Dr. Storer. 3

very respectfully
from
the author

ON

# SELF-SUPPORTING DISPENSARIES,

BY

DR. BIGSBY.

A

# BRIEF EXPOSITION

OF THOSE

# BENEVOLENT INSTITUTIONS,

OFTEN DENOMINATED

## SELF-SUPPORTING DISPENSARIES;

WITH A VIEW TO RECOMMEND THEM TO THE

## PATRONAGE AND SUPPORT OF THE PUBLIC,

As tending to raise the moral character and improve the condition of the

## LABORING CLASSES,

BY

**JOHN J. BIGSBY, M.D. F.L.S. AND F.G.S.**

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NIHIL HUMANUM A ME ALIENUM PUTO.

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ON

# SELF-SUPPORTING

## DISPENSARIES.

THE self-supporting Dispensary is an Institution for the relief of the sick of the working community, possessing many very superior claims to general notice: but its principal feature is, that it enables the poor, by a kind of mutual assurance, to provide themselves with the best medical assistance, independently, or nearly so, of public or private charity.

I had been for some years watching the progress of this great improvement on the ordinary Dispensary, suggested about fifteen years ago, by Mr. Smith, of Southam, in Warwickshire, but until the venerable Dr. Storer, of Lenton Firs, near Nottingham, had

the kindness to send me his interesting publication on this subject, I feared that it was an utopian scheme to produce impracticable happiness.

On application recently to Dr. Storer for further aid, he was pleased to furnish me with much oral information, several brief, but valuable manuscripts of his own, some annual reports of these Dispensaries, and three excellent addresses to the persons intended to be benefitted, by Dr. Calvert, of London, and Dr. Arnold, the present distinguished Master of Rugby School.

I now found this form of Dispensary to be spreading satisfactorily from the point of its commencement, and that it enjoys the favour of the labouring population, together with the zealous and disinterested patronage of the upper classes wherever it is practically known.

In London there is a society of noblemen and gentlemen, (chiefly from Warwickshire and Northamptonshire) "for promoting the "objects of self-supporting Dispensaries."

I feel a complete conviction that Mr. Smith's Dispensary, its rules being faithfully enforced, will be a blessing to almost every neighbourhood adopting it :—and most certainly adopted it will be, eventually, under some modification, as knowledge advances, all over the united kingdom. I believe that it is capable of working a moral revolution in the labouring community, aided by Savings' Banks, and the improved Friendly Institutions.*

Few things would gratify me more, than to aid in the establishment of a self-supporting Dispensary, in Newark, the place of my residence; but I should be very sorry to force one into premature operation. The sole object of these few pages is, to discuss, to feel the ground, to collect and convey information;—to be acted upon, when public opinion is mani-

* It is well worthy of notice, and will claim particular attention wherever an institution of this kind is contemplated—that every attempt hitherto made as an improvement on Mr. Smith's original plan, has either proved abortive, or injured the operation of the principle.

festly in favour of such a measure.—Nothing but good can arise from this procedure.

In the following few pages I beg to address myself to the opulent and influential. No self-supporting Dispensary can exist without their aid, to give their skill, money, and experience, in its first institution; and, above all, their labour towards its permanence. The working part of society want the necessary time and information, and are liable to mutual jealousies and many other hindrances.

The rich must remember that their welfare is closely bound up with that of the poor. There is neither happiness nor security for either party, unless there be sympathy and protection on the one side, and attachment on the other. The diseases of wretchedness I may notice, differ in this respect from those of luxury: many of them by crowding, defects of ventilation and cleanliness, acquire an infectious character, and are liable to be transmitted to the rich: those of the latter are

* The Cholera is mainly kept up by the anxieties and privations of the poor.

most commonly solitary, and are not communicated to the poor. The conclusion from these facts is obvious.

I shall now, 1st, make a few observations on the condition of the labouring community; 2ndly, animadvert on the present methods of assisting them when sick; and 3rdly, I shall describe the nature, object, and practical effect, of the self-supporting Dispensary. To this, I shall append a valuable paper by Dr. Storer, and the rules, in detail of this institution.

1st, On the condition of the labouring community.

It is consoling to know that the majority of the commonalty of our towns and villages have a great sense of self-dependence, and are provident, industrious, and orderly; and that they are imbued with a considerable feeling of their sacred and moral obligations. This is owing to the soundness of the English character, to our religious privileges, and to the nature of certain of our civil relations to each other.

That, however, a very large portion of the lower orders are ignorant, unthankful, idle, and profligate, is but too true; and is to be attributed in good measure, with Dr. Chalmer's, and some of the best informed men in Britain, to the natural operation of the Poor Laws, as at present administered. Much of the misery which meets the eye of benevolence in our land, is caused by the want of that ordinary forethought, frugality, and management, which the poor laws hourly and universally teach to be useless as well as painful. Wherever they are acted upon with rigour, there the sum of domestic comfort is increased:—wherever any temporary straitening can be supplied from the parish, there is an accumulation of distress.*

As long, as at present, every man has a claim on the property of the public, whenever

* The existence of charitable trusts, in villages and towns, for the direct distribution to the poor indiscriminately or nearly so, of money, food, coals, or clothing, is of no benefit to such places—but an injury. They attract a dissolute population, and keep them so. It is the clamorous that obtain the relief, while honest indigence remains unassisted.

he pleases to declare himself necessitous, the wonder will be that there is still to be found among us the virtuous and diligent labourer.

Indeed the poor laws are a grievous calamity; and are founded in opposition to the only true principle on which the labouring classes can be made easy in their minds, their persons, and in their dwellings—which is, that of causing them to depend upon and help themselves.

While this error in legislation is supinely permitted by parliament to exist, it is laudable in individuals or communities among us to make use of expedients, promising to lessen its injurious effects; *we* cannot directly lay the axe to the root :—the various schemes which have been devised with this view, I shall barely glance at. They have had for their object, the infusing into the minds of our population the kindly spirit of christianity. Of course this produces a conviction of the necessity of self-maintenance, a sensibility to the value of moral character, a desire for the right rearing and education of their children,

a love of home, a wish to increase its comforts and decencies, and an anxiety to prepare for the casualties of life. All this is aimed at by means of churches, chapels, schools, bible and missionary societies,* benefit societies, self-supporting dispensaries, sick clubs, savings' banks, district visiting societies, &c. &c.—These instruments for giving a right direction to the great masses of our fellow-subjects are doubly necessary in their present highly excited state, when they are momentarily receiving a larger share of information of every kind.

The working population naturally fall into several divisions according to the aspect under which they are regarded. We shall only mention two as having reference to our subject ;—the labourer in the open air, and the labourer in the workshop, or artisan. These form two distinct classes, and may be further subdivided with advantage into three grades.

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* Few things are so beneficial to the individual as a deep sense of the religious wants of others.

1st, Those who are just able to support themselves, whether well or ill.

2ndly, Those who are only able to support themselves when well.

3dly, Those who are unable to support themselves whether well or ill. These are the English paupers; many of them so necessarily;—as being friendless and impotent from infancy, or old age, casualties, or incurable disease, &c.

We shall make a few remarks on each of these divisions; beginning with those including the labourer and the artisan.

A prominent evil, among many others, in the moral condition of the English labourer in the open air is, hopelessness,—with dullness, hardness of character and sottishness as its natural consequences. So very few are the instances of any labourer bettering his condition, and so sure seems parish pay to accompany old age, that the present race are but too often left without a stimulus to exertion. Taking England throughout, the out-door la-

bourer is hardly stationary in comforts;—much less has he the happiness of finding a gradual improvement in his circumstances,—the fair fruit of successful industry :—and no man can well be at ease until he has attained this point. In North America, on the contrary, the activity and intelligence of the husbandman is most remarkable; and merely because, there, the servant knows that the steady labour of a few years will make him a master, and the proprietor of a farm, supplying all his simple wants.*

The classes working in the open air are continually making great muscular exertions. They therefore require an abundant and highly reparative food.

* These observations seem to hint at the desirableness of emigration :—this however, even on a larger scale, is only individual, not national, relief :—much present misery would certainly be put an end to :—but as much, if not more, would immediately spring up. All this is easily proved :—but not here. The only real cure for pauperism is an improvement in principle and habits. The writer can testify from personal knowledge that emigration to the Canadas would be a certain and unspeakable blessing to a large, (but select) class of families now enduring, among us, hopeless indigence : but this will not lessen parochial or other national burthens.

The stomach is full of energy and can extract strength and health from aliment, in ordinary cases, indigestible and even hurtful. How seldom does the married labourer possess the quantity and quality of food his wants demand!

The out-door labourer suffers very greatly from a want of change of linen and raiment, from a deficiency of bedding and bed clothes, from the smallness and bad ventilation of his room—or, on the other hand, from its being open to every form of inclement weather. His body is washed far too seldom; and from simple weariness at first; but afterwards from not being incommoded by dirt:—it is singular to observe that the functions of the skin may be nearly suppressed without the health being affected, provided there be constant exercise in the open air.

The diseases of this part of our population are rapid and violent, seizing on important organs, and therefore often fatal. They are liable to numerous accidents as bruises, dislocations, fractures, ruptures, aneurisms, hœmorrhages, &c.

The sedentary artisan too often works ten hours, daily, in a close shop, breathing an atmosphere polluted by human effluvia, by the exhalations from his materials, the combustion of furnaces, or even of many candles. He has a feeble appetite, and languishing digestion, which he is ~~able~~ apt to over-stimulate by ardent spirits. He is subject to alternate depression and excitement from fluctuations in trade, and is much affected by the political fermentations of a dense neighbourhood, by the influence of immoral example;—and by the anxiety and privations resulting from improvidence.

His food is also scanty, badly selected, and often ill cooked. He is liable to be covered with dust and dirt, greater in quantity, and more deleterious in quality, than the husbandman.

Hence blood of an inferior quality is formed, which carries into the various organs but few of the principles of health. We, therefore, observe these workmen to have puffy, sallow, countenances, their eyes dull and inexpressive, their muscles flabby and small, with puny limbs and narrow chests.

Such circumstances entail a crowd of diseases which differ, in many respects, from those of the field labourer. He is obnoxious to the effects of sudden and violent exertions, to accidents from machinery, &c.—to diseases of the skin, and those arising from unhealthy atmospheres, from handling poisonous materials, and to maladies originating in debility;—such as scrophula, &c. It is too often here that the physician is a vain counsellor. What can he effect against the constant and permanent action of the destructive causes we have just enumerated? A poor man can seldom change his trade if he find it unhealthy.

The above hasty view of some of the peculiarities in these two classes, depending on manual labour, has been sketched for the purpose of shewing that they are peculiarly liable to disease and casualties, and that therefore to them, living as they do, without accumulated capital,—in preparation for misfortune,—a method of ensuring medical advice, derived from their own exertions, and not involving personal degradation, is of inappreciable value.

Disease follows poverty, as certainly as the shadow follows substance: it is an evil to be poor, and live from hand to mouth:—to be sick as well as poor is doubly pitiable. I believe, with Dr. Worthington of Monmouth, that medical attendance is, in the aggregate, scantily provided for the poor throughout the whole of our island; and that large numbers of those who, by timely and continued aid, might have been rescued from death, are left to perish through neglect or ignorance.

When a working man is ill, his whole family are left without support;—and when he himself most wants nutritious and varied aliment, change of linen, and the tranquillizing spectacle of a satisfied family, he is deprived at once of all.

The industrious married labourer *must*, if he be a thinking man, live in constant dread of the calamitous effects of sickness—a state of mind sufficient to bring it on.

To remove this natural, but most painful, feeling, is the design of the self-supporting Dispensary.

It is to be remarked that during the prevalence of Cholera, a self-supporting Dispensary is especially acceptable;—for, in all unhealthy seasons and times of public distress, the poor are the most deeply injured: by reason of the expensiveness of the means of protection from the pestilence, by their ignorance, inertness, and also by their being otherwise occupied.

We have made above, a further division of the labouring classes into three grades, as they are able, or not, to provide for themselves.

According to the rate of wages all over England, sickness is a constant source of anxiety even to the first. If a surgeon be sent for in the ordinary way, it often happens that the very necessaries of the family are curtailed to pay the first bills consequent on a long illness. Frequently the payment is never made, for medical men do not often resort to the bailiff.

The fear of an indefinite bill causes medical advice to be requested, after a delay, which

has often aggravated the illness, and even made it fatal;—for diseases of the poor, it is evident, must have instant attention.

In the end, the whole family sink into the third grade, and become a permanent burthen on the parish, even to the third and fourth generation,—of which there are several instances in this town.

The next and very frequent expedient, is to apply to a druggist,—a step by which much valuable time is lost, and even harm done, in all probability, unless the druggist be a conscientious man, and can withstand an opportunity of vending his drugs;—but in doubtful cases, (and they are many,) a sense of right and wrong, in weak and fallible man, is apt to yield before self-interest.

After many struggles of this nature the first grade descends into the second.

The second avowedly cannot pay for medicines and attendance in the usual way. They continually go to a surgeon, as men have been known to go to an eating-house,

knowing that they can never pay:—or they go to a druggist, to the Dispensary, or to the parish surgeon.

The consequences of buying a druggist's advice and medicines have already been stated.

The sick man may also have recourse to the Dispensary. Hospitals* and Dispensaries are the greatest glory of a christian land. The former are expensive establishments, with which we have, at present, nothing to do.

Dispensaries with their disadvantages, have also great advantages.

They are peculiarly suited to the second grade of the working classes; and are of great value, as lessening the number of applications

* There is but one general hospital in Nottinghamshire: it cannot provide for more than one half of the legitimate objects supplied by the increased population of the county. Although the local papers warn patients every week that the beds are full, there are always from three to twelve, waiting in lodgings, in the town, suffering from delay both in mind and body; and not unfrequently obtaining admission only when too late. There ought to be a small one at Newark, and another at Worksop.

at the hospitals. They are extremely cheap, and easily managed, charities.

The physician, when attending a patient at home, can more readily discover, and better appreciate, the causes which have brought on, and are keeping up the disease. His visit is longer, and more consolatory in manner. The regret of being separated from his relatives is spared the patient. Besides, many complaints do not last long, and, therefore, do not need removal.

Dispensaries, of the common kind, are attended with important evils. Like the poor laws, improperly administered, which have smitten our people with a moral leprosy, *they* too do them the grievous injury of teaching them to depend, in case of sickness, on a public charity, instead of on their own wholesome foresight,—an all-important consideration. The tickets being at the disposal of subscribers, to obtain one, the sick has to take his first step in alms-asking,—and does not always stop there. He is often compelled in Newark to apply at half a dozen houses for a single ticket;—and having obtained it, he has to wait

for the day of attendance at the Dispensary, (which are only three a week,) except in obviously urgent cases. He cannot expect the medical attendant to go to him, when an independent person sends at the same time:—he will be visited afterwards; or by the apprentice. Medicines are here only to be had at a few stated times;—when really wanted, they are procured, on other occasions, with considerable trouble to the attending surgeon.

Common Dispensaries are liable to abuses, for which there is scarcely a remedy.—Persons quite capable of paying, frequently avail themselves of them to the great injury of the practitioner. Several times, persons have been detected among the poor of Guy's hospital surgery, who have been driven there in gigs, by their own livery servants. It is not very uncommon to procure for sale, leeches and valuable drugs from the Dispensaries of London, Ireland, and likewise of Newark, by false representations. Dispensaries greatly reduce parish expenditure, at the unrequited cost of the medical officer.

It is singular how slow to strike the mind, the very greatest enormities are, when they

are silently acquiesced in by society, and have received the sanction of antiquity. Forty years ago, the patients in the Hotel Dieu of Paris lay three in a bed: and if an operation became necessary on one of them, he was not removed for the purpose. Corpses were suffered to lie for hours close to the living sick. These are almost unparalleled instances of unchecked enormities; but, I trust, that the time will shortly come, when public opinion will perceive, and put an end to, the only lesser enormity of relieving parochial rates, by the gratuitous services of the Dispensary attendants. I may here observe, that the elevation of the professional character is of great moment to the public, and that it is only to be maintained by his fair remuneration. Irreparable mischief has, more than once, happened to members of noble families, who have resided near an imperfectly educated, or incompetent, medical practitioner. It is by the attentions and pecuniary liberality of persons of rank and fortune, that medical men of talent are chiefly induced to reside in remote districts.

Such are some of the most important objections to the common form of Dispensary.

They will nearly all vanish under the regulations introduced by Mr. Smith.

If the patient of the second grade have recourse to the third alternative, namely, medical assistance from the parish, then he falls at once into all the intolerable ills of pauperism;—from which, I repeat, that a small subscription to a self-supporting Dispensary, would have saved him; and from many other miseries attendant on a sick bed.

Sickness, therefore, we may suppose, has pauperised the patient, after a rigorous examination on the part of the overseer to discover whether he be, or be not, an impostor—and it is universally allowed, that next to the idleness and prodigality, fostered by the poor laws, sickness is the most frequent cause of pauperism.

So apt is sickness to destroy the poor man's vote, that in scot and lot boroughs, the candidates, for their representation in parliament, often pay the medical bills of such persons, when an election is drawing near;—and an instance has been known, of a surgeon

having been appointed to attend the sick friends of a particular candidate.

The following are a few of the effects of this change in the labourer's condition.

He loses his highly valued elective franchise, a mark of caste to which the poor cling with Hindoo pertinacity;—and which, in small boroughs particularly, is what mainly gives him importance in the eyes of his associates in this day of political clubs and club carousals.

He is no longer a free inhabitant of a free country, and is degraded in his own estimation, and in that of his family and neighbours. He is liable to be confined in the workhouse, often a real prison, which is always the depot of the collective vice, idiotcy, and idleness of the parish. He may be removed to his own parish, if he do not belong to that wherein he resides;—when he is forced from his friends and employers—perhaps from the manufacture or trade peculiar to the place, (the only one he knows,) to a village where he is a stranger, and where he can obtain no employment: and so once a pauper, always a

pauper. I could bring instances of removals, under very cruel circumstances, from Mr. Hulbert's pamphlet, &c. but I merely refer to them. His little furniture is sold, and his family are beggared. All these things happen daily in the lower ranks of life. The fear of them daily prevents medical advice reaching the unfortunate objects, till it is too late. A self-supporting Dispensary would greatly diminish the quantity of this suffering. It will be found peculiarly serviceable to the permanent and hopeless pauper, rendered so by circumstances over which the individual had, perhaps, no control, and, therefore, an object of especial tenderness.

The sick pauper is attended by a medical man, in some places, tolerably remunerated for the performance of his laborious duties; but in by far the greater number of parishes, the sick poor are farmed; that is, they are attended by any regular practitioner who will contract to do the work at the lowest rate, without reference to ability or attention.

The evils of farming press heavily on all the parties concerned,—the practitioner, the pauper, and the parish.

The surgeon frequently undertakes the charge for no more than the drugs cost him—his labour and skill remain uncompensated. He is, therefore, inclined to become careless in his treatment, and scanty in the supply of medicine;—apt to depute his apprentice oftener than he ought; and cannot, therefore, but lose public credit, and private peace of mind. In every way the bargain is a bad one for him. He enters into it, perhaps, having no practice,—or, because he is a new comer, and thereby gains access to the neighbourhood. When the old practitioner takes the office at too low a rate, it is to keep out a competitor. The pauper, as a natural effect of this bad system, is neglected in the country, for the remark does not apply so strongly in towns. In the former situation he is not so often visited, nor in some cases treated with ordinary skill;—and his medicines may be inferior in quantity and quality.

He is himself dissatisfied;—his health, and, perhaps, his life is the sacrifice;—his family, at the least, may be swept into the workhouse;—his pauperism is confirmed.—Mr. Hulbert's pamphlet contains many well authenticated instances of fatality from the

farming system. Slovenly practice is interred with the patient, and nobody is a whit the wiser. The parish suffers severely. They may have the perpetual burthen of the sick man's family thrown upon them by their own false economy;—an economy, by the way, which would not be persisted in, perhaps, if the overseers were permanent; as things are now, they are only anxious to perform their forced and unpaid services, as quietly, and as much in the beaten path, as possible.*

Parishes thus pay tenfold for their ill-judged parsimony. There are many degrees of medical talent and information, although the public may not know it.

I beg now to insert a statement of Mr. Smith's plan for a self-supporting Dispensary, extracted from a pamphlet of his.

It is proposed that there shall be established in every market town, and considerable

* The very knowledge of a contract having been made, prevents the poor from applying, even to medical men, distinguished for skill and humanity.

village in the kingdom, with the concurrence of the principal inhabitants, a Dispensary, to which such persons only shall be admitted, as patients, who cannot afford to pay, in the usual manner, for medical advice and drugs; the patients being as follows:—

1st, Or free class; consisting of laborers and servants, willing to subscribe something for themselves, and admitted by a committee of the medical men. The members of this class to be furnished with a green ticket.

2nd Class, or charity patients; not able to subscribe for themselves, but recommended by the honorary subscribers of the Dispensary. The members of this class to be furnished with a yellow ticket.

3rd Class; parish paupers; unable to subscribe for themseves, but admitted by a contract with the overseers; by whom they are to be furnished with a white ticket, entitling them to admission.

The funds of the Dispensary are to be derived from three sources; first, from the subscription of the free class; secondly, from

the subscriptions of benevolent individuals; and thirdly, from the sums paid by the parishes.

Free members contribute a certain weekly sum;—honorary members to be allowed to recommend one patient for every half-guinea subscribed;—parishes contribute according to their respective population.

The rate of the free member's contribution, probably need not, in any part of the kingdom, exceed 4s. 4d. per annum, or a penny weekly:—it should be collected either weekly, monthly, or quarterly, so as to suit the convenience of the poorest, who wish to subscribe. The free members should not only enjoy the usual advantages of a Dispensary, but be entitled by the green ticket to priority of attendance. In long illness they may, perhaps, be supplied with a nurse, cordials, food, linen, &c.

If it be deemed expedient to hold any annual festival or holiday, the free members should alone be allowed to attend on such occasions; and certain rewards might be allowed, to such of them as were known to be

peculiarly deserving; to have brought up a large family creditably; to have lived long with their masters and mistresses, &c.

Children to be admitted as free members, until they are fifteen years of age, for half of the usual contribution. Parishes should contribute a certain sum, to be determined upon by the Dispensary committee, for every hundred of their population, the rate being regulated by the distance of the parish from the Dispensary.

The honorary subscriptions and parish payments to be kept distinct from the free fund;—and the expences of the institution to be paid quarterly.

The medical officers of the Dispensary to be remunerated according to the number of the patients which each has attended in sickness.

The extra supplies to patients to be allowed under the direction of a visiting committee,—and chiefly, if not entirely, to members of the free class.

Every regularly educated practitioner, residing in the district comprehended in the arrangements of each Dispensary, to be allowed to offer himself as a medical officer of the institution. The acceptance of these offers, and the days and hours of each medical officer's attendance, to be regulated by the committee; and the latter notified to the patients; every patient, of all the three classes, being permitted to have the advice of the practitioner whom he prefers.

These regulations may be modified in different places, provided it be always kept in view, that the Dispensary is instituted for the benefit of those who cannot afford to pay the usual expences attendant on sickness;—that the contributions required from the free members, should be low enough to admit as many as possible to this class of those who desire to belong to it, in order to separate and distinguish them from those who are unwilling to make any exertion for themselves;—and that, in every case, the medical practitioners should be paid for time and trouble, and not for drugs. ("These to be purchased at the first hand, and of the first quality, by the direction of the committee").

The rules and regulations in detail will be found in the appendix.

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The advantages of the self-supporting Dispensary are numerous and most important.

It tends to elevate the character and condition of the laboring class by acting upon the opposite principles, to those of the poor laws, as now put in force; it cultivates in them what Mr. Smith calls "a prospective feeling."

It rises far above any merely charitable institution in a moral sense, by presenting to the poor the best mode of aid, the means of serving themselves.

Many of the worthiest of the poor, we know, neglect too long their complaints from an highly honourable principle. They will not incur expences which they cannot meet,—and they refuse to pauperise themselves. A self-supporting Dispensary gives a right of applying in the early stages of sickness to any of the medical men of the institution, whilst

it takes from them all motives for delay, as they have neither a bill to dread, nor a ticket to beg.

It is greatly superior to sick clubs, because the member of the former, instead of depending on one practitioner, whom he may not respect, has the choice of the whole neighbourhood;—and may have a consultation in a dangerous illness. The benefit of medical attendance on the wives and children of the poor is here secured; which is not contemplated by any club, or friendly society, now existing.

This Dispensary places efficient medical aid, in a manner pleasant to their feelings, within the reach of those who are most likely to suffer from the want of it, and thus has a tendency to mitigate the virulence of any epidemic.

The subscribers, whether well or ill, derive constant benefit from this Dispensary. The healthy contributor has felt easy and secure, on the score of expense, in case of illness or accident; while another, who has been so afflicted, has incurred no ruinous bills,

and has not entered into the downward path of pauperism.

This form of Dispensary marks out those who wish to preserve their independence; and so enables charitable neighbours to direct their chief attention towards those, who still have that spirit;—instead of spending their zeal in the too often fruitless labour of endeavouring to encourage habits of independence, when even the wish for it is gone.

This institution offers greater facilities, than any other, for increasing that spirit of kindness and union between the rich and the poor, which is so much needed at present.

Great advantage is derived from having attached to the Dispensary, a ladies' committee, to visit the free members regularly and impartially;—a salutary influence is thus obtained,—which discreetly used, will make it evident to the honest and industrious, that the desire of their superiors, is truly to promote the happiness of themselves and their children.

When the rich see the poor willing to help themselves, they are then stimulated to per-

form many kind offices, which would, otherwise, have been omitted.

The sums supplied by the free subscribers, are of the very greatest importance to the prosperity of the Institution. Advice, thus paid for, is much more carefully followed, than when merely elemosynary.

These Dispensaries seem calculated to promote medical knowledge and usefulness.

We need not perhaps have dwelt so long on the advantages of the Southam Dispensary to the working community, the nerve and stability of our country. They are so numerous, so great, and so palpable, that wherever the institution has been made available, the poor have, very much to their credit, subscribed thankfully, and in great numbers,—every where effecting a great share of immediate good. Thousands of industrious persons at Coventry, can bear testimony to the practical blessings thus produced. If there were no other such establishment in Britain, that one has existed long enough in the above-named city, and has been of such vast utility, that it has sufficiently

demonstrated the practicability, efficiency, and great moral utility of the scheme. In Coventry it has been found absolutely necessary to limit the free subscribers* to 2,500: now, persons have to wait for vacancies; and do wait;† so forward are they to embrace the advantages of the self-supporting Dispensary: and this, it is to be kept in mind, in the face of a gratuitous Dispensary, positively inviting their acceptance of its aid;—making, therefore, on the whole, the strongest case possible, (vide appendix, note 2.)

In the little town of Atherstone, this institution numbered 700 free members, in the

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* "The general description of persons admitted as *free* members," says the Coventry self-supporting Dispensary report for 1832, "may be comprised under three classes. The first, and by far the "most numerous class, are those who have been without any medical "aid whatever; the lamentable consequences of which, have in many "cases been painfully evident to the surgeons of this establishment. "Secondly, those who have usually sought gratuitous advice from "physicians and surgeons, and have procured their medicines from "druggists. Thirdly those whose situations in life rendered the "payment for regular medical advice very precarious."

† The limitation to 2,500 free subscribers is only temporary—till the committee are enabled to procure more roomy apartments.

first year: and I have reason to believe, that they multiply, under the powerful recommendation of the minister and gentry of the place.

At what time the Birmingham self-supporting Dispensary was founded, I do not know; but by an extract from its second annual report, I learn that it possesses more than 1000 free members, and that it had taken care of 1372 sick persons, and 34 cases of midwifery* during the year just passed.

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* Dr. Arrowsmith, of Coventry, informs me that he believes the plan does not strictly accord with that of Southam—for he thinks they sell tickets to sick applicants at 3s. 6d. each. I agree with Dr. A. in the following observations on this point. "At "Coventry, we rather reprobate that mode, deeming it an essential "principle of our institution, to foster forethought and the dependence "of the laboring poor on one another. Hence we admit no per-"son actually sick, unless he pays at the time a year's subscription "in advance, and procure two healthy members to enter with him, "their subscriptions being paid in advance also. If he cannot procure "two such members, he is obliged to pay 10s. in addition to his year's "subscription. By our method, we secure the admission of healthy "members, whose motive for joining the institution, is the praise-"worthy and virtuous one of providing against an uncertain contin-"gency, and which moreover requires the mutual co-operation of "individuals in the same rank of life, adequately to effect." Dr. Storer, speaks strongly to the same purpose. Vide appendix note 1.

Rugby in Warwickshire, is a small community, and has under the protection of Dr. Arnold* a Southam Dispensary, with 450 free subscribers, paying monthly in advance. In the district around Chilvers Coton, in the same county, there is another, with 500 free subscribers.

There may be scattered over England, Dispensaries of which I am ignorant, but in addition to those already adverted to, I can enumerate the following places where they exist, and with one or two exceptions, they are understood to flourish beyond expectation. Derby, Burton-on-Trent, Lymington, (Hampshire,) Calne, (Wilts,) Barfoot, Wellesbourne, Southam, and Aston, (Birmingham,) in Warwickshire, Long Buckby, and other villages in Northamptonshire, Tuxford in Nottinghamshire;—the last is of very recent date, and is as yet only under trial. I am confident that the amount of subscription, (3s. 6d. per annum each adult) is there made too low.

* See his concise and beautiful address to the working classes of that vicinity, on this subject. It is full of Christian wisdom.

The increase of free members is steadily progressive,—and evidently proceeds from gradual conviction: it is not sudden and very large, as if from fashion or undue influence.

In the rural Dispensary of Wellesbourne, in the eighteen months ending at Christmas, 1830, there was a gradual increase, of from 140 to 225 subscribers. In that period £95 had been spent from the honorary charity fund, in providing broth, meat, wine, linen, nurses, &c. for the sick.

It appeared also that only two or three persons had applied to the honorary members for charity tickets, a circumstance highly gratifying, and shewing that there was no disposition, on the part of the laborer, to solicit gratuitous relief, while by a small contribution he was allowed to provide against the time of illness and necessity.

Every where the arrears of payment are small.

The Duke of Sussex, on having Mr. Smith's plan explained to him, recently by

Dr. Birkbeck, was so pleased with it, that his Royal Highness offered to preside at a public meeting, when the time should arrive for making such institutions more generally known.

A nobleman of the highest rank, in this county, has taken up the subject very warmly, and has assisted the Rural Dispensary, at Tuxford, with a munificent zeal.

The Marquis of Lansdowne, and Earl Spencer, have each founded these establishments on their properties ;—so convinced are those enlightened statesmen that they are based on the true principles of civil and christian polity.

If the working community be benefitted in the way now shewn, it is evident that both the parish rates, and private benevolence—(thus including all ranks of society)—must be proportionably relieved by the self-supporting Dispensary.

It will have been observed, that it provides more effectually for the care of the poor of parishes, in sickness, and offers the means of

remunerating the medical practitioners in a less objectionable manner.

In March 1828, the parish of Atherstone resolved to employ the Dispensary to attend its poor, with the addition of £5 to the usual allowance.

The following certificate is from the visitor of the poor in the parish of Southam.

*Vestry Room, Southam,*
*March 23rd,* 1827.

"*As visitor of the poor in the parish of Southam, I have had full opportunity, during the past year, of becoming acquainted with the effects of the district Dispensary, established by Mr. Smith, in this town; and I think it right to state, that in my opinion, it has diminished the number of applicants for parish relief, and consequently improved the feelings of the laboring part of the population: of upwards of* 200 *persons now subscribing to the above district Dispensary, it appears that one half would, most probably, but for that institution, have been at this time in their respective parish lists.*"

PRESTON MASH, Visitor.

Charles Holt Bracebridge, Esq. Chairman of the meetings, and committee, of the self-supporting Dispensary, at Southam, and a magistrate of the county of Warwick, in an official document states, that "the measures "at length unanimously adopted in confor-"mity with Mr. Smith's views and principles, "have been attended with the most satisfac-"tory and promising results, and I feel, there-"fore, the most decided conviction that such "Dispensaries must prove highly efficient, in "relieving parish burthens, mitigating the "severest privations of the poor, elevating "medical practice, and reputation, and im-"proving the general morals and comforts of "any town or populous district."

C. H. B.

I extract from a public letter, of Mr. H. L. Smith, to the editor of the *Leamington Spa Courier*, the following satisfactory result of his plan, even at this early period of its existence.

"It is probable that 5000 persons have "been already actually rescued from pauper-"ism, by the influence of these establishments:

"and that as many more would have been made "paupers, had not they interposed between "the industrious poor, and their misery and "degradation."

The public, whether regarded collectively, or individually, having now been considered, we have still to see how the interests of the medical profession will be affected.

There will be no eventual advantage to the community, if the natural rights of any portion of it are infringed on. Civil errors of this kind generally correct themselves, but never without private suffering. I confess, that, at first view, I thought that the Southam Dispensary was a scheme to serve the public, at the expence of the medical profession; but now that I am more fully informed, and have considered the subject attentively, I have the best grounds for thinking that they will be benefitted, in a pecuniary sense, and have a yet freer scope, for the display of their well-earned character for humanity and benevolence. In another part of this address, I have briefly advocated the necessity of supporting their respectability.

Every thing shews the importance of securing the good offices of medical men;—some, of liberal minds, misconceive the matter;—but many of the most eminent, are already converts, and are only awaiting the ripening of public opinion.

The excellent founder of these Institutions is a member of the medical profession,—a country surgeon, enjoying the favour and esteem of his brethren;—which he certainly would neither possess nor deserve, had he attacked their means of livelihood.

The medical men who are best acquainted with this scheme, and with the state of professional emoluments, are the most decided in their conviction of its beneficial operation on the latter.

Dr. Arrowsmith, of Coventry, who is physician to one of these institutions, declares, in a letter to me, that "his opinion is firmly "fixed, that they are eminently calculated to "benefit the profession."

Dr. Conolly, of Warwick,* who has for years devoted his mind to these subjects, writes, "that he has been long of opinion, that the "just remuneration of medical men will not "be injured, but that in important respects "his position will be greatly improved."

Dr. Calvert, one of the committee of the London association referred to in the first page of this tract, who has organized one or more of Mr. Smith's Dispensaries, in Northamptonshire, under the auspices of Earl Spencer, "is quite convinced that, on the whole, "medical men will be better off with a self-"supporting Dispensary;—and those with "whom he has communicated are of the same "mind."

The sentiments of few in Britain on these points, are entitled to so much deference as those of Dr. Storer. His acute and philanthropic mind has, for more than half a century, been investigating, and endeavouring to improve, the relations between the sick poor, and the profession: and no one is more watchful over the

* Late Professor of Medicine in the London University.

well-being of the latter. The country is deeply indebted to him for his able dissertation on this new form of Dispensary. He has no difficulty in affirming, that the medical men who have thought that this plan would deprive them of some of their professional gains, have decided upon false premises, and that they are entertaining opinions injurious to their own interests and those of the common weal.

In fact, as far as I know, wherever a self-supporting Dispensary has been set on foot, (save at Coventry,) the medical profession, after due discussion, have consented to take part in it.*

The self-supporting Dispensary at Birmingham, has either ten or twelve surgeons attached to it, and two have been recently admitted.

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*At Coventry, (from local causes I doubt not,) all the medical men, except one, have been, from the first, violent opposers of the self-supporting Dispensary. There are many reasons why the opposition does not cease, even now that the undertaking has had the most brilliant success. One of these is, that the Dispensary has been the means of introducing into the town, two active and well educated rivals :—a most serious injury to the gentlemen already in practice, which might have been avoided by listening to reason in the outset.

They are satisfied with it, for their connexion is not only purely voluntary, but is the result of solicitation, on their parts, as I am informed by Dr. Arrowsmith. The Aston Dispensary, has three medical officers. All the medical men of Rugby in Warwickshire, and Buckby in Northamptonshire, are attached to the establishments of their respective places of abode—and those of the latter with remarkable readiness. In what manner this scheme was received at Derby and Burton-on-Trent, I am not informed; but it flourishes in both towns, according to the latest intelligence.

Indeed it ought to be considered more satisfactory to the profession, to receive a certain gross sum, rather than to send bills in individually, to the grade of persons needing a self-supporting Dispensary, and so to drive them eventually to quackery or parish relief. The surgeons to these institutions (see first Coventry annual report) stand in a more honourable position "than any other medical "men with the same class of patients. The "surgeon is here the friend of the sick, and "has never the painful alternative of losing "his time and medicine;—of leaving or neglect-"ing his patients in the hour of his greatest

"need;—or of enforcing his claim by legal "proceedings." The committee then conclude by observing. "That Dispensaries of this "kind, not only add to the respectability of "the profession, but furnish a greater remu-"neration than can be obtained by any private "practitioners, from persons in the same "condition of life."*

Medical men do not often object, in public at least, to common Dispensaries; but are always their earliest and steadiest patrons. Now, nothing is more certain than that they diminish the general practitioner's income. They attract patients from his surgery, by there existing no effectual check on the introduction of improper persons; while the self-supporting Dispensary possesses a Committee, wholly or half composed of medical men, who sit monthly for this very purpose—to decide on the eligibility of candidates for admission;—an act performed deliberately,—while the applicant is in health, and not at the disadvantage, to which common Dispensaries submit—of having to treat hastily with the

* They expect to divide £250, between their two surgeons this year, for advice and attendance only.

sick—sometimes women or children—in whose favor, every humane heart would give a doubtful vote.

This committee, with a half yearly meeting for revision, if thought needful, is a perfectly secure guarantee, that proper applications only are received.*

In truth, Mr. Smith's plan, if strictly and properly acted on, would include only those of the working classes who are not able to meet the unforeseen expences of sickness, and whom such expences throw on the parish, or plunge into debt and difficulty. The great principle of Mr. Smith's benevolent proposition is, to prevent this degradation: and if the general practitioners say that they ought to receive money from laborers or servants, with very low wages, from poor journeymen, or even from very poor tradesmen,—they must not expect such considerations to be tolerated. (Dr. Conolly).

* Among the persons, such a committee would agree to be eligible, are those who would be permitted to partake of the advantages of a general hospital, a common charitable Dispensary, the savings' bank, a sick club, &c. &c.

The self-supporting Dispensary will not, it is believed, enable the *whole* of the working classes to obtain medical assistance cheaper, but by the mutual assurance entered into, the payments are distributed among the sick, and the healthy;—and so are made easy to the former.

To the classes coming within the operation of this institution, the medical practitioner now gives a great deal of gratuitous advice, and medicines, which are never furnished by the surgeon in Dispensary practice. At present a country surgeon's shop is a public Dispensary at private expence.

The working classes are charged for their medicines at a low rate, and not at all for attendance;—an attendance of fatigue and anxiety,—given perhaps when an opulent neighbour requires his aid, and who may impatiently send for another. These bills are ever precarious, if discharged at all:—they are for the most part paid at a long credit, or by instalments;—and, perhaps, only after harsh measures.

Every surgeon, and especially the juniors in large towns, suffer great losses by bad debts.

I say nothing of bad contracts in farming the parish poor:—they have been already considered.

Surely it has now become very plain from all these statements, that while the advantages conferred on the poor, by the Southam Dispensary, are of incalculable value and never-ending duration, the mutual balancings and compensating effects, of many, and very different causes, will prevent the medical profession from suffering, in any respect, nay rather, that they will be greatly benefited.

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The above statements have been drawn up hastily, and under the pressure of many urgent engagements, but I trust they convey an intelligible, as I know they do a fair and moderate view, of this important subject.

Conciseness being a very principal object, I have confined myself to the simple enunciation of what appears to me to be truth.

Mr. Smith's plan is so simple;—its great principle of self-dependence so adapted to the present exigencies of society; and its results so clearly and largely beneficial, that it does not require a very labored advocacy.

Newark-on-Trent,
September 12th, 1832.

# APPENDIX.

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## Note I.

*The objections to the sale of tickets, are thus stated, by Dr. Storer, in a private communication to me :—*

"The sale of tickets, under the authority "of the committees of benevolent Dispensaries, "is one of the projected improvements on "Mr. Smith's plan. It was adopted at Sheffield "for some years ;—was carried on without "much success, and finally abandoned a few "months ago. A Dispensary, upon a more "general and extensive scale, being judged "necessary in so populous a town and district, "the influential inhabitants were so much "prejudiced against a form of Dispensary

"which had failed, that they came to the reso-
"lution, probably without much enquiry, to
"establish their new Dispensary upon the old
"charitable principle.

"There are so many strong objections to
"the sale of tickets making any part in the
"constitution of a benevolent Dispensary,
"that they ought to be strongly stated, and
"sedulously avoided in every new institution.

1st, "The persons having permission to
"purchase sick tickets, for an occasional pur-
"pose are not subscribers; and may not be
"easily ascertained to be fit objects.

2ndly, "Being otherwise independent
"of the institution, they cannot be supposed
"to entertain any feeling of attachment to it,
"or desire to promote its prosperity and per-
"manence.

3dly, "The expense of the purchase of a
"ticket, leads to the same delay of obtaining
"medical assistance, in the early stage of the
"disease, which is the constant subject of
"complaint and regret in private practice.

4thly, "The ticket is necessarily limited "in its duration, so that if the disease be not "speedily cured, the patient loses the benefit "of medical attendance and medicines, unless "humanity, on the part of the medical atten-"dant, should lead to its continuance.

5thly, "And lastly, in such cases the "medical attendant is exposed to undertake "a difficult task, from the long continuance "and inveteracy of the disease, which in "many instances, will be likely to set art at "defiance."

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## Note II.

*On the Benevolent Dispensary at Coventry.*

At a meeting of the inhabitants of Coventry held two years ago, to settle the form of a Dispensary, to be established there, it was proposed, that in addition to the usual offer of charitable relief, in medicines and medical attendants, to the proper objects—

there should also be admitted a class of free subscribers, from among the laboring population, who might be willing to pay a small weekly sum for themselves and families, to obtain the same advantage of medicines and medical attendance, when ill. The whole medical faculty (one physician excepted) having declared their opposition to the admission of any class of free subscribers, the proposal was abandoned, and a Dispensary established on the usual elemosynary system—and a subscription for its support was entered into. This was continued for a year with ordinary success—when a large majority of the influential inhabitants having become acquainted with the extensive advantages which the laboring population derived from Dispensaries, admitting free subscribers—in the counties of Northampton and Warwick, came to a determination to make the experiment at Coventry. At a meeting in March, 1831, when the other Dispensary had been established about a year, an offer was made of a coalition with the charitable Dispensary: this being rejected, a subscription was opened to defray the expense of the first establishment of a Dispensary, for free members only.

By the 18th of July, 1831, apartments had been provided, fitted up, and opened, to admit the names of free members;—and this was done in the face of a charitable Dispensary, offering and inviting the laboring poor to avail themselves of its benefit. Here follows an abstract of the report of the benevolent Dispensary, made at the general meeting assembled on the 29th of March, 1832, about eight months after it came into operation Free members admitted, from July 18th, to the end of that month, 50;—amount at the end of of August, 150; at the end of September, 390; October, 830;—November, 1150;—December, 1279;—January, 1832, the amount of free members reached 1540; in February, 1930;—in March, 2280. The Committee remark on the steady and regular accession to the number of free members, as giving every prospect of stability to the institution, and congratulate its friends on the advantage it promises to the community, and on the punctuality with which the payments have been made of a penny a week, from every member above fourteen years, and one half-penny weekly from those under that age.

The committee express their belief of the parish having derived much advantage from the necessity being removed, to which industrious and deserving persons are frequently reduced, of becoming burdensome to the parish, from the pressure of illness; which in many cases leads to permanent pauperism.

As the opposition of the medical faculty to the constitution of a Dispensary of this nature, was declared to be founded, on the apprehension of its interfering with the emoluments of their private practice; some conjecture may be formed of the extent of the profits of practice, consisting of patients of the three classes;—described in a note to page 38. By the statement of the committee it follows, that, from the payments of free members, at an average of 1600 members they have received £126. 7s. 11d., which has enabled them to pay for medicines, used in the six months since business has commenced, £45. 10s. 3d.; and for personal attendance by the surgeons, for the same period, £80, 17s. 8d., an amount which they believe considerably to exceed what could have been obtained by medical attendants

from the same order of the population, in private practice; and without being at any expense in furnishing medicine. It is obvious that this moderate emolument is received in a way, much more honourable and satisfactory to a professional man, than by the usual practice of sending bills;—and that the whole system of the medical attendance, as viewed, either by the patient or his medical attendant, is likely to be more satisfactory, and, in the result more successful, where no question of interest can arise between them.

The committee offer an opinion, that the medical gentlemen who opposed this Dispensary, have taken a very perverted view of their own interests. Their short experience enables them to calculate, that the future appropriations for medical attendance, not including medicine, will amount to £200 a-year for 2000 members, and to £250 for 2500 members.

The fund produced by donations and annual subscriptions, is proposed to be kept entirely separate. It has, hitherto; been expended in the original formation of the

establishment;—and will always be a source, from which to defray occasional and extra expenses;—and where a surplus can be depended upon, it ought to be laid out in cordials, or articles of nourishment, for the sick.

The above abstract of the Coventry report is given, as the strongest possible proof of the willingness, or rather, the forwardness of the labouring poor, to avail themselves, when an offer is made to them of any plan, by which their own means and endeavours can be rendered effectual to the benefit of themselves and families, and relieve them from the apprehension of their being degraded into the ranks of pauperism. This is the strongest case that can be produced;—because the free subscribers are almost all working manufacturers, and have come forward, under the circumstances of a very distressed state of the manufacture, and the lowest rate of wages;—and all this in the face of a charitable Dispensary, acting in competition, and inviting all to partake of its assistance without expense.

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The Dispensary, established at Derby, admits three classes: the 1st of free members;—2nd, charitable patients;—3rd, parish paupers.

It has existed since October, 1830. At Midsummer, 1831, the free members amounted to 500;—my last accounts, March 9th, 1832, make the amount of free members 654, and that 12 had been admitted on the preceding week; the payments had been punctually made always in advance.

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Many of the Dispensaries have been in existence and operation for some years, in the counties of Warwick and Northampton, when they were first introduced by the benevolent exertions of Mr. Smith, both in towns, and even in districts of contiguous parishes, where they are all prospering;—and, in every instance that has come to my knowledge, have been joined by a very large proportion of the labouring population, as free members. In all these cases, the parish officers, and other influential persons, declare their belief of the

great benefit conferred on the parish funds by these institutions, and their influence in improving the character and conduct of the laboring classes.

J. S.

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## Note III.

*Regulations extracted from the Rules of the Atherstone Self-Supporting Dispensary.*

It is to be remarked that these Rules ought to be rendered applicable to each institution, the maintenance of the principle, as here detailed, being always held strictly in view:—

The free members consist of mechanics, servants, and poor persons not receiving parish relief.

Persons wishing to become members must leave their names and places of abode at the Dispensary, in writing, one week before one of the monthly committee meetings, which are held the first Monday in every month between ten and eleven o'clock.

The subscription for every member above twelve years old, is one penny a week.

For one or two children of the same family, under twelve years old, one halfpenny a week.

For more than two children in the same family, under twelve years old, one penny a week.

No member is entitled to relief, unless all arrears are paid up.

Every member being one month in arrear, must pay a fine of one penny.

If two months in arrear, a fine of three-pence.

After any member shall be reported three months in arrear, he shall be excluded from the society.

All subscriptions are to commence from the 1st of January in each year, and may be paid in advance.

Members are entitled to Medical and Surgical Advice and Medicines at the Dispensary; and attendance in Midwifery.

A surgeon will attend daily (Sundays excepted) at the Dispensary, between the hours of nine and ten o'clock, between which hours all patients must attend for advice, if able.

Patients not able to attend at the Dispensary, may be visited at their houses, by the medical man they may name, on applying to the dispenser for a note; and have a consultation of surgeons, if necessary.

Patients must find their own bottles, bandages, &c. and must apply at the Dispensary for all medicines, between the hours of one and two o'clock (unless otherwise directed by the surgeon).

In case of accident or sudden illness, members may have immediate medical attendance, on applying to the dispenser for a note.

Any woman requiring a midwife, must give notice to the dispenser six weeks before she expects to be confined.

Any woman wishing to be attended in her confinement by a surgeon, and paying eight shillings to the dispenser before she is confined, may, by giving six weeks notice to the dispenser, and obtaining a note from him, be attended by any of the Dispensary surgeons she may name.

If any patients neglect to attend at the Dispensary for three weeks, without the permission of the surgeon who attends them, such patients will be considered as discharged.

All patients wishing to declare off the medical books, are required to go to the surgeon who attended them at the Dispensary, to state the same and must at the same time deliver in their Prescriptions to be filed.

Children of members may be vaccinated gratis at the Dispensary.

All persons neglecting to comply with the above regulations, will be reported to the committee, and be liable to be discharged.

For further information see the printed rules.

A distinct fund has been raised, by donations and subscriptions of honorary members, to assist the deserving and industrious free members in sickness.

This fund is employed in supplying cordials and linen gratis, and paying nurses appointed under the direction of the medical men, assisted by a Committee of Ladies.

No part of the free members' fund is applied for this purpose.

*May* 5, 1828.

S. AND C. RIDGE, PRINTERS, NEWARK.