

Third report of the Committee of the Convention of Poor-Law Medical Officers.

Contributors

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

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X

THE COMMITTEE

THIRD REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

THOMAS HOOPER, M.D., Chairman, Bedford-square.
THOMAS MARTIN, Esq., Treasurer, (Regent).

OF THE

CONVENTION

POOR-LAW MEDICAL OFFICERS.

AUGUST,

1850.

NOTICE.—It is requested that all communications be addressed to CHAS. F. A. LOWN, Esq. (Honorary Secretary), 4, Hanover-square, and that
COMMITTEE-ROOM—4, HANOVER-SQUARE.

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NOTICE.—It is requested that all communications be addressed to CHAS. F. J. LORD, Esq. (Honorary Secretary), 4, Hanover-square, and that all Post Office Orders be made payable at the Reigate Post Office, to THOS. MARTIN, Esq., Treasurer, Reigate.

REPORT.

It will be remembered that at the Public Meeting presided over by Lord Ashley, in February, 1849, a comprehensive petition to Parliament was unanimously signed, and subsequently presented to the House of Commons by the noble lord, numerous copies of which were obtained through the Printing Committee, and circulated throughout the country. Many letters which were received in consequence of this Public Meeting required to be fully and publicly recorded; therefore the opinions and suggestions contained in them were abstracted, and appended, as addenda, to the Report, for publication in the medical journals. They were subsequently circulated in the form of a tract, accompanied by a short address to the three thousand medical officers. To strengthen this general petition, it was deemed advisable to obtain from various parts of the country separate short petitions, in furtherance of the objects of the convention. A letter was therefore sent to one medical officer in each union, with a printed form of petition to be copied and signed by the medical officers in the respective districts throughout England and Wales. Nearly fifty of these were well signed, and returned to the Committee, some of which were presented by Lord Ashley; others by Mr. Aglionby, Serjeant Talfourd, and Mr. Forster. Similar petitions were also obtained by various gentlemen in the metropolitan and rural districts. Mr. Wells, of Crewkerne, obtained eight petitions in favour of the objects contemplated, two of which were from the medical officers of the Chard and Yeovil Union; these were presented to the House by the

respective Members of the immediate districts from whence they came. Several important petitions, signed by the clergy, magistrates, and chairmen of the Boards of Guardians, as well as by medical officers, were likewise obtained from Buckinghamshire. Owing to the exertions of Mr. G. Cowley, the attention of Mr. Disraeli was drawn to the subject and Mr. Cowley and the Honorary Secretary had two long interviews with that honourable gentleman, when he undertook not only to present the petitions, but also to put, in the House of Commons, some questions to the President of the Poor-law Board, respecting the payment to union surgeons for sanitary duties. He expressed a general interest in the subject, and stated his intention of carefully considering it during the recess, that he might be able to append an amended system of Poor-law medical relief to a measure which would deal generally with certain taxations to be *removed from local to national* payment. The Poor-law surgeons have reason to regret that the honourable Member did not accomplish the object he contemplated. If many individuals could be found as active in the cause as Mr. Cowley, Mr. Wells, and a few others, union surgeons would by this time have become as successful in their endeavours as a much smaller body of men,—the clerks of turnpike trusts,—who by uniting their political influence throughout the entire of England, induced the great body of country Members to oppose the General Turnpike Bill, and compelled the Government, in spite of its utmost efforts, to withdraw that obnoxious measure.

In the Committee's communications with their constituents, some variety of opinion has necessarily occurred relative to given measures. One gentleman expressed displeasure that the larger towns had not been more prominently invited to co-operate with the Convention. Another, representing a Medico-Chirurgical Society in an eastern county, declined giving sundry small subscriptions intrusted to him for the Convention, in consequence of his differing *in toto* from the views expressed at the Public Meeting. The Committee replied that they regretted that a difference in opinion, as to *details*, should arise among men interested in a general

cause; they inquired, as matter of information which might assist in guiding their proceedings for the general good, what were the special views entertained by the Society in question; and hoped that no minor shade of opinion would be allowed to damage the common cause. The Committee have not been favoured with further communication from the Society. There has generally prevailed much unanimity among the comparatively few gentlemen who have *had* zeal and *made* leisure *enough* to take a lively interest in the movement.

With the view of enlarging their operations and ensuring greater uniformity of action and concentration of organized efforts, it was suggested to the Committee to attempt the formation of a Poor-law Medical League, with branch associations in the principal towns and cities. After much deliberation, it was determined to issue a circular letter, with schedule, for the purpose of ascertaining the opinions of each Poor-law medical officer. Upon examining the answers, it appeared there were in favour of the proposed Association, 178; doubtful as to the usefulness or probable success of the plans, 39; refusals to co-operate or contribute one shilling monthly, 46. So that only 263 answers were received to more than 3,000 applications; hence, it was obvious that the idea of forming an extensive or efficient League as proposed, could no longer be entertained. The offers of co-operation and assistance, given by so many gentlemen, were however deemed so valuable, that attempts were made to secure their aid as Honorary Local Secretaries. Letters were addressed to many of the 178, inviting their co-operation in this capacity. It was, however, soon found that such officers, scattered over a wide area, with ill-defined duties, and wanting leisure to act, as well as neighbouring coadjutors to act with, were, in the majority of instances, unable to raise even a local agitation; hence the idea of forming the Association, or of collecting any permanent advantage from the comparatively small number of gentlemen who were willing to aid in the cause, was reluctantly abandoned by the Committee. Perhaps it may hereafter be found that the best mode of gaining the ends of the Convention will be to secure the services of one

paid officer with an Assistant-Secretary devoted to the business of the Convention. Such an agent, at one time busy in London, and more particularly seeking parliamentary influence; and at others travelling over the country, would do much by persuasion and personal exertion. None but an experienced, zealous, medical man could thoroughly do this, and no one engaged in practice could make such a sacrifice. Hence, even this mode is beset with difficulties.

The lamented death of the late President of the Poor-law Board, Mr. C. Buller, rendered it expedient for the Committee to seek an interview, by deputation, with his successor, the Hon. M. T. Baines, Esq., shortly after his appointment, to learn his opinion respecting the objects of the Convention.

Prior to this interview taking place, it was judged advisable to ascertain if any adequate power were vested in the President to grant redress to the Union surgeons by enforcing from the guardians—if not an improved system of Poor-law medical relief, at least a better scale of remuneration, with permanency of office; and being satisfied with the result of their inquiries, a Deputation waited on the President, on the 24th May, 1849, when Mr. Vallance forcibly stated the general case. The President replied that he was perfectly aware of the hardships under which the Union surgeons laboured, and felt very desirous to have them removed. His power, however, had been very much overrated; he had been informed that Mr. Buller, in considering the question, found the difficulties increased as he proceeded. An extension of the powers of the Commission, so as to allow such measures as were sought in the memorial to Sir George Grey, could only come through Parliament;—that in Parliament, many of the Members were “*ex-officio*” guardians, watching every proposed change with attention, while from local knowledge in their own districts they were able to speak to facts, and took an interest in the proceedings of the Board of Guardians;—that other parties than medical men, manifesting co-operation by joining in the petitions, would be likely to have considerable weight with the Legislature; and—that the question of finance was the great difficulty. Throughout the country the demands upon

the rates had lately been increasing; he had no reason to believe that any mode of administering medical relief, except as now, through the Boards of Guardians, would be acceptable to the country in general. The plan of placing the entire cost on the Consolidated Fund was one which Sir George Grey might deal with. The President concluded by saying, that being himself new in office he could not speak positively as to the extent of his present authority, and assured the Deputation that he was quite prepared to view the position of the medical officers as one calling for relief, and that he would give the subject his best consideration. From this reply of the President, your Committee had but little hope that he would enforce his powers to better the condition of medical officers.

The Committee next considered the propriety of again addressing the medical corporations, that they might at least memorialize the Poor-law Board in favour of the *three* leading points of an amended system of Poor-law medical relief, namely,—permanency of office,—responsibility to medical authority, and—payment proportionate to duties performed, as appended to the memorial to Sir George Grey, and embodied in the general petition to Parliament. This step was pressed upon the Corporations as one conducive to the interests of the sick poor, of the medical profession generally, (but of the Union surgeons more especially,) and of society at large.

The Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, having made some exertions the previous year, declined any further interference in the matter.

The Apothecaries' Company having applied for additional information on the mode of redress proposed by the Committee, the Honorary Secretary was instructed to forward the required explanation, and at the same time to express the desire of the Committee to receive the support of the Society in favour of the three principal points contained in the memorial to Sir George Grey, and to urge the Society to appeal strongly to the Poor-law Board on the subject, more especially as the orders of the General Board of Health were felt to be particularly oppressive and unjust. The Committee

have not heard that any further notice of the subject has been taken by the Worshipful Company.

The Poor-law medical officers will not fail to observe that no disposition is shown by any of the existing medical corporations *strenuously* to labour for the amendment of a system admitted by themselves to be oppressive, to at least 3,000 of their professional brethren in office, and indirectly to every member of the whole profession.

Unsupported by the medical bodies alluded to, the Committee availed themselves of an admirable letter of the Hon. and Rev. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, as originally published in the *Times*, under the signature of S. G. O., on the position of medical officers of Unions. Five thousand copies of this letter, with the permitted use of the author's name, were printed and circulated. They were issued with a short address, urging the clergy and magistrates, on the score of policy, justice and humanity, to forward the general objects of the Convention by petitioning Parliament in favour of an improved system.

The National Institute of Medicine, Surgery and Midwifery having convened a Medical Conference and invited attendance from public bodies, delegates from the Committee were appointed to be present, in order to watch more specially such matters of proposed legislation as bore upon Poor-law Medical Relief, it being considered that the interests of the Union surgeons were identified with a healthy legislation which should govern the profession.

Several members of the Convention volunteered to be present at the annual meeting of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association, which took place at Worcester, with a view of obtaining support in aid of the Union surgeons. The following resolution having been proposed by Dr. Cowan, of Reading, and seconded by William Cantrell, Esq., of Wirksworth, was unanimously adopted :

“That this meeting having again taken into consideration the position of Poor-law medical officers, and dwelt especially upon the additional unrequited duties pressed upon them for sanitary purposes, feel it right now, when public attention is directed to the subject, and a disposition

manifested to consider the alleged grievances, *again* to memorialize the Poor-law Board, and petition Parliament to adopt a system of Poor-law medical relief with regulations relating to sanitary matters, at once favourable to the poor, just to the medical officers, and equitable to the rate-payers."

It was considered by some gentlemen who watched the proceedings at Worcester, that even the council of this Association were becoming weary of the yearly recitals which gave evidence of the want of unity among the members of the profession on the subject.

About this period, the kingdom was alarmed by the awful visitation of the cholera: every journal which was published gave some instance of the strong sense of injustice entertained by the medical officers at the unrequited labours demanded from them by the guardians under the orders of the General Board of Health.

The power of the Poor-law Board to grant relief being ascertained, a strong letter was addressed to the President, begging him to issue a summary order in accordance with the authority vested in the Poor-law Board, to the end that the evils pressing on the Union surgeons in their attendance on the sick poor might be abolished. On the same day a letter was forwarded to the General Board of Health, calling attention to the increased and new character of the duties imposed on the medical officers by the recent orders of that Board relative to the cholera, and requesting an interview by deputation. A compliance with this request was declined on the ground that the obligation to grant remuneration for the special services required rested with the Poor-law Board and the local guardians. The memorial and letter, as sent by the Committee, with the unsatisfactory and evasive answer of the Poor-law Board, are as follow:

(COPY.)

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE POOR-LAW BOARD.

SIR,—The Poor-law Board having the power, as evidenced by the 4th and 5th William IV. cap. lxxvi. clause 46, and the 10th and 11th Victoria, cap. ix. clause 10, "to regulate, when they may see occasion, the amount of salaries payable to officers respectively," the Committee of

the Convention of Poor-law Union Surgeons take leave to memorialize you, who have already considered the position of Poor-law medical officers, that you may issue such orders as may secure a payment to them in accordance with the extent of their duties, and the costs incident to the supply of medicines and the maintenance of establishments needful for an efficient administration of medical relief to the sick poor.

Although your memorialists have expressed the opinion that a Board specially constituted for the supervision, control, and payment of Poor-law medical relief, now extended to near three millions of Her Majesty's subjects in England and Wales, with the whole cost thereof derived from the Consolidated Fund, would be the best means to secure justice to the Union surgeons, and the fullest advantage to the sick poor, they are willing to waive for the present, this view of the subject under a sense of the difficulties which beset its immediate introduction.

They beg, however, in the most earnest manner, respectfully to submit to you, that an exercise of the authority and power of the Poor-law Board, as shown to exist in the Acts alluded to, would be equal to such a diminution of their admitted grievances, as might render their tenure of office and the rigorous performance of their obligations, less painful and humiliating to themselves, and in many ways more beneficial to the suffering poor.

They therefore respectfully suggest, 1st. That henceforth the Poor-law Board should, by a special order, direct that all appointments of medical officers be as durable as their good conduct and capability and willingness to continue therein.

2nd. That the amount of payment be based on a calculation of the number of cases attended in a given District during the past three years. That the fixed salaries be arrived at by determining 6s. 6d. as the average sum to be paid per case throughout the country.

That the provisions of the medical order of 1842 for extras be enforced in all Unions, and under all circumstances be made binding, except that the operations performed in the house be awarded the same fees allowed to out-door cases. Also, that a special provision be forthwith made to secure a just compensation, for the enormous extra labours which are entailed upon the Union surgeons, through the Board of Health, under its general powers and regulations, more particularly during the presence of cholera or other epidemics.

We beg to call your attention to the subjoined copy of a letter recently received from the General Board of Health on the subject.

We have the honour to be,

Yours, very respectfully,

THOMAS HODGKIN, M.D., *Chairman.*

CHAS. F. JAS. LORD, *Hon. Sec.*

4, HANOVER-SQUARE,

July 23, 1849.

POOR-LAW BOARD, SOMERSET-HOUSE,

August 1, 1849.

GENTLEMEN,—I am directed by the Poor-law Board to acknowledge the receipt of the communication signed by you on behalf of the "Committee of the Convention of Poor-law Medical Officers," and to inform you that the suggestions contained in the communication, shall receive the best consideration of the Board.

The Committee are, however, so well acquainted with the subject of Poor-law medical relief, that it is unnecessary for the Board to point out to it the difficulties which exist to any immediate and general alteration or modification of the present system.

As regards the suggestion of the Committee, "that a special provision be forthwith made to secure a just compensation for the enormous extra labours which are entailed upon the Union surgeons through the Board of Health, under its general powers and regulations, more particularly during the presence of cholera," I am directed to state that the Poor-law Board are not empowered to lay down any prospective scale of remuneration for such services, but that of granting a reasonable compensation on account of extraordinary services is vested in the guardians, with the approval of this Board, by the proviso to Article 172 of the General Consolidated Order, and that such power has already been acted upon in several instances.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

W. G. LUMLEY, *Assistant Sec.*

To THOS. HODGKIN, Esq., and CHAS. F. J. LORD, Esq.

Foiled in their efforts to obtain even an interview with one Board, or any redress from either, the Committee, on the 23rd of December, wrote to the Honourable Mr. Baines respecting the conflicting orders of the Board of Health and the Poor-law Board, calling his attention generally to the subject of medical relief, more especially to the imposition of sanitary duties during the recent epidemic, and requesting to know if any and what remedial measures were proposed. An answer to this communication was received on the 2nd of January, with the official assurance that the letter would receive the consideration of the Board. Having received no further notice on the subject, the Committee again sought an interview by deputation with the President.

It may be well here to advert to a meeting of the Committee, which was convened in October, at the request of

several members, to specially consider the propriety of their endeavouring to place the administration of medical relief to the destitute poor under the control of the Board of Health. From the correspondence just recorded, it appears that the Poor-law Board had power to regulate the *salaries* of medical officers, and also to enforce the performance of such duties on their part as the guardians, under recent authority of the Health Board, were obliged to see carried out. At the same time the guardians *would not*, and the Board of Health *could not*, award additional recompense for such additional labours, which were evidently beyond the letter, and even the spirit of the medical officers' contract. It was obvious that the Poor-law Board rather shunned grappling with the question, as it would place them too often in antagonism with the Boards of Guardians. On the other side, should the management of the medical attendance on the sick poor be transferred to the General Board of Health, there was no evidence that the Union medical officers would be benefited; it was therefore deemed advisable not to hamper the Committee by a premature application to that Board, but to wait the development of events, and in the interim to ascertain from the Poor-law Board and from the Union surgeons their opinion on the matter. With this latter object, an advertisement was several times inserted in the medical and daily journals. The answers were not very numerous, but they were singularly unanimous in approving of the proposal for the transfer of the control of the medical staff of the sick poor to the Board of Health. In consequence of the retirement of the Earl of Carlisle from that Board, and its then peculiarly unsettled state, particularly as regarded the due proportion of medical knowledge and influence, it was determined to postpone the proposed application on the subject.

The Committee obtained their second interview with the President of the Poor-law Board on the 2nd Feb., 1850. On this occasion general evils complained of were glanced at, but especial allusion was made to the letter forwarded by the Committee on the 20th of December, in relation to the imposition of extra work on medical officers during the cholera through

the orders of the Poor-law Board and the General Board of Health. Respecting the *power* vested in the Board to *order* better payment to medical officers, the words of the Act under which the President was appointed and the Board established were quoted and pointedly dwelt upon. The President said he "considered that he must, in some degree, have been misunderstood on a former interview; he admitted that he had the requisite power which on many occasions had been exercised favourably toward the medical officers, but with respect to cholera, and other epidemics, the Poor-law Board had not the power to lay down any scale of remuneration in anticipation of extraordinary services, but the power of granting reasonable remuneration for the same was vested in the guardians, and that whenever an increase of salary or payment was proposed by them, the Poor-law Board had always much pleasure in confirming the same."

The Deputation urged the Poor-law Board, "seriously and in earnest," to apply themselves to the construction of a new and a better system of Medical Relief; one great evil of the present system being the absence of a Medical Commissioner. It had been suggested to the Committee by gentlemen who had devoted much attention to the matter, that medical aid administered to the sick poor should be entirely separated from Poor-law relief, and the arrangements connected therewith transferred to the General Board of Health, whose officers the Poor-law surgeons had in some measure become during the period the Contagious Diseases Prevention Act was in force. That Board had, through the Boards of Guardians, already required the medical officers of Unions to perform sanitary duties: if the power of paying was added, they would easily be qualified to effect the change under consideration. It was believed that such an entire transference of the charge of the sick poor would be attended with beneficial results. A member of the Deputation asked the President if, in his opinion, such a change might not be effected, so as to combine justice and a due regard to finance. The President, in reply, begged to be excused expressing an opinion on this point, as the subject was quite new to him, and added that he was not in a position to pledge

himself to any particular course, observing, that great difficulties were in the way of a satisfactory adjustment.

During the interview, some conversation arose relative to the proposed Superannuation Fund Bill, and the rumour that the medical officers were not to be embraced in its provisions. The Deputation stated that they had not any authority from their constituents to interfere on the point, although they felt it right thus far to notice it, in order that the Board might devise some means of enabling the medical officers to take advantage of such fund if they should so wish. Mr. Nichols, a member of the Board, remarked that such a view had suggested itself to the Board, and promised that due consideration should be given to the subject.

Shortly after this interview, the Committee received a letter from Dr. Bainbridge, stating that some gentlemen had met at his house, to consider the Superannuation Fund Bill, and had formed a Committee, a deputation from which sought an interview with the Committee of the Convention. Two interviews having taken place between the Deputation and the Committee, resolutions in favour of the object sought, were agreed to and published in the medical journals.

The National Institute having addressed a circular letter to the Convention, with a copy of a resolution relative to the General Meeting of the profession, held on the 11th April last, on the subject of medical reform, inviting the attendance of the Poor-law medical staff, it was resolved that an advertisement should be sent to the medical and other journals, drawing the attention of the Union surgeons to the objects of the meeting, and requesting their attendance on that occasion.

After the early and repeated assurances of sympathy, and of a desire to ameliorate the status of the Union surgeons made by the Poor-law Board, the Committee were not prepared to receive an account of the treatment exercised by that Board toward the surgeons of the Holborn Union. In this case, not only has a reduction of salary to so low an amount as eightpence per case been *sanctioned*, but it was actually met by a suggestion from the Poor-law Board for even a *further* diminution of the payment, and an *augmentation* of the work of the medical officers.

In the Stepney Union, the guardians determined to intrust the medical treatment of the poor to the exclusive care of three medical officers, *unconnected* with private practice. This plan was soon found to work so badly, that one of the newly-appointed surgeons, applied to the guardians for assistance, stating that on some days he was obliged to neglect from thirty to forty patients. Again and again the subject was discussed by the Board of Guardians, till at one meeting the rector said, "I thought the surgeons treated us badly, but now I feel we treat *them shamefully* ! "

One of the medical officers has already resigned. Advertisements have been issued, which have been met by one applicant only, who retired as soon as his duties were fully enumerated to him in the board-room, after his election. The guardians have therefore been reduced to the necessity of entering into negotiations with such local medical men as they can induce to assist them in the difficulty, produced by their defective arrangements. In illustration of the oppressive and impracticable nature of the duties demanded of the medical officers of that Union, it may be mentioned that one of them was summoned to attend six cases of midwifery, requiring *immediate* assistance, in distant parts of his district, in one day.*

Time after time, the Boards of Guardians have set at nought the consolidated order requiring payment for extras ; and also have repeatedly shown themselves, as in the Stepney, Leighton Buzzard, and Ledbury Unions, willing to intrust the care of the sick poor to any speculative enterpriser who possesses a diploma.

The Committee having been unsuccessful in their repeated attempts to obtain redress through the Poor-law Board, determined to place the general position of the Union surgeons before the public, by advertisements in the daily journals. The following statement was ultimately agreed to, but not without some strong expressions by many in the Committee that the *whole* staff should signify their determination to

* Since the above was written another of the medical officers of the Stepney Union has resigned his office, and there is reason to believe the other will follow his example.

resign office simultaneously, in case the evils thus made manifest should not be reformed by the end of another year :

(Copy of Advertisement.)

THE POOR-LAW BOARD.

The Sick Poor, their Medical Attendants, and the Rate-payers.

In England and Wales, a staff comprising more than 3,000 professional gentlemen, acting under the Poor law Board, administers relief during penury, disease, and suffering, to nearly 3,000,000 of human beings.

The demands made upon the time, skill, and health, of these medical officers, who are often called, single-handed, to succour nature under the most appalling calamities to which humanity is subject, are urgent, frequent, and perilous.

This class of gentlemen are nominally requited from a fund annually raised for the poor, amounting to nearly eight millions sterling. Called into active service by the humanity and wisdom of the nation, they have been considered as paid by £197,953, averaging per case, as shown by above eight hundred promiscuous returns, in country districts, 2s. 7d., and 1s. 6½d. for metropolitan districts, being less than half the cost of drugs alone in hospitals. One half of this amount is paid by the parishes, the other out of the Consolidated Fund.

Impelled by a sense of renewed and continued oppression and misrule, injurious to themselves and also to the sick poor and to the rate-payers, the Poor-law medical officers have often laboured for the reform of the vicious system.

Convinced of the existence of these evils opposed to justice, humanity, and science, Lord Ashley (aided by the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Guthrie, then president of the College of Surgeons) obtained a parliamentary inquiry through a select committee in 1844. Strong and conclusive as was the evidence then obtained, little, if any, amelioration ensued; no enactment passed the legislature to correct the abuses thus made manifest. Multiplied aggressions and miseries, needlessly incurred through false economy, found another organ by which to give utterance to their complaints in the Convention which was established in October, 1847, over the first annual meeting of which Lord Ashley presided.

Petitions to Parliament from various classes of society have been numerous and frequent. Deputations have waited on the Home Secretary of State, and again and again on the Poor-law Board. These deputations have been received with official politeness, and with assurances of sympathy and promises of consideration.

More recently, orders have emanated from the Poor-law Board urging curtailment of expenditure, sanctioning deviations from their consolidated order, and suggesting a further reduction of salaries to medical officers, even bringing them down in one metropolitan Union to about 8d. per case.

Such appreciation of the services of professional men, who are expected to be gentlemen of education, ill becomes a Board, one of whose secretaries, Lord Ebrington, receives a salary of £1,500 per annum, for doing that which occupies but a moderate portion of his time, reserved from parliamentary and other duties.

The Poor-law Union surgeons make this appeal to the public, and to the press more especially, satisfied that such a system cannot long be maintained when fully brought under public notice, and exposed to general condemnation.

By order of the Committee,

THOMAS HODGKIN, M.D., *Chairman.*

CHAS. F. J. LORD, *Honorary Secretary.*

4, Hanover-square, May 14, 1850.

It was subsequently resolved, that a thousand copies of this advertisement should be printed, and that one should be forwarded to each Member of Parliament, with a note respectfully drawing attention to the subject of Poor-law Medical Relief. Another attempt, with a similar object, was made last month, by advertising in the daily journals the case of "*Hyet, v. Cheltenham Guardians*," and coupling with it the opinion of Mr. Justice Patteson, as expressed in his charge to the jury,—“That no class of men in the kingdom were so hard worked and badly paid as the Union surgeons.” In this case the guardians offered as recompense £6, and subsequently paid into court, under fear of the law, £20 for services, for which even a jury composed of tradesmen awarded £50. It has been proposed to publish a series of similar short statements of figures and facts, in order that the public may see how far a ground of complaint is established, and the certainty that exists that, under a system so essentially vicious, the poor must frequently suffer.

A strong case was furnished through the treatment received by Mr Tatham, a medical officer of the Huddersfield Union. A fever hospital was taken, during an epidemic, by a portion of the guardians, who instructed Mr. Tatham, in addition to his usual duties, to attend to the hospital; of 160 cases attended, “77 were removals from *other medical districts* by *the guardians themselves*; these guardians reported to the general body at the next meeting what they had done, and

its propriety was unanimously acquiesced in; *but no entry of that acquiescence was made in the Minute-book of the Board.*" Mr. Tatham brought an action for compensation to the amount of £106 3s. 6d. A written protest against the defence of this action was made by the Chairman, also by a guardian who had been six years Chairman, and four out of five of the other Huddersfield guardians.

At the trial, it was not alleged that the sum for compensation was excessive; but it was pleaded, that there was no written order of the guardians on the resolution-book, directing him to attend the Fever Hospital; *and that therefore he had no claim for compensation.* Mr. Tatham was punished *for the neglect of the guardians*, and nearly the whole salary he had received during the first five years of his engagement as medical officer was swallowed up in losses, and matters connected with the prosecution of the suit, and subsequent investigations. These "losses and costs," were estimated at £400. The judge, Baron Alderson, the jury, and the entire court, were indignant at the wrong perpetrated against Mr. Tatham. Mr. Baines, who led for the defence, was heartily ashamed of his brief. Although the judge was obliged to pronounce against Mr. Tatham on the legal point, he characterised the conduct of the defendants as disgraceful; and further added, "It will be a disgrace to the town of Huddersfield if they allow Mr. Tatham to be one shilling out of pocket. A public subscription ought to be set on foot, not only to defray that gentleman's expenses, but also to compensate him for his services to the poor, and for the great risk of life he has incurred in attending to the fever cases. If I were an inhabitant of Huddersfield, I would readily subscribe to it."

The Committee having deemed it advisable to seek an interview with Capt. Sir G. R. Pechell, Bart., R.N., M.P., with the view of bringing the subject of Poor-law Medical Relief before the House of Commons during the present session, a Deputation was appointed for that purpose. The reply of the hon. baronet to the communication sent by the Honorary Secretary was, "that in consequence of his being

obliged to leave town, he was unable to fix a time for receiving the Deputation."

The Committee regret that they must point to the repeatedly unsuccessful efforts which have been made to accomplish the objects for which they have been labouring, rather than to any positive advantage obtained by their exertions. However discouraging (at present) this want of success may appear, the cause in which the Convention is embarked is good, and there is reason to hope that the efforts of the Union medical officers to ameliorate their present condition will ultimately prove successful. It must, nevertheless be stated, that if the whole body of Union surgeons, who feel so justly dissatisfied with their position and remuneration, had agitated the public mind, and concentrated their political influence on the Members of Parliament in their respective districts, the Committee would now have had to speak of success rather than of hope deferred.

Reviewing the successive steps set forth in this Report and coupling therewith the experience derived from nearly three years' exertions, the Committee beg to state their opinion, that—

1st. The *disjointed efforts* made by them with much zeal during the last two years, if continued, cannot do more than keep up a teasing agitation, wasting the time and paining the feelings of the few gentlemen who regularly devote themselves to the work.

2nd. That there is no reason to think that the Poor-law Board will ever take steps to remedy the hardships of the Union surgeons, and to correct the misrule under which they serve and the sick poor suffer, until they can be forced to such a measure. A cessation of the present undue professional competition must take place, a loud voice with a resolute purpose must be raised up in the Commons, and well supported on the hustings in every borough and county. It is not too much to state that the medical profession should be equal, by their numbers as well as by their rightful influence, to accomplish what is equally due to themselves, the sick poor, and the rate-payers.

3rd. That the attempts now being made by the Poor-law

Board to engage medical officers without private practice for the service of the poor, could not without much difficulty be successfully applied to rural districts. The plan of engaging a class of gentlemen for exclusive attendance on the poor is of such very questionable advantage, that the Poor-law Relief Committee reporting to the House of Commons in August, 1838, said "They felt it to be most important that the poor should be perfectly satisfied with their medical attendants, and with this view it appears to be desirable, as indeed is almost always the case, that the *care of the poor should be confided to the same person who is in the habit of visiting their richer neighbours.*" Such an arrangement as that attempted to be carried out by the Poor-law Board will only work well for the public or for the profession when the duties of Union surgeons shall be blended with those of Officers of Health, under the control of the General Board of Health, or some other authority, independent of the guardians and Poor-law Board, and adequately paid for by the State.

4th. That as the public are more convinced than formerly of the false position in which the Union surgeon is placed, they will be satisfied that it is their duty to provide *adequate remuneration* and better regulations for the prevention as well as for the cure of disease among the poor. Such provisions are due from the State on the score of justice, humanity, and sound economy.

As their past efforts promise some beneficial results, the Committee are somewhat reluctant to recommend the dispersing of an Association, which was considered as owing its very *birth* to the existence of *great*, perhaps insuperable difficulties. They, however, desire to leave their future course, or even existence, in the hands of their constituents, regretting only that they have not been able to accomplish more; and they express a readiness to continue or rather to *extend operations*, if the body of Union surgeons will pledge a more uniform co-operation.

THOMAS HODGKIN, M.D., *Chairman.*
CHARLES F. J. LORD, *Hon. Secretary.*

Treasurer's Report.

THOMAS MARTIN, TREASURER, IN ACCOUNT WITH THE POOR-LAW
MEDICAL OFFICERS' COMMITTEE.

RECEIPTS.			EXPENDITURE.		
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Amount of Subscriptions received since the last Account commencing 19th February, 1849 ..	244	2 3	Balance due to the Treasurer at the last Account	22	17 9½
			Advertisements.....	28	8 0
			Postage-stamps.....	28	18 0
			Printing and Stationery	53	19 1
			Petty Cash and Miscellaneous Expenses	12	15 11
			Mr. Williams's Salary and occasional assistance	47	0 0
			Messrs. Fuller and Saltwell, Solicitors	1	1 0
			Balance in Treasurer's hands ...	49	2 5½
	£244	2 3		£244	2 3

THE Committee reprint the Resolutions which were appended to the Memorial forwarded to Sir George Grey, Bart., on the 26th March, 1848, as illustrative of the objects sought to be attained by the Committee for the amelioration of the present system of Poor-law Medical Relief:

1st.—“That in the opinion of your Memorialists, it is essential that the payment of medical officers should be by a fixed salary, exclusive of fees for midwifery and important surgical cases.

2nd.—“That the amount of salary might justly be fixed,—either by an estimate of the average of cases attended during a series of past years, considered in connection with the area of the medical district; or by the payment of a certain sum per head on the population, corrected by the consideration of the relative density and poverty of the district.

3rd.—“That making every allowance for the difference which must exist in the remuneration of private and public practice, it would not be just that the salary should be based on a less amount than 6s. 6d. per case, with the charge varying with the area.

4th.—“That medical officers of workhouses should be paid a separate salary, based on the average number of inmates.

5th.—“That it is just and proper, and conducive to the interests of the poor, that an extra payment should be made, as at present, for Midwifery and for important surgical cases; and that it appears to your Memorialists advisable that the fees should be paid for cases occurring in workhouses, as well as in out-door cases.

6th.—“That to the cases of surgery requiring payment, enumerated in the General Order of the Poor-law Commissioners, should be added:

Fractures of the Clavicle;—Fractures of the Skull:—Retention of Urine, when requiring repeated introduction of the Catheter;—Severe Burns and Scalds;—And that £3 be paid for Compound Fracture of the Arm.

7th.—“That the payments allowed for midwifery and surgical cases under the General Order of the Poor-law Commissioners are satisfactory in amount.

8th.—“That in order to remove difficulties in the way of a more equitable payment of medical officers, and considering that half the Union medical expenses are already paid from the Consolidated Fund, it is highly desirable that the whole expenses of the medical attendance on the poor should be removed from Unions to the Consolidated Fund.

9th.—“That it is expedient that there be a Director-General of the Poor-law Medical Department appointed by Government, and exercising supervision over Poor-law medical practice, in the manner of the other public services.

10th.—“That it is expedient that there should be Inspectors General of Poor-law medical practice appointed by Government, and acting under the orders of the Director-General.

11th.—“That the Inspectors-General acting each in a district assigned to them, should examine the Infirmarys of Workhouses, inspect the Reports of the medical officers, inquire into cases of alleged negligence, &c. &c., and that matters of disputed payment should be referred to them.

12th.—“That the medical officers of Unions should be appointed by Boards of Guardians as at present, subject to the approval of the Director-General; that their qualification should be as at present ordered, but that all future modifications of the qualifications should be made by the Director-General.

13th.—“That the appointments of all medical officers should be permanent; that is, to endure until they die, resign, or are dismissed for some valid cause.

14.—“That the forms of Books or Reports should be approved by the Director-General, and should be as short and simple as is consistent with the requirements of the public service.

15th.—“That the access of the paupers to the medical officers should be made as ready as a due distinction between those who require parochial attendance, and those who do not, will admit. That in doubtful cases where illness exists, and there appears to be temporary destitution only, the Board may grant medical relief by way of Loan; that in such cases a fee of be paid by the Board of Guardians to the medical officer.”

Signed in behalf of the Committee,

THOMAS HODGKIN, M.D.

Chairman.

4, Hanover-square, March 26th, 1848.