his side-pocket a bundle of Bank-notes, to the amount, it is believed, of 2000*l.* *dashed them on the table*, in the most insulting manner, observing, that if they should not prove sufficient, his *Banker's Check-book* was ready to supply the deficiency \*. He haughtily

\* Some of my readers may be anxious to know what portion of the 2000*l.* was *charitably* deposited by the Doctor in the fund of the Dispensary. From the opening to the close of the ballot, independent of those who had subscribed from time to time from the declaration of the vacancy, more than 500 guineas were received for votes, in favour of Dr. Meyer, the greatest part of which, it may be at first supposed, from the *grand exhibition* by Dr. Lettsom, was furnished by him. It is believed, however, that the part which he contributed was exceedingly trifling, (I understand not above a few pounds,) and that Dr. Meyer was himself at no small expence; for which I am sorry, and should have been happy if any explanation on my part, or that of my friends, could have been made with propriety, so as to have prevented it.

called



called upon the spectators to remember that he, with a few others, had founded the institution, and wished they would be unanimous in one cause, which he called the *cause of charity*. This would not satisfy them. They thought themselves called upon to revenge so great an insult, and the whole became a scene of uproar and confusion: some of the friends even of Dr. Meyer, joined in the cry of *shame*.—The tumult, however, at length subsided, without any of those rash acts of personal violence, which are liable to occur on such occasions, but which are always best avoided.

The *persevering* Doctor, regardless of these public marks of censure and contempt, and losing sight of every thing but the *prize in view*, seemed rooted to the spot, and continued in his *dignified situation*. What an admirable display of fortitude!—Where shall we find the man who would have maintained his ground so *nobly*?

My readers may easily anticipate the event of the election. To be brief, the *charitable* Doctor, however much he might lose *himself*, gained *his point*, and happily, without the assistance of his Banker's Check-book; for my friends, at the sight of the 2000*l.* although convinced that the Doctor produced it more *in terrorem*, than with any idea of bringing it into real use; yet being sufficiently aware, that instigated by pride, he would have exhausted his  
whole



whole fund rather than have been defeated in his end, thought it much better to *oblige him at an easy rate*, than by imprudently lavishing the little stock they had in hand, make his triumph still greater.

In fine, my friends and myself were not in the least surpris'd to find, at the close of the ballot, that there appeared for Dr. Meyer 885 votes—for myself 310, of which 294 were old subscribers, 20 new ones only having been made in my favour, and four of these, through accident, not having voted.

So fully satisfied were we with our conduct, and with the conviction that the majority of old subscribers was in my favour\*, that never, perhaps, was the loss of an election less felt by the unsuccessful candidate or his friends.

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Lettsom, conscious of the striking impropriety of his conduct in his capacity of chairman, attempted to apologize, and expressed a wish that the whole of the business should be forgotten.—Being aware, however, that the affair would be publicly talked of; although I was satisfied of the approbation of my more intimate friends, yet conceiving that those less acquainted with me would be backward in believing that any man,

\* By examining the books of the Secretary, in which the names of the *old Governors*, who voted, were marked, they were found to amount to 526, 294 of which having been in my favour, gave me a majority of 62.



after the professions which he had made to me, could be capable of such a conduct, I made known my resolution, that the various circumstances relating to the election should not be passed over in silence, but that I would make the whole of them public in print.—One of my friends immediately requested that Dr. Lettsom would inform the meeting, whether he had not said to me, that he would not publickly interfere, as he had formerly displeased the Governors by doing so? Upon his remaining silent, I related the different proceedings in as few words as possible, in order to give him an opportunity, before he quitted the chair, of defending himself.

He neither denied nor explained the charges of duplicity, which I alleged against him, although an answer to them was repeatedly called for, and had the *satisfaction* at length of leaving the room, amidst the murmurs and most striking marks of censure and disapprobation of many that were present.—

Such has been the conduct of Dr. Lettsom; in the representation of which, I can safely declare, that there has been no exaggeration, nor wilful intention of exceeding the bounds of strict truth and propriety. Having throughout the whole been so much on my guard, as to take down in writing, an accurate account of most of the circumstances, immediately after the time that

E

they



they occurred, I can assert them with greater confidence than if I had trusted to memory. Relying on the justice of my cause, I shall cheerfully submit it to every candid and unprejudiced mind; and should Dr. Lettsom condescend to offer any thing to the public in his justification, shall be ready, if necessary, to enter into any further discussion or explanation of the subject.



R E M A R K S  
O N T H E  
E S T A B L I S H M E N T  
O F T H E

*New Finsbury Dispensary,*

I N

Saint John-street, Clerkenwell.

**T**H E eyes of the subscribers of the Finsbury Dispensary having been fully opened by the very glaring abuse to which most institutions of this nature are liable in the election of officers, evinced by the recent example which has been mentioned, a select number of them, assisted by some other gentlemen of respectable character, immediately resolved to institute a New Dispensary, with such laws and regulations as would effectually remove all the evils complained of. A plan of this kind has accordingly been carried into execution, and the Dispensary already opened for the relief of the poor. The encouragement which it has met with has been so great as to surpass the most sanguine expectations of its first promoters, and, if a judgment may be formed from the perseverance, abilities, and connexions of many of the gentlemen who have interested themselves in its



success, there can be little doubt of its being flourishing and permanent.

It was proposed, and, indeed, intended, at one time, to fix it either in Holborn or Hatton-street, but it appeared on consideration more eligible to adopt a situation as near the center as possible of the different districts, at which patients are to be visited at their own habitations; and, as Islington and Holborn constituted the two extremes, it was thought that St. John's-street, Clerkenwell, would be the most convenient place; which has therefore been preferred. The title of the *New Finsbury Dispensary*, and its vicinity to the Finsbury Dispensary in Saint John's-square, have induced some of the gentlemen connected with the latter to suppose, that the new one has been instituted in direct opposition to the other, and with the expectation of its complete ruin. Such suspicions, I may venture to assert, are without foundation; for, although the first idea of the new establishment originated from the disgust at the conduct of Dr. Lettsom, and, although some of the subscribers of the old one have determined in future totally to support the new, which must at present, in some degree, weaken the resources of the former, and thus far imply an opposition, yet, there are others among the most zealous supporters of the new plan, who still mean to contribute to the old one, from the conviction, that the number of distressed objects is so great as to furnish



furnish employment, and full encouragement, for both. This will be more generally the case, should the old Dispensary follow the example set by the new one, of correcting the abuses before stated, in the election of officers, and in *guarding against the undue influence of individuals.*

As there are several of the subscribers to the old Dispensary, who, from the offices which they hold in it, and from other circumstances, must be much interested in its welfare, and to whom I feel myself particularly indebted for their friendly conduct, it gives me some concern that the new one, to which I have been appointed Physician, should excite so great an alarm among them, and that they should, in the letter to their subscribers, which has been hastily circulated, endeavour to impress them with the idea of a direct opposition, and of the most hostile measures. I must again declare, that the promoters of the New Institution are actuated by honourable and benevolent motives. They admit that the two Dispensaries may be so far considered in opposition, that the one, which is the most perfect, or best regulated, will, in all probability, be most generally preferred; but that, as the one will always have the opportunity of adopting any salutary regulation made by the other, a balance may be easily preserved, while the management is entrusted with proper persons. They are willing to allow, that they expect superior advantages from their new laws, especially



especially if these are not adopted by the other ; but they never intend to encourage any unfair or improper method of injuring the Old Dispensary ; and are very far from supposing, that the ruin of it is necessary to the establishment and success of their own. This Institution, from the uncommon support which it has already met with, they believe will be flourishing, whatever may be the condition of the other ; nay, if it should even be more liberally supported than before.

Whatever may be the event, there is one consideration, which must be satisfactory to all, that the poor, the object of both Institutions, cannot possibly be injured by the additional establishment ; for, if one only should maintain its ground, they will still derive the same advantages as before ; if both should succeed, the relief which they will experience must, of course, be more complete and extensive.

It would be no difficult matter to prove, that the greatest utility may arise from two Dispensaries in the same neighbourhood, provided it be populous, and that the number of labouring and indigent persons be great, which is certainly the case in the districts included by the two Dispensaries in question.

The persons who are chiefly entrusted with the management of the business will be thus rendered more vigilant ; œconomy will be more cautiously studied ; abuses will be no sooner committed than corrected, and the medical attendants



dants will be more active in the discharge of their duty. The torpor or lethargy, which is so frequently connected with the idea of security, and which is often productive of ruin, will be effectually obviated; and, if a propriety and moderation of conduct be preserved, the two Dispensaries may in time be mutually serviceable to each other. Instead therefore of any dislike or aversion to the new Institution, the friends of the old one should rather promote its interests, as their donations and subscriptions will be more cautiously and usefully applied than formerly; and, although there may be some degree of competition, yet, as we shall co-operate in a similar design, the good effects of which will be sensibly felt by the poor, it is to be hoped, that those sentiments of opposition, which have been so strongly inculcated, will be diminished or removed. It should be recollected also, that part of the resources of the new Dispensary will be derived from persons who, although charitably disposed, yet, from the distance at which they reside, would never probably have contributed to the old one, which is one reason, among many others, to prove that both Institutions may be well supported.

The promoters of Dispensaries in general contend, that they cannot exist without the money arising from the new subscribers, who are permitted to vote at the different elections. The friends of the New Finsbury Dispensary are of a contrary opinion. They wish to pre-  
serve



serve *inviolable the right of election*, a principle which so strongly accords with the feelings of most men, that they have no doubt they will experience the most liberal and substantial support.

I cannot conclude this subject without expressing my warmest acknowledgments to the numerous friends, who have either already subscribed, or mean to contribute to the New Dispensary. As I am much interested in its prosperity, they cannot more effectually serve me than by continuing their exertions in adding to the number of subscribers.

Such persons as humanely devote a certain portion of their fortune to charitable purposes, may, *at whatever distance*, contribute with propriety to the present undertaking; for, as by the laws of the Dispensary, patients, wherever they reside, may, by a proper attendance, experience relief; and, as the most distant subscribers may appoint any friend to recommend distressed objects, they will have the satisfaction of reflecting, that their donations are as well disposed of as if they themselves were on the spot. My friends therefore, however distantly situated, may have an opportunity both of serving me, and of gratifying their humane dispositions, by assisting in the promotion of this useful Institution.



No. 7  
OBSERVATIONS

ON A

PROPOSAL

For establishing at EDINBURGH

A PUBLIC DISPENSARY

For the relief of the POOR, when subjected to chronic or tedious diseases.

BY ANDREW DUNCAN, M.D.

Physician in EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH:

---

M,DCC,LXXVII.



OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

A PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

BY ANDREW DUNCAN, M.D.

Physician in Extraordinary

EDINBURGH.

MDCCCXXII



P R E F A C E.

THE following Observations may probably fall into the hands of some readers who have never seen the Proposal to which they allude. On their account, the Proposal itself is here reprinted. And, that every reader may be better able to judge for himself how far the objections which have been urged against it are well founded, these also are again subjected to public examination.

It may readily be presumed, that there are some to whom the answers here given to these objections will appear unsatisfactory. Yet it is concluded, that there is no one who will be averse to receive that evidence which future facts can alone afford. By these, it is hoped, he will be fully satisfied, whether his own private opinion be  
well



well founded, or the contrary. And, in forming a determination respecting a proposal, which has for its object the relief of those oppressed by indigence and disease, the generous and humane must derive pleasure and satisfaction from lending their aid in furnishing to the public that solid and incontrovertible proof, which can be derived only from experience.

Edin. June 20.

1777.

A



*A Proposal for establishing at Edinburgh a  
Public Dispensary for the relief of the  
Poor, when subjected to Chronical or Te-  
dious Diseases.*

**T**HERE are many individuals whose labour, even in health, cannot raise them above penury and want. It is, therefore, presumed, that no one will deny the utility of those charities which are intended for their aid in time of sickness. And, among the many blessings which attend easy and affluent circumstances, the satisfaction which is derived from affording relief to those who are real objects of charity, is certainly not the least considerable. Hence, it is not doubted, that the following proposal will meet with candid and serious consideration from the benevolent and humane.

In many diseases, relief can only be afforded to the poor, by removing them from the situation in which they may happen to be placed, to one better accommodated for their recovery. But there are other ailments, in which the cure might be conducted with equal advantage, while they continue to lodge in their own habitations, and, in some measure, to prosecute their usual employments. For the removal of complaints  
of



of this kind, it is principally requisite that they be directed to the use of proper medicines, and that they be furnished with these, without incurring an expence which they are unable to defray. Besides this, patients labouring under particular diseases, and at certain periods of life, especially infancy, may have their complaints alleviated by medical aid, although they would be much injured by being lodged in an hospital.

From such considerations, although there be not, perhaps, a metropolis in Europe better supplied with public hospitals for the reception of the sick, than London, an institution for furnishing the indigent with medicines and advice in sickness, has lately been established at that place. The General Dispensary of London, which is supported by no other fund but voluntary annual contributions from the charitable, has been the means of relieving thousands from wretchedness and misery. And, it affords a convincing proof of the utility of the institution, that the number of contributors has been considerably augmented every year, since the commencement of that charity.

That an establishment of this nature at Edinburgh, would be attended with similar advantage, it is at least highly probable. If, therefore, it can be shown, that these advantages may  
be



be obtained at a very inconsiderable expence, there is some reason to hope, that the generosity of the public may grant the necessary aid. Little else would probably be requisite for carrying this scheme into execution at Edinburgh, than the providing a house, with proper conveniences for the purposes intended. And these would require neither a large nor expensive building.

An annual fund, sufficient to render this charity extensively useful, might, it is presumed, be obtained, by conjoining with the practice in medicine which it would afford, lectures on the cases of the patients who reap the benefit of it. Besides a gratuity to the lecturer, a small fee, in name of medicine-money, would be chearfully paid by every student attending the lectures. That, in this way, money may be collected at Edinburgh, appears from a trial already made. For, at the commencement of this winter session, Dr Duncan began a course of Clinical Lectures in the manner here proposed, and he collected, as medicine-money, above fifty guineas. Although this sum would not go far in the maintenance of patients, and in every other expence connected with it; yet, when solely appropriated to the purchase of medicines, and when these, although of the best quality, are procured in the most oeconomical manner, it may be extensively useful.



useful. And, accordingly, from this fund, many indigent persons, afflicted with chronical diseases, improper for admission into an hospital, are every week supplied with medicines. That there are not only many proper objects for such a charity, but that they begin to be sensible of the advantages of it, may be inferred, at least with some degree of probability, from observing, that the number of the patients applying for relief has increased every week since the commencement of this scheme.

From these considerations, Dr Duncan, who would probably carry on a private Dispensary, in the manner in which he has already begun it, is induced to lay the present proposal before the public, in hopes that a charity which, in his opinion, cannot possibly be attended with any bad consequences, may be put upon a permanent footing. Although the regulations by which this charity should be conducted, behoved afterwards to be settled by the contributors, yet the following conditions, most of which are copied from those of the London Dispensary, might be the basis of these regulations.

*First*, That every one contributing to the undertaking, shall hold the rank of Governor, during the space of two years, for each guinea he shall pay to the funds of the charity.

*Second,*



*Second,* That every one contributing five guineas at the commencement of the scheme, or seven guineas at any different periods during the first five years, shall be a governor for life.

*Third,* That a general meeting of the Governors shall be held annually, at which they shall elect a President, two Vice-presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary, and six Directors, for superintending the business of the charity during the ensuing year.

*Fourth,* That, at this annual meeting, a particular account shall be laid before the Governors of the money collected and expended during the preceeding year, and of the number of patients who have obtained assistance from the charity.

*Fifth,* That all future appointments of physicians, or other medical officers, shall be by the suffrages of a majority of the Governors.

*Sixth,* That, as far as the funds of the charity will allow of it, every Governor shall be entitled to have constantly one patient enjoying the benefit of the charity on his recommendation.

It is impossible to foretell every consequence that may result from such a scheme. Experience, and that too for some length of time, is the only ground on which a certain conclusion can be formed respecting the advantages or dis-



advantages of any new institution. Yet it is presumed, with some degree of confidence, that, if the plan now proposed shall ever be properly carried into execution, every contributor will have the most convincing evidence that it is a charity of great utility; and, among other beneficial consequences, the following will probably result from it:

It will afford relief to many of the industrious poor, when afflicted with tedious ailments, of such a nature as to render them improper objects for admission into an hospital. And, for supplying their necessities, it may raise a new fund to such an extent, at least, as to be of no inconsiderable use.

It may diminish the number of urgent applications for admission into the Royal Infirmary, from those labouring under chronical diseases, not sufficient to incapacitate them from continuing, in some degree, their usual employments, and not requiring a state of rest, but of action. Thus it may be the means of occasioning a saving of the funds of a most excellent charity, the annual expence of supporting which has been, of late years, from the increasing number of applications, equal to the amount of its annual revenue.

It may relieve the physicians of the Infirmary from an uneasiness which they must sometimes  
feel,



feel, in consequence of the urgent applications of those who are improper objects for admission into an hospital; for whose aid no particular fund is yet provided; and the supplying of whose necessities would be an additional expence to the hospital.

As the cases of different patients can never be supposed to agree with each other in every circumstance, Clinical Lectures afford an almost endless variety. And, it is probable, that the more they are given, the more will they be valued. The present institution then, by still farther demonstrating, to those who study medicine at Edinburgh, the propriety of attending these lectures as long as they remain there, may be instrumental in increasing the number of students who attend the Infirmary, where they will hear clinical lectures on acute diseases; and thus, while, in one way, it diminishes the expence, in another, it may add to the revenue of that useful charity.

It will furnish those gentlemen who resort to Edinburgh for the study of medicine with opportunities of hearing important, yet doubtful questions, respecting the fundamental principles of the healing art, stated in different points of view. A circumstance which, as tending to secure diligence among public professors, and to promote liberal inquiry among students, has led  
the



the founders and patrons of foreign universities to give encouragement and support to private teachers in medicine. This is particularly the case at Vienna, the seat of an university, on which, as a seminary of medical education, greater attention has of late years been bestowed, than on any other in Europe, and which is at present in the most flourishing situation.

It will give every Governor an opportunity of relieving, at a very inconsiderable expence to himself, those whom he may accidentally learn to be in necessitous and distressful circumstances; and who require that charitable aid, which is, of all others, most essential, the means of restoring health.

And, *finally*, If the appointment of different medical officers to this charity shall be thought necessary, either now, or at any after period, or if it shall, at any time, be deprived of a Physician by death, resignation, or otherwise, the establishment of the charity now proposed will put it in the power of a majority of the Governors to reward approved merit, by giving it the means of acting, or to furnish rising genius with an opportunity of displaying itself.

How far these sentiments are well founded, time alone can determine. But, if some of the good consequences here pointed out should not result from it, others may arise no less beneficial,

as



as tending to relieve the distress of the wretched, and to advance the study of medicine at Edinburgh. Although it may be of material consequence to this undertaking, that those who think it not unworthy of their countenance, should take an early opportunity of subscribing ; yet no money will be expected from any one till a general meeting of the Governors shall have elected a treasurer for receiving the money, and directors for the administration of it. Under the conduct of a council, chosen by the free suffrages of the charitable and humane, it will not readily be imagined that any object will be allowed to interfere with public utility ; and, if the interest of any individual should seem to be promoted by a measure which tends to the good of the community, it will not be displeasing to any generous or liberal mind.

---

*A Letter from Dr Duncan to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary.*

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE lately subjected to the examination of some of my friends, a proposal for establishing a public Dispensary at Edinburgh. From conversations which I have had with some of your number, I am sorry to learn, that they cannot



not be brought to view this matter in the same light that I do. Those whose intentions are even the best, will yet think differently of the same subject ; and it is by the test of experience alone, that it can finally be known who is in the right.

I trust that it will be a sufficient defence of my conduct, that I am as much convinced as I possibly can be, by reasoning conjoined with some experience, that the scheme which I have projected, if it shall ever have a fair trial, will be productive of very considerable advantage to the Royal Infirmary. And if, from farther experience, it shall be found to have a contrary effect, I am, for my own part, determined to drop it. Where my judgment, however, is not convinced by the reasoning of others, I cannot, I imagine, be blamed for appealing to fact, and future trials.

I have long entertained the highest regard for that valuable institution, of which you have the honour to be the managers ; and, oftner than once, I have employed in its service the most strenuous exertions of which I was capable. Should these exertions be ever again requisite, they shall not be wanting : And, as I am convinced, that Clinical Lectures, during the summer, which I carried on for the two last seasons, might be continued with some advantage to the  
Hospital,



hospital, if no other person, who may consider himself as having a preferable claim to that employment, or whose labours have a greater chance of being crowned with success, be willing to undertake the office, you may command the services of

Your most humble

*Bristol-Street,  
19th March.*

and most obedient servant,  
ANDREW DUNCAN.

*Minute of a Meeting of the Managers of the Royal Infirmary, 20th March 1777.*

THE Managers of the Royal Infirmary having observed, that a printed paper has been lately dispersed in this city, containing, *A Proposal for establishing at Edinburgh a Public Dispensary, for the relief of the Poor when subjected to chronical or tedious diseases*; and being persuaded, that the carrying this scheme into execution would be of detriment to the charitable foundation under their charge, they consider it as their duty to lay their sentiments, with respect to this proposal, before the public. And,

1<sup>st</sup>, The Managers are of opinion, that the proposed institution is in a great measure superfluous. Though the Managers of the Infirmary, from



from the state of their funds, are under the necessity of limiting the number of patients to be admitted at one time into the hospital ; yet, as they are constantly attentive to accommodate the public, they allow a discretionary power to the physicians and surgeons in waiting, to receive supernumeraries, so that no urgent case may be refused admittance ; and, relying on the beneficence of the public, they have ventured sometimes to exceed their annual income, in order to afford relief to the distressed poor : And, supposing that the establishment of the house were at any time full, yet charitable persons may obtain a place for a patient at the small expence of paying sixpence each night, until a vacancy shall happen, which will permit the hospital to support him on its own funds.

Besides this, the scheme of a dispensary seems to be unnecessary, as there is hardly a physician or surgeon in this city who is not willing to give advice to the poor *gratis* ; and the greater part of them give such advice every day. Many physicians, together with their advice, give money to purchase the necessary medicines ; and all the surgeon-apothecaries are daily in use of giving medicines to the poor *gratis*. To this may be added, that though, for reasons which shall afterwards be mentioned, the Managers of the Infirmary do not allow of out patients as a part of  
the



the establishment, yet they permit the physicians and surgeons in waiting to give advice, and to order medicines from the Infirmary-shop, to many poor persons, whose case does not require, or whose situation will not permit, that they should be taken into the hospital. By these several means, all the purposes of a dispensary are answered ; and there seems to be no occasion for loading the public with the expence of such an establishment.

*2dly*, The Managers are fully convinced, that the proposed establishment of a Dispensary will be hurtful to the interest, and obstruct the utility, of the Royal Infirmary. They have good reason to know, that the sick poor receive but little benefit from the advice and medicines given to them in their own houses. They cannot take medicines in a proper manner in their cold and inconvenient habitations, and can very rarely be induced to observe the regimen which is often necessary for rendering their operation effectual ; so that the only means of affording them relief, with any prospect of success, is, by taking them into a well-appointed hospital. But, though the patients in the Royal Infirmary have as great care and attention bestowed upon them as in any hospital in Europe, it is well known, that, from mistaken prejudices, many indigent persons are extremely averse to go into this hospital ;



pital; and not a few of the poor in this city, rather than apply for admission, languish long useless, or become a burden to the public, or die under ailments, from which they might have been relieved in the hospital. Experience long ago convinced the managers, that the allowance of out-patients, (which was permitted at the first institution of the Royal Infirmary), greatly encouraged this aversion; and, for that reason, the Managers found it necessary to abolish this practice. It is obvious, that the institution of a Dispensary, as now proposed, must have the same pernicious effects. The poor cannot be sensible of the imperfection of the practice carried on by means of a Dispensary, but will trust to it so far as to prevent their applying to the Hospital, in which, perhaps, they can only receive effectual relief. Of this the physicians and surgeons, who give advice to the poor, are so sensible, that they have daily occasion to recommend to them the entering into the Infirmary, as the most proper means of receiving effectual relief. Thus they are very instrumental in promoting the humane purposes of the Royal Infirmary, and in diffusing its beneficial effects. But this cannot be expected from the physician, whose private interest is dependent on the number of patients who resort to himself.

3dly,



3dly, As the proposed establishment of a Dispensary is intended to furnish the means of giving a clinical lecture, it must, in that way, prove hurtful to the Royal Infirmary. The clinical lecture there, as far as the Managers know, is the only one given at such length, and upon such an extensive plan, in any hospital in Europe; and it is well known, that it has contributed greatly to render medical education in this University more complete than in any school of medicine, and, at the same time, has tended to increase considerably the funds of the Hospital. The managers have reason to believe, that a clinical lecture cannot be given to any good purpose but in an hospital, as it is only there, that patients in acute diseases, with which it is most necessary that students should be acquainted, can be properly subjected to their examination. But further, in the clinical ward of the Infirmary, not only patients in acute diseases, but those labouring under chronical disorders, are admitted; and every person capable of judging knows, that chronic cases cannot be properly treated or studied, unless the physician has an opportunity of seeing the patients daily, and of constantly watching over the conduct both of their medicines and their regimen.

Though the Managers are, for these reasons, clearly of opinion, that the clinical lectures in  
an



an hospital must have great advantages over those given any where else ; yet, they apprehend, that students may not always be fully aware of this ; and that, by various means, they may be so misled, as to encourage clinical lectures out of the Infirmary, which may be of detriment, both to medical education in the University, and tend to diminish the funds of the Infirmary ; a charitable foundation, from which, not only this city, but the kingdom, has derived such benefit, that they have thought it highly worthy of their countenance and support.

The Managers recommend to their clerk to have a copy of this minute published in the several news-papers of this city, as soon as conveniently can be done.

(Signed) ALEX. WOOD, PRESES.

---

*Part of a Letter from Dr Duncan which appeared in the Caledonian Mercury of the 26th of May, and which was subjoined to his Proposal for establishing a Dispensary at Edinburgh, and his Letter on that subject to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary.*

“ **O**F the above proposal and letter, I leave every reader to form an opinion for himself. Had I all the inclination in the world



world to enter into controverſy, I have not at preſent leiſure for it. It is, however, my intention ſeriouſly to conſider every circumſtance that has been thrown out reſpecting this ſcheme; and, by the beginning or middle of June, I ſhall probably take what I reckon the moſt proper method of ſubmitting my ſentiments to the public, on the ſubject of eſtabliſhing a Diſpenſary at Edinburgh.

“ Meanwhile, give me leave only to obſerve, that it is very far from being my intereſt to have, as patients at a Diſpenſary, thoſe for whoſe caſes admiſſion into an hoſpital is moſt neceſſary. On the contrary, ſince I began to give lectures on the caſes of patients labouring under chronical diſeaſes, I have had occaſion to adviſe a greater number of the poor to apply for admiſſion into the Infirmary, within the ſpace of a few months, than for ſeveral years before. I hope I have committed no crime in having been the means of beſtowing, during the courſe of the winter, on perſons in indigent circumſtances, ſubjected to diſeaſes which, in my opinion, rendered them improper objects for admiſſion into an hoſpital, about fifty pounds Sterling. With this, it is true, my private intereſt has been connected; but I have never once heard it inſinuated, that what I have already done, and what I may perhaps be able to continue without public aid,



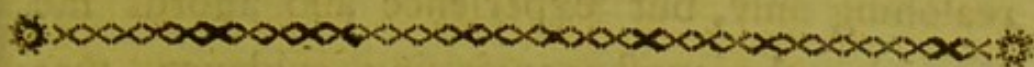
aid, has been productive of the smallest disadvantage to the Infirmary. Should future experience shew, that even a private Dispensary has the effect of hurting that Hospital, I shall not hesitate one moment in sacrificing my own interest to the public good; but, while I have facts to demonstrate the contrary, no one, I imagine, will expect, that an employment which has been, and may be attended with some profit to myself, should be relinquished on any opinion, however respectable."

OBSER-



# OBSERVATIONS

*On a Proposal for establishing a Public Dispensary at Edinburgh.*



SOME months have now elapsed since I put into the hands of several of my friends, and of some other respectable citizens, a Proposal for establishing at Edinburgh a Public Dispensary for the relief of the poor when subjected to chronic or tedious diseases. Soon after this proposal had been thus circulated, an advertisement appeared in all the news-papers of this city, extracted from the minutes of the Royal Infirmary, in which the Managers of that hospital endeavoured to show, that, if such a scheme were carried into execution, it would be detrimental to the charity under their charge.

That such authority will have great weight in determining the sentiments of the public, can admit of no doubt. When, therefore, one who may be supposed to be interested in the success  
of



of such a scheme, is to attempt to answer these objections, he must enter on a difficult task, with peculiar disadvantages. I trust, however, that no veneration for opinion will altogether preclude a candid inquiry. And, after the most serious and attentive consideration, I cannot see the force of any one argument that has been urged against this institution. While, on the other hand, not reasoning only, but experience also affords me every day the most convincing evidence, that many advantages would result from such an establishment at Edinburgh. Hence, although I have a very high respect for almost every manager of the Royal Infirmary, yet, I trust that I need offer no apology for submitting my opinion to the examination of those who may consider a subject, which proposes for its object the good of the community, as not unworthy of their attention.

Circumstances might perhaps be mentioned which would lessen somewhat, in the public estimation, the respect which otherwise would be paid to the opinion of the managers of the Royal Infirmary. Even the wisest and best of men are not entirely without passion and prejudice. And it is hard to say how far, even those of the greatest discernment, may be misled by various circumstances. I am, however, firmly persuaded, that the cause which I mean to support, requires



quires no adventitious aid ; and I earnestly wish to avoid every circumstance which can be construed into a reflection upon the conduct of any man. Yet, conscious of the integrity of my intentions, I may speak with freedom, and I hope I shall be able to act with firmness.

I may farther observe, that it is not by argument alone that the present question will be finally determined ; even without public aid, I may, perhaps, be able to give such a trial to this scheme as will afford proof of its real tendency. And, notwithstanding the opposition which has been made, I have assurances of, at least, some aid. I am, indeed, sensible, that the public attack which has been made upon this charity, is not the greatest difficulty which it has now to encounter. Among the number of my most intimate friends, there are some, who, although they approve of the undertaking, are subjected to such restraints, that they cannot support it, without running greater risks than I could either desire or wish ; many others, I doubt not, may be in the same situation, of the motives of whose indifference I shall ever remain ignorant. When, however, I appeal to future experience, I refer my cause to the determination of a judge, the equity of whose decision no one can deny. And when I solicit aid for this purpose, it ought to be remembered, that the effect of opposition will be, not to prevent a trial,



but merely to render that trial less convincing to the public, and more expensive to an individual.

When I desire only to be fully satisfied of the tendency of this scheme, by a proper trial, and when I again repeat a declaration which I have already made, that, if it shall be found, by experience, to be prejudicial to the interest of the Infirmary, it is my determined resolution to relinquish it, I cannot allow myself to imagine, that those, whose opposition proceeds from no other motive but the fear of its being detrimental to that charity, will be averse to such a trial. On the contrary, I am even led to hope, that they too will be desirous of forming a judgment on the sure basis of experience; and, if a trial shall convince them of the utility of this scheme, that their influence will hereafter be exerted to make reparation for the injury they may have already done it. When a question is agitated in which the good of the community is concerned, and when that question may be determined by facts, which can neither be concealed nor misrepresented, those whose opinions are the most opposite, if they be actuated by the interest of the public, will mutually desire to be guided by experience.

Such considerations, joined to the most firm conviction of the utility of the institution which I have proposed, have determined me to strain every



every nerve in order to obtain that evidence which experience alone can afford. And when I now venture to lay my sentiments respecting this matter before the public, it is in the hope, that every one will soon have an opportunity of judging on the most unequivocal proof, how far they are well founded. If, therefore, I can now render it probable, that the establishment of a public Dispensary at Edinburgh would be productive of many valuable effects, I may reasonably hope that there are some who will be desirous of giving countenance and support to that trial which I so anxiously wish for. With this view, I shall briefly state the effects which I imagine this institution will have with respect to the Royal Infirmary, to the medical college, and to the indigent, when subjected to disease. These will naturally include the most full answers which I am capable of giving to the objections which have been made to such a charity ; and in a question which, I hope, is to be decided by future facts, I shall reckon it unnecessary to enter into minute detail.

But, before I deliver my sentiments on any of these subjects, I must beg leave briefly to mention the different occurrences by which I was induced first to propose such an undertaking. After I had delivered lectures at Edinburgh for the space of five years, as a private teacher, I was appointed



appointed by the Town-council to teach the Institutions of medicine in the University; and, although I entered upon this important task under many disadvantages, yet I had the most flattering and convincing testimonies, that my labours were not unacceptable to my hearers. In that station, I was also invited by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to take a share of the clinical lectures at that hospital. And, in that branch of medical education, of all others the most important and most difficult, my exertions gave a higher degree of satisfaction than I could reasonably have expected. When, therefore, after my appointment in the university was terminated, I again resumed the employment of a private teacher, several of those who had formerly been my pupils at the Infirmary, were desirous of hearing, from me, lectures on the cases of patients whose diseases were of such a nature, that they could not with propriety be admitted into an hospital. And it was observed, that, among the students attending these lectures, such a sum might be collected, as would defray the expence of supplying with medicines people in indigent circumstances, who were subjected to such diseases.

I was not ignorant, that, on the clinical lectures which are given at the Royal Infirmary, no

Page 39  
line 12.



no inconsiderable part of the funds of that charity depended. But it never once entered into my imagination, that lectures on such cases could be considered as having the smallest degree of interference with those delivered at the Royal Infirmary. To this proposal, therefore, I had no other objection, than that which arose from the supposition that there were not many objects of charity who would be willing to avail themselves of the advantages which practice in this manner might afford. I consented, however, to make the trial. And I was soon convinced, that the opinion which I had formed was very erroneous. In a very short time, seldom a week passed, during which I did not admit upon my list twice the number of patients that were requisite for my lectures. The sum, however, which I had collected from the students, in name of medicine-money, enabled me, without any expence to myself, to supply the necessities even of those whose cases I had no occasion to employ as the subject of lecture.

This institution was soon so much known among those who stood in need of that aid which it was capable of affording, that applications became numerous. Among these there were many whose cases I considered as ill suited to such practice. To them I seriously recommended it to apply for aid at the Infirmary, as imagining  
that



that it was by confinement only, and by regular medical attendance under that confinement, that they could obtain effectual relief. The cases of many others were such, that, unless for the sake of experiment, no practitioner could think of admitting them into an hospital. For the relief of patients afflicted with diseases of this nature, I employed the utmost attention which I was capable of bestowing ; and I had soon the satisfaction of seeing my exertions, in many cases, crowned with success. This, from the regular records which have been kept of my practice, I have no doubt of demonstrating to the conviction of every candid practitioner.

Thus satisfied, from facts, that there were numbers of individuals in circumstances of great indigence, for the relief of whose calamities a charity of this kind was well suited, and who, from such an institution, could receive effectual aid, I first conceived the idea of attempting to put it on a footing more permanent, and more extensively useful, than it could be while it depended entirely on one individual. But, before entering upon a transaction of such importance, I was resolved to be directed by the best advice I could obtain from those in whose judgment I could rely, and who were not in a situation which would lay them under any restraint in delivering their sentiments with freedom. One of  
the



the first to whom I had occasion to communicate it, was a medical gentleman, equally distinguished for activity in his profession, and for humanity and attention in relieving the indigent. He not only approved of the scheme, but proposed that it should be conjoined with another charitable establishment which he considered as wanting at this place. From different considerations, however, all thoughts of the proposed addition were soon laid aside; and, confining myself entirely to the original idea, I committed to writing a short sketch of this scheme, nearly in the same state in which it afterwards appeared as a proposal for establishing at Edinburgh a public Dispensary for the relief of the poor, when subjected to chronical or tedious diseases.

This proposal I put into the hands of several friends, requesting their candid opinion after due consideration. At the same time, I informed them, that, while I wished to be guided by the judgment I should be able to collect from them, I was desirous that my intention should never go farther than the circle of my friends, if, in their judgment, it should be reckoned either improper or inexpedient. The opinions I received were various. Two questions naturally presented themselves to consideration; how far the scheme itself was a good one? and, supposing it to be such, how



how far it was adviseable for me to make the attempt to carry it into execution?

The general utility of the scheme was supposed to depend on the effect it would have with regard to those who were the immediate objects of it, and on the influence which it might have on other useful charities. While some were clear in their opinions that it would be a charity of extensive utility, and not prejudicial to any useful institution already established, others entertained doubts, and proposed alterations. These suggestions I committed to writing; I bestowed on them the most serious consideration; I was soon satisfied, in my own mind, that, whatever wore the appearance of objection, admitted of the most satisfactory answer; and I adopted several of the alterations which were proposed.

But if, among the number of my friends, some entertained doubts respecting the utility of the scheme, there were many more who candidly delivered it as their opinion that the attempt would be prejudicial to myself. They admitted, that, if it could be carried into execution without opposition, it might be of material service to me as a private teacher, since it would afford me a foundation for lectures, which, as being of the utmost utility to students, would not fail to be well attended, provided they were executed in a  
manner



manner that should give satisfaction. But they added, that the public professors in the university, like every other incorporated body, who have the least shadow of claim to monopoly, had ever been jealous of private teachers. They observed, that my lectures, in particular, were so displeasing to some of them, that I had met with opposition, which no other teacher had ever before to combat. They concluded, that this opposition would now exert its utmost influence; and that, notwithstanding the utility of the scheme, such ingenuity would be exerted in raising probable objections to it, that I should be effectually cut off from all aid in attempting to carry it into execution. Hence, while its real tendency could never be known, an attempt, in itself laudible and meriting public thanks, might not only be the source of groundless clamour and popular odium, but might also create opposition to me among worthy and disinterested men, who would otherwise consider it as their duty to give aid and support to industry and virtue. I saw the force of these objections; yet, convinced of the useful tendency of my proposal, and persuaded, that, on the footing on which I was to put it, the opposition of any man, or of any body of men, could never prevent a trial, I at last determined on an appeal to future facts.

E

Trusting,



Trusting, therefore, that the opposition which proceeded from mistaken views, would soon either cease, or even become the source of my chief support; and that, if opposition proceeded from any other origin, it would, in a short time, either lose its influence, or counteract its intention, I printed the proposal, and distributed it among those from whom I thought there was some chance of obtaining aid. While, however, I trust my cause to future experience, I yet reckon it necessary to mention, in a public manner, the answers I have given in private to the objections that have been made to it, and briefly to state my sentiments respecting the influence which it will have on the interest of the community at large.

The great source of ostensible objection to this scheme, has been the supposition that it will be hurtful to the Royal Infirmary. It is said, that a Dispensary at Edinburgh will obstruct the usefulness of the Infirmary: That, were the poor provided with any other institution for relieving their distress, such is the prejudice they entertain against the hospital, that they would no longer think of applying to it for relief. And, as a convincing proof of this, we are told, that the Managers of the Infirmary were obliged to abolish the institution of giving aid to out-patients at the Infirmary,



mary, from the pernicious influence which it had in this way.

This argument, however specious, is far from being solid. That there is no regular establishment of out-patients at the Royal Infirmary, is true. But it is very difficult to understand how the abuse of this institution could ever have led to its being abolished, without supposing very great inattention on the part of those who were then physicians to the hospital. They were under no obligation of treating, as out-patients, those whose cases required confinement in the hospital. And, while there remained a single vacancy in the hospital, is it to be supposed, that any one patient, whose disease was of this nature, would receive medicines as an out-patient? Besides, this argument evidently proceeds upon the supposition, that every patient may be benefited by admission into an hospital. No one, however, can be often present in the waiting-room of the Infirmary, without hearing a contrary doctrine inculcated. There patients are every day told, that the nature of their disease is such, as renders it improper for them to be admitted; and that, in place of receiving relief in the hospital, they would be injured by it. If, then, there be cases of this nature, can we suppose that an institution for the relief of such patients.



tients was abolished, because those who were then physicians to the hospital allowed it to be abused? For they certainly had it in their power to have restrained it within proper bounds. But, perhaps, without much difficulty, we may assign another, and a better reason, for abolishing an allowance for out-patients at the Royal Infirmary. Certain it is, that the funds of that hospital, which are now, I believe, greater than they ever were before, are, at present, annually expended in affording aid to in-patients. And it is also certain, that those whose cases require confinement to an hospital, are the greatest objects of charity. The Managers, therefore, whether intentionally or not, have unquestionably consulted the interest of the indigent, in not allowing any part of their funds to be appropriated to another purpose. Can this, therefore, afford an objection to a scheme which, without, in any degree, diminishing the revenue of the Royal Infirmary, will create a fund for the relief of those whose diseases are of such a nature, that they ought not to be admitted into an hospital? And a fund too, which would otherwise be carried from Edinburgh, and bestowed on medical education at other places.

From these considerations, then, I am firmly persuaded, that a dispensary, on the footing which  
has



has been proposed, will in no degree obstruct the utility of the Infirmary ; but, I will even go farther, and I will venture to assert, that it must, to a very considerable degree, extend the benefits of that charitable institution. This assertion I found, not merely on reasoning, but on facts. It is but natural to imagine, that those whose cases required confinement, upon applying for aid at a dispensary, intended solely for chronical affections, would there be told, that it was necessary for them to apply for admission into an hospital. And indeed, the interest of the institution itself, would make it absolutely necessary, that they should not be treated at the dispensary. Unless, therefore, we were to suppose the physician at that charity totally void of humanity, we may conclude, that he would point out to those whom he could not relieve, the place where that relief was to be had. And this would unquestionably be the best reason he could assign for not taking them under his own care.

Such reasoning I have often, of late, had occasion to employ. Since I began to give medicines, *gratis*, to those afflicted with chronical diseases, many have applied to me, whose cases, in my opinion, required confinement to an hospital. To all these I have seriously recommended it, to apply for admission into the Royal Infirmary.



firmary. And I have, at the same time, refused to admit them to the benefits of the Dispensary. Although my advice has not been followed in every instance, yet it has in many. Had I not been acting as physician to a dispensary, these patients would probably never have applied either to me, or to any other regular practitioner. Thus, then, by means of this institution, I have had it in my power to extend the benefits of the Infirmary to several, who probably would otherwise have died of their ailments. And, if the very beginning of a Dispensary has been productive of such consequences, may we not conclude, that the continuance of it will, to a much higher degree, be attended with the same happy effects?

Although, however, it thus appears, that a Dispensary at Edinburgh must extend the usefulness of the Infirmary, yet it may be imagined that it will have a tendency to diminish its revenue. And it has been said, that, as the proposed establishment of a Dispensary is intended to furnish the means of giving a clinical lecture, it must necessarily have that effect.

That the clinical lectures in the Infirmary have formerly been attended by a greater number of students than of late, is an undoubted truth; and that they may fall to a still lower ebb, is not impossible. Without hesitation, I may venture to assert,



assert, that these lectures might easily be put upon a footing more useful to the students, and of course more advantageous to the hospital, than they have been for these three years past. And I mean not to conceal that, during the period I have mentioned, I have myself delivered the greatest part of them.

At a seminary of medical education, the attendance given to clinical lectures will always be, in some measure, proportioned to the instruction which students derive from them. Of all the different kinds of medical lectures, there is, perhaps, no one which can be more easily taught than clinical lectures. It is hardly possible to conceive any man, capable of practising medicine, who is not, at the same time, capable of saying something with regard to that practice. Yet it does not follow that, from such remarks, students will receive much information. And, to teach this branch of medical education with all the advantages to the students of which it is capable, requires higher abilities in a professor, and must engross a greater proportion of his time, than is necessary for any other. But, besides long experience, great discernment, and much attention, clinical lectures require also a peculiar talent, which few possess. Hence it is, that some of the most eminent professors at Edinburgh, who were listened to by the students with the highest admiration when they taught other branches of medicine, have

*Vide P.  
2 Line*



have by no means given equal satisfaction when they delivered clinical lectures. Any fluctuation, therefore, to which the clinical lectures at the Infirmary may hereafter be subjected, may naturally be referred to the same cause, which has already produced similar effects.

That the number of students attending the clinical lectures at the Royal Infirmary may be increased, if lectures of a similar nature are given at a Dispensary, and that it never can be diminished from this cause, are propositions which, I imagine, may be demonstrated, in the most convincing manner, by a very few observations.

Let us, for a moment, suppose, that the patients to be treated at the Dispensary, laboured under the same diseases with those who are admitted into the Infirmary. Even in this case, the lectures, I apprehend, would rather aid than hurt each other. A clinical course, in one very essential particular, differs from every other. In other branches, the same lectures are repeated every year. But a clinical lecturer, if he discharges his duty properly, will never have it in his power to deliver the same lecture oftener than once. Attendance on one teacher, therefore, can no more be a bar to hearing another, than attendance on anatomy or botany can supersede attendance on the practice of medicine. On the contrary, if one clinical course shall demonstrate



monstrate the utility of lectures of that nature, it will necessarily be an inducement for them to attend another.

But, besides that no two clinical courses in the same hospital can agree with each other, the lectures given on the cases of patients who are admitted into the Infirmary, must be still more different from lectures on the cases of those who attend the Dispensary. The only patients who can be admitted to receive the benefits of the Edinburgh Dispensary, are those whose diseases are of such a nature, that either they do not require admission into an hospital, or that they would be hurt by it. In the Infirmary, on the other hand, by much the most important cases, and especially those chiefly selected as the subject of clinical lectures, are of such a nature, that they cannot be the subject of treatment at the Dispensary. And, is it possible to suppose, that, because any gentleman has had an opportunity of hearing lectures on the cases of patients who labour under hypochondriacal affections, stomachic ailments, consumptions, or the like, he will, on that account, be less desirous of hearing lectures on the cases of those who are subjected to fevers, inflammations, or similar affections? If, therefore, the clinical lectures at the Infirmary should fail, that failure must unquestionably be ascribed to some other cause than to lectures being given on



the cases of patients at a Dispensary. But, if students think that they reap benefit from the observations that are there offered on some diseases, it will unquestionably be a strong motive with them to receive instruction, in a similar manner, respecting others, which cannot be the subjects of Dispensary practice. When, therefore, it is considered, that, besides a great variety of chronical diseases, it is at the Infirmary alone that lectures can be given on acute affections, it must be evident, that case-lectures at the Dispensary cannot diminish, but may increase the number of students attending the lectures given at the Infirmary.

From such considerations, I am persuaded, that a public Dispensary at Edinburgh, in place of obstructing the utility, and diminishing the funds of the Infirmary, would, in a short time, have no inconsiderable influence, both in diffusing the benefits of it, and in augmenting its revenue. But, besides this, a Dispensary for chronical diseases at Edinburgh would be still further serviceable to the Royal Infirmary, by allowing the funds of that useful charity to be strictly appropriated to those purposes for which they are most necessary. While there are some diseases which could not fail to be aggravated by admission into an hospital, there are others, for which treatment in such a situation unquestionably is not requisite. In as far as  
such



such cases are admitted into an hospital, it must lead to a considerable expence of funds, which might be more usefully employed. No one, who is acquainted with hospital-practice, can be ignorant, that the bane of every hospital is its being crouded with chronical cases. The expence of maintaining patients subjected to these, must be great, as the cure must be tedious. And, since the cure of such affections could be prosecuted with equal success while the patients continued to lodge at their own habitations, and, in some measure, to prosecute their usual employments, an establishment for the relief of those in such a situation might tend very considerably to diminish the expence of the Royal Infirmary. Without such an establishment, however, urgent applications for admission into the Royal Infirmary, from those who are in such a situation, can hardly be refused. And thus the public are obliged to pay, not merely for the medicines, but for the maintenance also, of some who make use of the hospital, not as a means of getting rid of disease, but as a refuge from labour. Thus, a Dispensary for the industrious poor, when subjected to chronical diseases, would often be the means of preventing the funds of the Infirmary from falling a prey to lazy impostors.

Having thus endeavoured to state the effects which a Dispensary would have on the Royal Infirmary, let us next consider its tendency with



with respect to Edinburgh as a seminary of medical education. In this point of view, it will, I apprehend, appear, that a Dispensary, while it can be attended with no bad effect, must be of some service, and may possibly be productive even of the most beneficial consequences.

With this view, let us briefly consider the effect which these lectures may be supposed to have with respect both to the teacher and to his hearers. That a private teacher of medicine would derive many advantages from being furnished with an opportunity of delivering such practical lectures as this institution would afford, is not improbable. If, therefore, it be imagined, that the advantages which any place enjoys, as a school of medical education, are strictly in proportion to the gain of public professors, and that every fee which is drawn by a private teacher would otherwise have entered their pockets, this institution might be supposed to have a bad effect. It is, however, hardly possible to conceive any propositions which have less foundation in truth.

The advantages which may be derived from private lectures have appeared to be so great, to the founders and patrons of two of the most eminent medical universities at present in Europe, that they meet with countenance and support. At Vienna and at Goettingen, while the utmost pains is bestowed in procuring public professors



feffors of the highest eminence, the greatest encouragement is also given to private teachers. And these universities are at present frequented by a greater number of medical students than any on the continent of Europe. Were it not from enjoying the benefits of private teaching at Paris, no student of medicine would ever think of prosecuting his studies at that place, after finishing his education at Edinburgh. From facts, therefore, we may infer, that this encouragement is at least attended with no bad effect.

But, we may even go farther. That private teaching, in general, may be of service, that it is particularly serviceable in medicine, must, at once, appear from even the most slight consideration. If the success of a private teacher be ever found to diminish the concourse of students attending a public professor, it can proceed only from great inferiority in that professor himself. While the former must have many difficulties to encounter, the latter teaches with every advantage. If, therefore, we suppose him to possess even a very small share of merit, he can never be deserted. But even admitting his abilities to be the highest imaginable, and his attention to be the most unwearied, yet his exertions can never render the labour of others totally superfluous. Private teaching takes away from the student no opportunity of acquiring information which he before possessed. It affords him an opportunity  
of



of hearing questions, which, although doubtful and difficult, are yet of the highest importance, stated in different points of view. And, in a science perplexed with so many intricacies as occur in medicine, this is essentially necessary. Hence it is, that those who wish to practice medicine with safety to others, or credit to themselves, will never rest satisfied with the opinions of any one teacher. Were there eminent private teachers of medicine at Edinburgh, it would furnish them with an opportunity of acquiring, at this place, that information which they must otherwise seek elsewhere. And this might be the means of protracting their stay at Edinburgh, to the emolument of the citizens in general. In this way, my lectures have already had some effect. For there are gentlemen now attending my course, who, had not these lectures been given, would have left Edinburgh at the end of the winter-session.

But, if a private teacher may be the means of detaining students at Edinburgh, so he may also be the cause of their resorting to this place for medical education. If he never acquire eminence, it will be the same thing to the city as if he never taught. But, if his fame and reputation as a physician and as a lecturer, be extended over this and other countries, the benefits to be derived from studying under him will be an additional motive with students to give Edinburgh



burgh the preference to other schools of medicine. While the object of students is the acquiring useful knowledge, it will never once enter into their consideration, whether a teacher read his lectures within the precincts of the college, or without them. To them it would be sufficient, that, at Edinburgh, they have an opportunity of hearing him.

Thus, then, should the professor, to whom he is more immediately a rival, be even a sufferer, the public will yet be benefited. If the public professor be a man of singular abilities, the labours of a private teacher may yet be the means of securing diligence, and of calling forth exertions which otherwise would never appear. But if, on the contrary, from misinformation, or from less excusable motives, an important trust in the university shall ever be committed to a man whose abilities are unequal to the task, the eminence of a private teacher may effectually prevent the bad consequences of such an appointment. And, were such an error to be ever committed with respect to that branch of medical education, which must be the basis of all future inquiry, private teaching is the only possible means by which the school of medicine, which now flourishes so much, to the honour and emolument of this city, could be preserved from ruin.

If, then, these be the natural consequences of private teaching at this place, should it be reckoned



oned unworthy of encouragement? But, if private medical lectures in general may be productive of advantages, the interest of Edinburgh, as a school of medicine, will be particularly promoted by those lectures, for which the Dispensary affords a foundation. It is allowed by all who are in the least degree acquainted with the advantages which may be derived from clinical or case lectures, that it is impossible to conceive any mode of education better calculated for conveying useful knowledge. If so much benefit may be derived from lecturing on those diseases which may with propriety be admitted into an hospital, it is difficult to conceive any good reason why the cases of those patients, whose diseases are of such a nature, that it would be cruelty to admit them into an hospital, should not also be the subject of lectures. And, if no public professor at Edinburgh gives lectures on such cases, must it not tend to the advantage of students, that they have an opportunity of hearing them from another quarter? There can, however, be no dispute, that, whatever contributes to the improvement of students, is conducive to the future interest of the university.

But, if the real interest of the Royal Infirmary, and proper views of those principles on which the reputation of Edinburgh, as a school of medicine, is to be extended and supported, afford arguments



arguments for the establishment of a Dispensary, the relief of those oppressed by indigence and disease, furnishes reasons which will operate still more powerfully, as inducing the charitable and humane to give countenance and support to such an institution.

It has indeed been alledged, that if a Dispensary were established at Edinburgh, it could be but of little use. Of all the objections which have been made to such an institution, this, to me, appears to be the most extraordinary. The experience which I have already had furnishes me with incontestible proof that a Dispensary will be of very great use. While I can already appeal to fact, I esteem speculative reasoning unnecessary. But, on this subject, even reasoning alone, although no facts could yet be adduced, must, I think, afford conviction to every reader.

There are some, indeed, who contend, that medicine is a science from which no advantage can ever be derived. With such I mean not to reason. But, taking it for granted, that the bountiful Author of our nature has supplied us with powerful agents, which, when properly used, are capable of removing and alleviating many of those diseases to which the human frame is subjected, the utility of such an institution can never be disputed. And that, in many diseases, medicines may be ordered with judgment, be ex-



hibited with attention, and be followed by happy effects when they are given to the poor at their own habitations, must be self-evident propositions to every one who does not altogether deny the power of medicine.

Does the skill of a practitioner depend on his giving his advice at any particular spot? Or, will the children of an indigent tradesman, the whole produce of whose labour is but barely sufficient to support a numerous family, enjoying health; will these, when subjected to disease, be attended to with less care by a feeling mother than by a hireling nurse?

I am far, however, from meaning to assert that the giving advice and medicine to the poor at their own habitations, is a mode of practice without imperfections. I admit that the coldness of their habitations may sometimes be a very great inconvenience; although heat is by no means essential to the cure of all diseases. But, in what situation is the practice of medicine without imperfection? The assertions of the Managers of the Infirmary respecting the practice which must be carried on at a Dispensary, gives me a just claim to compare it with that which is carried on in every hospital. It would be no difficult matter for me to prove, that this likewise is subjected to imperfections, and these by no means inconsiderable, which human prudence can never



er remove. But such a discussion would be as foreign to my purpose, as it was out of place in the Managers of the Infirmary to hold forth to the public the imperfections of practice at a Dispensary, which is solely to be confined to the relief of patients who neither can, nor ought to be admitted into an hospital.

But the usefulness of a Dispensary is, I apprehend, evinced beyond all doubt, by the arguments which the Managers of the Infirmary have brought to prove that it is unnecessary. That a charity for the relief of those who ought not to be admitted into an hospital, should be superfluous, because the Infirmary receives supernumerary patients, is an assertion which requires no answer. But, besides supernumerary patients, it is true that advice, and, on some occasions, medicines also, from the shop of the Infirmary, are given gratis to those whose complaints do not require, and whose situation will not permit that they should be taken into the hospital. We are told, however, in another part of the minute, that the annual expence of the Infirmary has sometimes exceeded its annual revenue. Does not the continuance, then, of a permission to give some medicines gratis from the shop of the Infirmary, after a regular establishment for out-patients has been abolished, demonstrate, in the most convincing manner, that they find it inconsistent



sistent with humanity to remove entirely the aid which may thus be afforded, but is confined solely to those whose wretchedness and penury are obvious, and others, although better clothed, may be in equal distress?

It is indeed true, that the humanity of the physicians and surgeons, who are practitioners in Edinburgh, by giving advice at their own houses, and by accompanying that advice, either with medicines or with money, is a means of relieving the distress of numbers to whom the benefits of the Infirmary cannot be extended. That their benevolence affords the most essential aid to the poor, is unquestionable. But, will the indigent be deprived of this, because a public charity of the same nature is established? The objects which require this aid are numerous. And, after a Dispensary is established, the humanity of private practitioners will still have an ample field for acting. Numbers would have recourse to such a charity, who, if it were not established, would otherwise expend the money which is requisite for obtaining food and raiment to those of their family, who continue to enjoy the blessing of health, in purchasing medicines at laboratories. And every one whose humanity induces him to be a subscriber to the Dispensary, will have a title, for a very small consideration



sideration on his own part, to demand that aid for the indigent, which he would otherwise be obliged to solicit as a favour.

The expence with which the public would be loaded by the establishment of a Dispensary, is with little propriety urged as an objection against it. This charity is not proposed to be founded on any tax, but on the voluntary donations of those who will receive pleasure from relieving the distress of the indigent. And the utmost sum which would be required from them, when compared with the expence of other charities, is very inconsiderable. For it is to be remembered, that the annual expence of this institution is to be defrayed by money obtained from those who attend it as pupils, from the hope of receiving adequate returns for what they pay. And students of medicine, in consequence of deriving instruction from Dispensary practice, will be induced to support an useful charity at Edinburgh, with money which otherwise they would expend on their education elsewhere. All the money which is solicited from the benevolent, is proposed to be employed in erecting a commodious building for the purposes of this charity. Such a building might be executed, with every convenience, for the sum of five hundred pounds. And, while it would secure permanence to this charity, it  
would,



would, at the same time, be the means of extending its utility, and would continue in perpetuity to be the property of the public.

But the advantages which would result from furnishing the indigent with medicines, when subjected to such diseases as either do not require admission into an hospital, or would be hurt by it, is not more manifest, than it is obvious, that this is a charity which, of all others, is the least liable to abuse. Medicines, even in their most simple state, when in single doses, are not a commodity which can be disposed of by any but those whose profession it is to sell drugs: And, when medicines are compounded together, they can be of use to no one but the individual for whose complaints they are particularly calculated. But, even supposing it possible that the medicines given in charity at a Dispensary could be sold to advantage by impostors who might sometimes receive them, yet they would certainly find purchasers only among those on whom it would be charity to bestow such medicines, had they applied for them. For what other motive, but extreme indigence, could ever induce any one to purchase at such hands? I must own, therefore, that it surpris'd me to find, that any man of discernment should have ever drawn an objection to a Dispensary from such a source.



source. It is hardly possible to conceive any charity whatever to which such objections may not be urged with better reason.

But, in place of leaving the decision of this question respecting the utility of a Dispensary at Edinburgh to argument alone, let us have recourse to facts. Facts are here supplied, in the consequences which have resulted from Dispensaries at other places, and in those which have already flowed from such an institution at this place.

The Public Dispensary of London has been the means of relieving thousands from wretchedness and misery. The Westminster Dispensary has been productive of the same happy effects. And the advantages resulting from a similar institution in Dublin, have been so clearly demonstrated, that it has been repeatedly aided by grants of money even from the legislature of that kingdom.

These institutions, all of which are but of recent date, will naturally lead to the establishment of dispensaries in other places. A proposal is accordingly printed for establishing a Dispensary at Kelso. And this scheme meets with approbation and support from inhabitants in that neighbourhood, distinguished by high rank in life, by judicious discernment of the real interest of their country, and by humane attention to the relief of the indigent. A subscription is also begun for establishing a Dispensary



penfary at Newcastle. It deserves to be remarked, that it is opposed by some, whose private interest is connected with the Infirmary at that place. But that this opposition proceeds solely from the jarring interest of the medical practitioners, can admit of no dispute. For there the physicians of the Infirmary neither pretend to deny the usefulness of a Dispensary, nor to represent it as pernicious. They have attempted to thwart the scheme, by setting on foot a subscription for a second Dispensary, to be conjoined with the Infirmary. Notwithstanding what has been said by the managers of the Edinburgh Infirmary, I should not be surpris'd to find a similar conjunction adopted at this place. And I am convinced, that, although it were adopted, it would neither render the Dispensary which I have propos'd an useless, nor a superfluous institution.

At other places where Dispensaries are established, they are supported by annual subscription. But here a fund for defraying the annual expence of this charity may be obtained from a different source. Since the beginning of November last, I have collected seventy-six pounds Sterling, in name of medicine-money, from students who have attended my lectures on the cases of patients, whose diseases I thought to be of such a nature, as to prevent their admission into an hospital. Out of this fund, one hundred  
and



and twelve patients, whose narrow circumstances could ill afford the expence of drugs when they were subjected to bodily distress, have been supplied with every medicine which, to the best of my judgment, could be useful, either in alleviating or removing their complaints. The case of each patient has been carefully taken down in writing, and entered into a register at the time when they were admitted to the benefit of this charity. Reports are afterwards inserted of the effects which result from the medicines employed. And hardly a week passes, in which I do not receive, in presence of many students, sincere thanks and fervent prayers for future success, from those whose diseases, by the aid of divine providence, I have been the instrument of removing.

Among the number who have applied to me for aid, there have been several who were my patients in the Infirmary, and whom, after fruitless attempts for their relief, I dismissed from that hospital, because it was my opinion, that they would suffer from longer residence there. In more than one instance of this nature, I have had the satisfaction of doing material service by my practice at the Dispensary. And, from experience, I can assert, that, while the practice of medicine, both in an hospital and at a Dispensary, is liable to imperfections of different kinds, yet, in



either way, it is beneficial to society, and an inestimable blessing to the poor.

Influenced by such considerations as I have now mentioned, I can neither be intimidated by opposition, nor do I despair of success. Confident, that what I have here advanced will be demonstrated by future experience, with patient silence, I shall wait the decision. And I trust it will soon be the opinion of every disinterested man, that a Dispensary at Edinburgh for the relief of the poor subjected to chronical diseases, is beneficial to the Royal Infirmary, serviceable to medical education, and highly useful to the indigent though industrious labourer.

I should, however, consider myself as wanting in duty to the public, did I not put it in the power of every generous and humane man, who wishes for the accomplishment of these valuable ends, to lend his aid in promoting them. This consideration then, induces me to make the following proposal, to which, I must own, it is difficult for me to foresee any good objection.

Let those who shall become subscribers to this institution enjoy, from the time of paying their subscription, all the privileges annexed to the rank of governors. But, in place of immediately bestowing the money that shall be collected, in erecting any building, let that money be deposited at interest, in some secure hand, for the  
space



space of two years, from the beginning of December next. Let the interest only of the money thus collected be allowed for defraying some part of the expence of hiring rooms, and obtaining other articles necessary for the Dispensary. And, at the end of that period, let every contributor have it in his option to withdraw his original contribution.

By this plan, every subscriber will have an opportunity of being fully satisfied of the real tendency of a Dispensary, before his money be employed in that way which is to render it a permanent institution. And, after the repeated assurances which I have given in the most public manner, that, if this charity shall be found in any degree detrimental to the interest of the Royal Infirmary, I am determined to relinquish it, the real friends of that hospital can have nothing to dread. On the contrary, if my views be not mistaken ones, there is ground for hoping, that it will prove beneficial to that charitable institution. Ought they not, therefore, as well as me, even on the probability of such an event, now to exert their endeavours for having it in their power to form an opinion on the only certain foundation?

With the view of demonstrating, in the most convincing manner, the truth of every conclusion which I have here drawn, I have put into the hands of some of my friends, who are of opinion, that  
the



the scheme which I have proposed, merits approbation and support, subscription-papers for a Dispensary, under the conditions which have been mentioned. If there be any others who wish to encourage such an undertaking, or who are desirous of giving aid to such a trial as must afford conviction to every one respecting the real tendency of this scheme, they also shall be furnished with subscription-papers. I shall make up an exact list of all those who, by subscribing their names to such papers, or in any other manner, may signify to me their intention of contributing any sum, not less than one guinea, for the support of this undertaking. And, about the middle of November next, I shall take the liberty of summoning the first general annual meeting; leaving it afterwards to the contributors at large to regulate and superintend this charity in whatever manner they shall reckon most conducive to the public good.

I now conclude these observations, by giving public assurance to every one who shall become a contributor to the Dispensary, that, in discharging the duties of physician to this charity, the most unwearied attention shall never be wanting from

their most humble servant,

ANDREW DUNCAN.