

Correspondence between the managers of the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, and Dr. Cormack, relative to the resignation of the latter as one of the physicians of the institution.

Contributors

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Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN THE

MANAGERS OF THE ROYAL INFIRMARY,

EDINBURGH,

(2)

AND

DR. CORMACK,

RELATIVE TO THE RESIGNATION OF THE LATTER AS
ONE OF THE PHYSICIANS OF THE INSTITUTION.

“ The system of teaching Clinical Medicine in the University of Edinburgh is defective.”——“ To render the Clinical School of Edinburgh complete, it appears to me that a Practical should be added to the present Hospital Clinic.”—*Sir James Clarke.*

EDINBURGH:

SUTHERLAND & KNOX, 58, PRINCES STREET.

LONDON: JOHN CHURCHILL.

1845.

CORRESPONDENCE

MANAGERS OF THE ROYAL INFRMANS

REPRINTED

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

At the same time I beg to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

DR. CORNWALL

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

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P R E F A C E .

I DEEM it due to my friends, professional and non-professional, to publish the following Correspondence, relative to my resignation as a Physician to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

At the time I became a candidate for the office, I had in view the status it conferred, and the facilities which it afforded for professional improvement ; but I soon found, that the conscientious discharge of Infirmary duty was often incompatible with due attention to private practice ; and having adopted my profession as a means of livelihood, I foresaw, that unless a change took place in the hour of visit, and in some of the other Hospital arrangements, I should ultimately be obliged to resign.

In commercial appointments, gratuitous services are appreciated at their proper value, and are fast falling into desuetude. Referring to this fact, and to the financial and vital statistics of the Infirmary as compared with similar institutions, I suggested to several of the Managers, that some remuneration to the Physicians was absolutely necessary, if they wished to command adequate attention to the medical wants of the suffering poor entrusted to their charge. I was assured, however, that it would be useless to bring any such proposition before the Board.

I next attempted to effect some change in the system of Clinical instruction, whereby I might have had some indirect

advantage from my appointment. Public Hospitals should be regarded not merely as *curative* institutions, but as establishments calculated to promote the general health of the community, by affording medical students extensive opportunities of minutely observing and studying disease in a collected form; and in no way can this object be fully accomplished, except by Hospital Physicians giving careful conversational courses of bedside tuition to small classes. The privilege of giving *any kind* of Clinical instruction in Edinburgh, has been limited by the Managers to two or more University Professors, and alternately to one of the two Senior Infirmary Physicians. I never could see the propriety of this monopoly. Bedside instruction can—like Practical Chemistry—be taught only by the teacher coming into direct and individual contact with each pupil; and without this kind of tuition all other medical study is valueless. It therefore caused me deep regret to find that the Managers resolved to prevent me—although their concession would not have been without a precedent—from attempting to remedy, to a small extent, a defect of such importance, particularly as its existence in Edinburgh formed the special subject of an excellent pamphlet by Sir James Clarke.

When hesitating what course I ought to follow, in consequence of the declinature of the Managers, I received their communications of the 2d of October, which led to a renewal of the correspondence; and was followed by my resignation.

I have at present contented myself with referring to such matters as are merely personal; but there are many things of public interest connected with the Infirmary, to which I may afterwards refer at some length.

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

CORRESPONDENCE.

No. I.

TO THE HON. THE MANAGERS OF THE
ROYAL INFIRMARY.

131, PRINCES STREET,
August 23, 1845.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

It is my desire early in the ensuing session, to offer private clinical lessons to a class of *not more than ten pupils*. As the greatest part of my instructions must be given in connection with my patients in the hospital, I feel that I cannot with propriety take any steps in this matter without receiving your permission, which I now respectfully ask. What I contemplate is, *not the giving of Clinical Lectures*, but of familiar practical lessons, on the plan, which, in March last, you permitted Dr. Douglas to pursue.

I have only within the last few days learned, that my not discharging Dr. Craigie's duties, during his now long protracted absence from the hospital, has been attributed to a disinclination on my part to undertake the work. I think it right, therefore, to state, for my own justification, and perhaps for your information, that this is not the case. I have never received any communication from you, Dr. Craigie, or my other colleagues, on this subject, which has surprised me; as I believed, that whenever one of your Physicians was unable to discharge his duties for a time, however short, he would intimate the same to you, by whom, as a matter of course, (unless the absence was to be a very short one,) the Physician who,

at the time, was supernumerary by rotation—would be called into active service, the duty assigned to him being mainly regulated by his seniority.

I am,

My Lord and Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

No. II.

TO THE HON. THE MANAGERS OF THE
ROYAL INFIRMARY.

131, PRINCES STREET,
August 30, 1845.

MY LORD, AND GENTLEMEN,

I beg respectfully to solicit an early answer to that part of my communication of the 23d instant, which regards "*private clinical lessons*;" as it will materially affect arrangements which I require to make without delay in reference to the approaching session.

Dr. Beilby and Dr. Pitcairn—deputed by you to consider my letter—met with me at your request, and heard from me a full account of what I have in contemplation. They intimated to me, that as objections had been raised by some of those gentlemen who are immediately interested in keeping up the present restriction on clinical teaching, I ought to inform you in writing, (of what I stated to the Committee in words,) that I did not crave leave to give certificates, which students could pass at the Boards as certificates of attendance upon clinical lectures—that my lessons would in no way interfere with the emoluments which arise from the clinical monopoly; as from private lessons not qualifying for the Boards, students would not come to me, if they could get the same kind of in-

struction by attendance on a course which would be received as part of the regular curricula. When I said in my former letter—"What I contemplate is not the giving of clinical lectures, but of familiar practical lessons," I meant, that I would not be a competitor with the present Clinical Lecturers, as attendance upon them would still be *compulsory*, and upon me purely *voluntary*.

What I wish to gain is not a mere personal end.—To supply the rudiments of Clinical Science to such a great Medical School as Edinburgh still is, *several* private Clinical Teachers are urgently required; and as they are not only tolerated, but much encouraged, in all the Hospitals of Paris, and recently in some of those of London, and Dublin, and in the Infirmary of Glasgow, the number of pupils who fee the Edinburgh Hospital will go on decreasing from year to year; and I am not singular in believing that the reputation of Edinburgh, as a School, for safe practitioners, can only be maintained by several such classes being kept in constant operation. When a student at the Edinburgh Infirmary, I felt painfully what I have heard every other student, with whom I was acquainted, state to have been his own case, that comparatively little every-day practical knowledge could be derived from frequenting your crowded Clinical Wards, and listening to the able discourses which are delivered with reference to the cases twice a week; and this must be so with every pupil who has not previously been taught in familiar and daily lessons how to observe disease. This kind of information cannot be communicated by desultory observations at the bed side; which, however, may be of immense value to those who have been carefully and systematically taught *the rudiments of medicine* at the bed side. I have ventured to trouble you with these remarks, not because I suppose they contain any information; but to point out, that I regard the subject of my request as one involving the interests of the public, and of the students, inasmuch as I wish to enjoy no monopoly, and will never object to the indefinite multiplication of private Clinical Teachers.

Were I only asking a personal favour, I would still consider my claim as more than sufficient; for allow me to remind your Honourable Board, that the appointment to the Medical Department of the Infirmary of Edinburgh, is not only without emolument of any kind, but from the number of patients, and the hours fixed for attendance involving the most valuable part of the day, the faithful discharge of the duties is quite incompatible with even an average private practice. The experience which may be gained by holding the situation is valuable; but unless the physician, when private practice presses, neglect his Hospital patients, or consign them to his clerk and nurses—this experience will be purchased at an immense present sacrifice on his part.

In conclusion, I have only to say, that private Clinical Teaching has, wherever it has been tried, been found of signal benefit to the patients, and the pupils; and of great service to the teacher, in training him for the adequate discharge of the more formal, the more difficult, but not the less necessary duty of Clinical Lecturing.

I am,

My Lord and Gentlemen,

Your very obedient Servant,

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

No. III.

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
1st September 1845.

Dr. CORMACK.
131, PRINCES STREET.

SIR,

I am directed by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to inform you, that, after considering your letters of the

23rd and 30th ult., they resolved, that it was inexpedient to grant the privilege sought by you.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

PETER BELL.

Clerk to the Incorporation.

No. IV.

*Extract from Minutes of the Managers of the Royal Infirmary,
22d September 1845.*

“The Committee beg to recommend in regard to the attendance of
“the Physicians of the Institution, that at all times when any of them
“are absent from their duties, no one shall be entitled to officiate in
“their stead, unless warranted to act in the capacity of Physician by
“an express appointment from the Managers, and that in all such in-
“stances the Junior Physician off duty is the natural person to be ap-
“plied to, and employed, in virtue of his status in the Royal Infirmary.
“—And it is farther recommended that the above regulation should
“apply to the Clinical Physicians as well as to the Ordinary Physicians.”

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
2d October 1845.

SIR,

I am directed by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to transmit to you the foregoing extract from the Minutes of the 22d September, and to state that the Managers, in terms of the Report, beg, that, when any unavoidable absence occurs, information may be immediately made to them.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

PETER BELL.

Dr. CORMACK,
131, PRINCES STREET.

No. V.

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
2d October 1845.

SIR,

I am directed by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to inform you, that in consequence of an application from Dr. Craigie, they have granted him leave of absence for six months, and in consequence, have directed the Physician, now off duty, to be called on; it being understood that Dr. Paterson will attend Dr. Craigie's wards, and that the ordinary rotation, in all other respects, will take effect.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

PETER BELL.

To Dr. CORMACK.

No. VI.

TO THE HON. THE MANAGERS OF THE
ROYAL INFIRMARY.

131, PRINCES STREET,
3d October 1845.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

I have this day received from your Clerk, Mr. Bell, an excerpt from your Minutes, containing a resolution recommending the observance of an original statute of the Infirmary, which I beg to say I have never violated; and would never in any way wish to evade.

Along with the excerpt from your Minutes, I have received an official letter from Mr. Bell, informing me, by your desire, that "in consequence of an application from Dr. Craigie,

you have granted him leave of absence for six months, and in consequence have directed the physician now off duty to be called on; it being understood that Dr. Paterson will attend Dr. Craigie's wards, and that the ordinary rotation in all other respects will take effect."

You are aware that for a long time past, the Senior Physician has unfortunately been unable to give personal attention to his duties, although it is only now that my services are asked in place of his, and that the Second Physician has lectured both as a substitute and as a principal; and thereby established in his own person a monopoly of what was intended by your regulations to be done by two distinct parties. Now, however, that the Senior Physician has formally relinquished his duties for a time, I shall feel obliged by your informing me, if I am to understand that in virtue of my position, as Second Acting Physician, I am for the time I occupy that position, to be allowed to exercise the privilege annexed to that office, of being allowed to give Clinical Lectures alternately with the Senior acting Physician.

I take the liberty of making this inquiry without prejudicing the application, to give Conversational Clinical Instruction, which I formerly preferred in my capacity of Third Physician; and which, to the surprise of every one, was refused by the Managers, without any reason being assigned.

I am,

My Lord and Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

No. VII.

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
6th October 1845.

SIR,

I am directed by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to inform you, that your letter of the 3rd inst. was laid before them this day, and that they had likewise an application dated 4th inst., from Dr. Paterson, requesting to be allowed to remain in charge of his own wards.

After considering the whole subject, the Managers resolved, that Dr. Paterson should be allowed to remain in his own wards, as requested, and that you should take charge of Dr. Craigie's wards, according to the rule of seniority; and, with reference to the other part of your letter, they resolved that this being only a temporary arrangement during the absence of Dr. Craigie, for six months, their understanding is, that Dr. Paterson is to lecture for Dr. Craigie during the period of his temporary absence, and that therefore your services as a lecturer will not at present be required.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

PETER BELL.

Dr. CORMACK,
131, PRINCES STREET.

No. VIII.

TO THE HON. THE MANAGERS OF THE
ROYAL INFIRMARY.

131, PRINCES STREET,
13th October 1845.

GENTLEMEN,

I duly received your letter of the 6th instant, and have given it my most careful consideration.

As there is a determination on your part to prevent me from participating in any of the advantages fairly belonging to the responsible, laborious, and personally hazardous office of Infirmary Physician, I feel that I would be wanting in self-respect, as well as in duty to my family, did I any longer retain the appointment. I now, therefore, resign it into your hands.

I am,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

No. IX.

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
EDINBURGH, 14th October 1845.

SIR,

I am directed by the Managers of the Royal Infirmary to acknowledge receipt of your letter of yesterday's date, resigning your office of Physician to the Infirmary, and to express their regret, that the terms in which the communication was made, put it out of their power to follow any other course than to accept the resignation so tendered. The Managers desired me to convey to you their thanks for your valuable services, during the two years you acted as Physician to the Infirmary and Fever Hospital; and, at the same time, to express their regret that in retiring, you should have done so on a narrative, the accuracy of which, they cannot admit. You say there is a determination on the part of the Managers "to prevent you from participating in any of the advantages fairly belonging to the responsible, laborious, and personally hazardous office of Infirmary Physician," and that it is on account of this alleged determination on their part, that you resign your

office. They feel it due to themselves to state, that you have entirely misapprehended their feelings towards you. They do not now, and never did, entertain the sentiments you impute to them.

Their desire has been to distribute impartial justice to all the officers of the Establishment; and it was only because they conceived that it would have been an act of injustice to Drs. Craigie and Paterson, to have interfered with the temporary arrangement entered into between them, regarding the course of lectures to be delivered during the ensuing six months, that they felt themselves at present obliged to decline giving their sanction to any lectures which you might have contemplated delivering. My letter to you of the 6th inst., rested the declinature entirely on the ground of this being a temporary arrangement, and expressed no opinion whatever adverse to your claims hereafter to lecture every alternate year, in the event of Dr. Craigie being unable to resume his valuable services to the Infirmary, after this temporary arrangement for six months, should have expired.*

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

PETER BELL.

Dr. CORMACK,
131, PRINCES STREET.

* I never doubted but that if Dr. Craigie resigned, I would of necessity be allowed to lecture every alternate year, as I would then have been Second Physician: and my request was, that as during Dr. Craigie's temporary absence, I became Second Acting Physician, I might temporarily enjoy the advantages, as well as undergo the labour of that office. Dr. Craigie lectures this year by his proxy, Dr. Paterson, and next year Dr. Paterson will lecture in his own right; and supposing that Dr. Craigie were now to resign, I would—had I remained in office—have been entitled to lecture two years hence. I would then have been in the fifth year of my service, during two years of which time, I would have been doing the duty, without participating in any of the privileges of the Second Physician. This, in the opinion of the Managers, would be "impartial justice," Why? "Because they conceived it would have been an act of injustice to Drs. Craigie and Paterson to have interfered with the temporary arrangement entered into between them."

No. X.

TO THE HON. THE MANAGERS OF THE
ROYAL INFIRMARY.

131, PRINCES STREET,
16th October 1845.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

I beg explicitly and sincerely to repudiate the charge of imputing to you "sentiments" or "feelings" intentionally adverse to myself.

In resigning my office as Infirmary Physician, I truly stated the ground of it to be your determination to prevent me from enjoying any of the advantages which I conceived to be fairly belonging to my late office. You interdicted me from giving conversational Clinical Instruction to ten pupils, to whom, in my anxiety to conciliate Dr. Craigie, Dr. Paterson, and the University Professors, I pledged myself that I would give no formal lectures, and no Clinical Certificates. During a long period, when Dr. Alison and Dr. Christison were unable to do the whole duty of the Clinical Wards, and when I was not on duty, you delegated certain of these Wards to Dr. Bennett, (who is not one of the Physicians of the Infirmary,) without making any communication to me on the subject. You did not call on me to perform Hospital duty when Dr. Craigie ceased to visit his Wards months ago, and went to Germany; but only when you authorized Dr. Paterson to lecture in room of him; that is to say, when at Dr. Paterson's request, you assigned to me Dr. Craigie's Wards, and to Dr. Paterson, Dr. Craigie's privileges. In acting thus, your only desire was to be courteous, and "to distribute impartial justice to all the officers of the Establishment:" and you dealt with me not as a private gentleman, but as an individual holding a certain appointment.

I resigned not because I thought that the sentiments of the Managers were personally unfriendly to me, but because I felt

that I would be wanting in self-respect as well as in duty to my family, did I retain the appointment upon the footing which you deemed "impartial and just."

Trusting that this explanation will satisfy you,

I am,

My Lord and Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN ROSE CORMACK.