

A letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan, Bart. M.D., etc. and correspondence between the Irish government and John McDonnell, M.D. occasioned by the publication of that letter.

Contributors

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A LETTER

TO

SIR DOMINIC CORRIGAN, BART.

M.D., ETC.

AND

CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

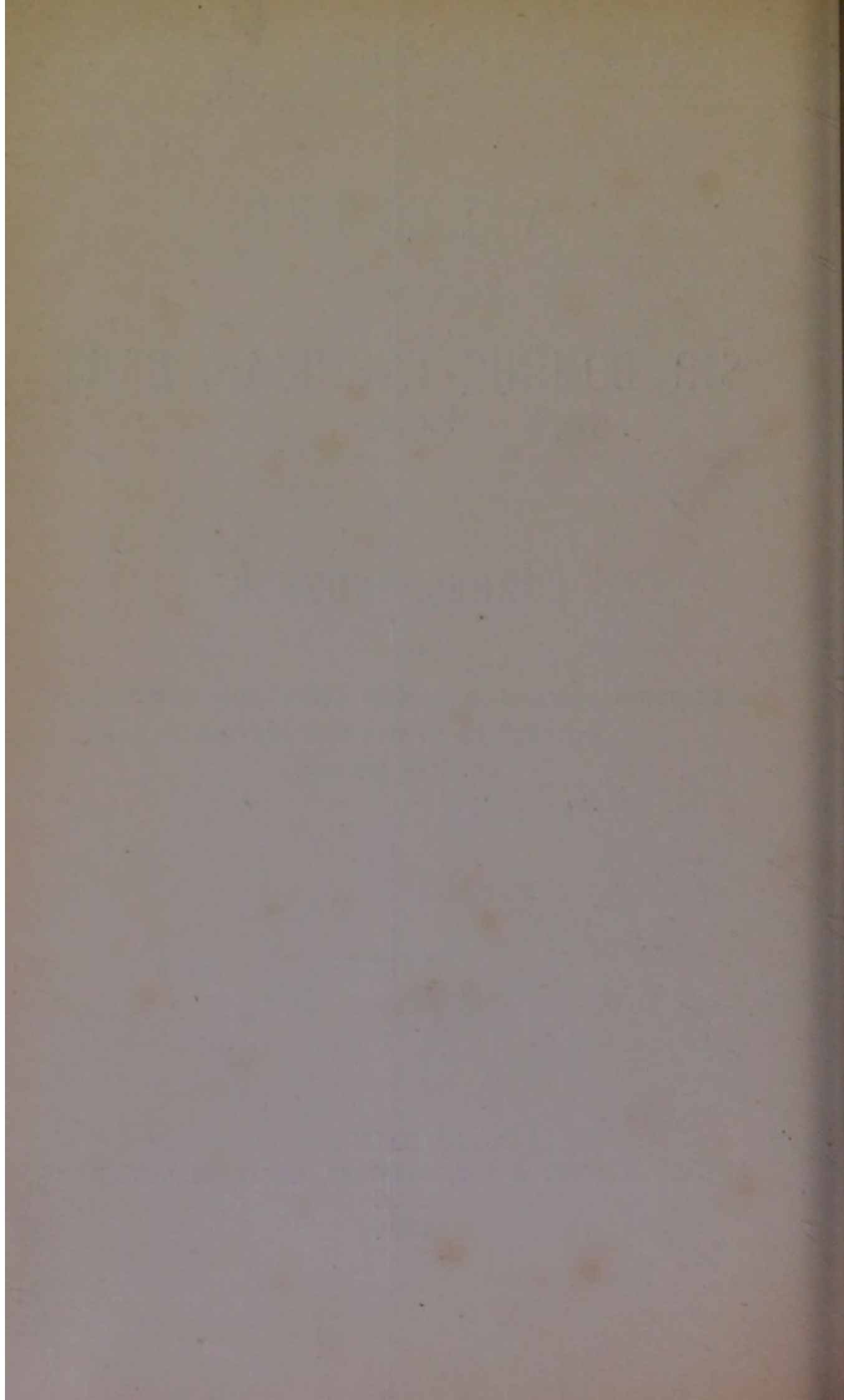
THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND JOHN McDONNELL, M.D.
OCCASIONED BY THE PUBLICATION
OF THAT LETTER.



DUBLIN :

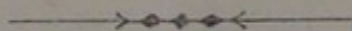
RICHARD D. WEBB & SON, PRINTERS, GREAT BRUNSWICK-ST.

1868.



CORRESPONDENCE,

&c.



4, Gardiner's Row,
Dublin, 2nd November, 1868.

My dear Sir Dominic,

Since I have held my present office till this day, I have thought it right, having to deal with people of all sects and politics, to restrict my political demonstrations to the act of voting for the candidate for parliamentary honours whom I believed to be most likely, as a member of parliament, to consult for, and promote, the true interests of the United Kingdom, and especially "that part of it called Ireland."

If I regarded your present candidature merely in its political aspect, I should follow the same line of conduct now, and simply give my vote to you and Mr. Pim. But you come before me not only as a politician of opinions which I think sound, but as a candidate prepared, if successful, to be the advocate in the House of Commons of wisely liberal treatment, in legislation, of the Medical Profession; and of improvements in Medical Education and Examination, which I know would result in very great public benefit. *I know* that giving to Boards of

Guardians power to pension Medical Officers, when **past work**, would be both just to them, and a great blessing to the sick poor. *I know* that by a reform of our present system of Medical Education and Examination, which, by comparison with that of France or Germany, is perfectly disgraceful to our legislature, great benefit would accrue to society at large; and I believe that the lucid exposition you could give, before the Commons and the nation, of the multifarious vices of the existing system, would, before long, by a "happy despatch," secure their replacement by a system which would effectually bar the entrance into the ranks of the medical and surgical profession against all who did not prove themselves to be possessed of such professional knowledge as would make them professionally well informed, and therefore skilful and trustworthy servants of the public.

These considerations have brought me deliberately to the conclusion that it would be wrong to confine myself, in your case, within the limits I have hitherto prescribed to myself on the occasion of voting for parliamentary candidates; and I have accordingly given to my son Robert a draft for £100 to be used in futherance of your return.

I am, my dear Sir Dominic,

Very truly yours

JOHN McDONNELL.

Sir Dominic Corrigan, Bart., M.D.

The publication of this letter gave occasion to the following correspondence with the Irish Government:—

Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle,
12th November, 1868.

Sir,

I am directed by Colonel Wilson Patten to forward you the enclosed papers,* and to request that you will furnish him with such remarks as you may think fit upon them.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN C. THYNNE.

Dr. McDonnell.

4, Gardiner's Row,
Dublin, 13th November, 1868.

† Sir,

I have received a letter from Mr. Thynne requesting me to furnish you with my remarks on a letter to the Right Hon. Gathorne Hardy,

* The enclosed papers were—a letter from the Right Hon. Gathorne Hardy, referring to the Lord Lieutenant a complaint of abuse of office (by the publication of the letter to Sir D. Corrigan) laid before Mr. Hardy; the letter of complaint by Mr. E. Cronhelm; and a printed copy of the letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan, enclosed in Mr. Cronhelm's to Mr. Hardy.

† I am most anxious to invite the special attention of any non-professional person, into whose hands this correspondence may come, to this letter. In the existing condition of medical and

written by Mr. E. Cronhelm ; and on my letter of 2nd November to Sir Dominic Corrigan;—the former of which Mr. Thynne encloses, and a not quite correct printed copy of the other.

I have no remark to make on Mr. Cronhelm's letter, except that I think it an unwarrantable attempt to fetter my liberty of action as one of the constituents of the representatives in Parliament of this city.

The request for my remarks on my own letter places me in some difficulty, for this reason, that I intended in my letter to explain the motives of my conduct, and I think I have done so very clearly. Nevertheless, I will endeavour by amplification of what I have said, to render it more intelligible to you.

I have been for more than thirty years an earnest medical reformer. The circumstances of my professional life (as an Hospital Surgeon, Professor of Descriptive and Surgical Anatomy in the Dublin Royal College of Surgeons, an Examiner in that College for its Surgical Diploma, and above all, as the Medical Poor Law Commissioner for seventeen

surgical education and examination for diplomas in these countries, a test-examination for the protection of the public is as necessary as it is for the protection of our soldiers. In an especial manner is it necessary for the protection of the sick poor ; upon whom, almost certainly, the ignorant physician or surgeon falls. The rich can protect themselves.—J. McD.

years) have peculiarly qualified me to form sound opinions respecting the importance of, and necessity for, legislative reform of the education and examination of medical men. The existing system of medical education and examination in these countries is grievously and disgracefully below that of France or Germany

We have nineteen competing bodies legally entitled to grant medical or surgical diplomas or degrees, all having (and in many of them the examiners also) a direct pecuniary interest in granting the diploma on the easiest terms. I will give you a specimen of the fruits of this system.

The army medical authorities have imposed a test-examination on all candidates for medical appointments in the army. The candidates are required, as a sort of qualification for admission to this examination, to present a degree or license in medicine, and another in surgery, from some of the above-mentioned nineteen bodies

A few years ago, an attempt was made, I need hardly say by the representatives of some of these bodies, in the General Medical Council, to procure the abandonment of the examination in question. The attempt was defeated by Professors Parkes and Sharpey, who produced at the meeting of Council, on the 30th of April, 1864, a mass of documentary evidence in proof of the absolute necessity of the test, in favor of the lives and limbs of our soldiers.

From this evidence I select the following three cases of persons armed with surgical diplomas.

The first was asked—In a case of wound of the femoral artery (the great artery of the thigh) what steps would you take? He replied, that he would amputate the limb. No. 2, being asked how he would treat an acute inflammation of the knee-joint, said, he would open the joint freely. The third candidate being required to perform the operation of tying the iliac artery (the great artery for the supply of blood to the lower part of the abdomen and lower limb), opened the peritoneum (the lining membrane of the abdomen and bowels), and stitched up the omentum (one of the contents of the abdomen) in the wound.

I think I may safely assume that you possess sufficient surgical skill to render it unnecessary for me to assure you that the consequence of these proceedings would have been in all the cases deplorable, and in two, if not all of them, probably fatal.

Such, and many similar though less astounding cases of ignorance amongst legally qualified medical men, which have come to my knowledge, have made me earnestly desirous of putting an end to the system that produces such results. I know that the legislative establishment of a sound system of medical education and examination would confer great benefits on the public and also on the medical profession, and I am most anxious to do every thing

in my power towards the attainment of that end, by procuring the advocacy in Parliament of such a man as Sir Dominic Corrigan, altogether irrespectively of any political consideration whatever.

Such have been, as my letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan shews, the motives of my conduct. I hold that no man, of whatever politics, is justified in taking umbrage at them. Having deliberately determined to subscribe in furtherance of Sir Dominic Corrigan's return to Parliament, I did not think it consistent with my honor to do so under a mask, and, therefore, consented to the publication of my letter.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient, &c.,

JOHN McDONNELL.

The Right Hon. Colonel Wilson Patten.

Chester,

November, 14th, 1868.

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th, which reached me too late for me to reply to it before leaving Dublin yesterday evening.

I regret that you should have so much misunderstood my object in requesting Mr. Thynne to forward

to you the correspondence relating to your published letter on the subject of the Dublin election. I had not the least intention of questioning, much less of interfering with your political opinions, or the exercise of your vote at the ensuing election, and I am sorry that you should, under a misapprehension, have taken so much trouble in adverting to them. My object was to afford you an opportunity, before I submitted the correspondence to his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, of offering any observations upon it which you might think proper, seeing that public attention has recently been directed to a decision of your department, that officers of it, while exercising their votes, ought not to take a prominent part in the elections, the inference of Mr. Cronhelm clearly being, that in publishing your letter in the newspapers you had transgressed this rule.

Believing you to have replied to Mr. Thynne's letter under a misapprehension of its object, I will not submit the correspondence to his Excellency till I hear further from you.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. WILSON PATTEN.

J. McDonnell, Esq., M.D.

4, Gardiner's Row, Dublin.

Poor Law Commission Office,
Dublin, November 16th, 1868

Sir,

Mr. Thynne's letter to me, written by your directions, gave me no hint as to the point to which you desired that my observations should be addressed. I regret much, that, under a misconception, I should have imposed on you the trouble of reading an anatomico-chirurgical essay.

I assure you it never entered my thoughts that you wished to interfere, in any way, with the free exercise of my franchise, to vote for whomsoever I should think it my public duty to support as candidate to represent Dublin in Parliament; but I thought, and think, that Mr. Cronhelm did intend to do so.

You quote the case of the clerk to the Youghal Board of Guardians, and appear to assume that my conduct has been similar to his. If such be your opinion, I think it does me great injustice.

I extract the following passages from the letter of the Poor Law Commissioners to the Youghal Board of Guardians on the subject of the clerk's conduct.

"From the evidence, which is herewith transmitted for the Guardians' information, and from the statements made by Mr. Kennedy* himself, there can be no doubt that he has been acting as a paid agent and canvasser for one of the candidates in the approaching parliamentary election for the borough of Youghal

* The Clerk

—a position which the Commissioners consider to be incompatible with that of clerk of the Youghal union.

“The clerk of the union is not only returning officer in the election of guardians of the poor, in the course of which contests of a political character may often take place, but he is the public officer who has been selected by the Legislature to supply, in the first instance, the lists of Parliamentary voters for county and borough, with the further duty cast upon him of objecting to persons who might be known to be open to objection on certain grounds ; and further to attend the court of the revising barrister with the union books, and afford information when called upon to do so.

“It appears to the Commissioners that a public officer entrusted with such duties should not expose himself to the risk of a forfeiture of public confidence by becoming an active partisan in any political conflict, especially in the localities in which he has official functions to perform in reference to the franchise of the electors.”

Again :—“If he ” (Mr. Kennedy) “is not prepared to abstain, at once, from the course of conduct which he has adopted, and endeavoured to vindicate, the Commissioners must require him to resign his office of clerk to the Youghal Union.”

I was a party to the writing of this letter. The direction for the writing of it bears my initials ; and it was, in my opinion, clearly justified by the circum-

stances of the case. But I hold that there is no analogy between this case and mine.

If Mr. Cronhelm reasons thus :—" Dr. McDonnell has declared by a published letter, backed by his subscription, that he earnestly desires to promote the return to Parliament of an able advocate of reform by Parliament of the education and examination, for medical and surgical degrees, of medical men : therefore, he has impaired the confidence of Whig, or Tory, or Radical, or Repealer, or Protestant, or Roman Catholic, in his impartiality in the discharge of his duties as the Medical Poor Law Commissioner."

If Mr. Cronhelm reasons so, I think the premises do not sustain the conclusion, and that he is a bad logician.

If I thought such reasoning sound, I should most sincerely regret what I have done. But I repeat what I have said in my former letter, that I think my conduct has not given reasonable ground of exception to it to any man of whatever politics.

You seem to think that Mr. Cronhelm considers my publishing my letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan the gravamen in his charge. When I wrote it I had no thought of its being published. I did not publish it ; but I permitted the publication of it.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient, &c.,

J. McDONNELL.

The Right Hon. Colonel Wilson Patten.

Shaw Hill, Chorley,
22nd November, 1868.

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 16th, which has met me at this place. The observations which you make on the implied charge of improper interference at an election appear to me to be satisfactory, and I have pleasure in submitting them to his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. WILSON PATTEN.

J. M'Donnell, Esq., M.D.

Poor Law Commission Office,
Dublin, 28th Nov. 1868.

Sir,

I did not receive your letter of the 22nd inst. till yesterday.

My character has been assailed, and my motives misrepresented, in regard to my letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan, in several of the Dublin newspapers, especially in one, the editor of which is my personal enemy.

I am therefore very desirous, if you do not object, to print our correspondence on this subject, in vindication of my public character ; and request your permission to do so.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient, &c.,

J. McDONNELL.

The Right Hon. Colonel Wilson Patten.

Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle,
4th December, 1868.

Dear Sir,

I am directed by Colonel Wilson Patten to say that he will be glad to see you to-morrow, at two o'clock, at the Castle.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN C. THYNNE.

J. McDonnell, Esq., M.D.

The Castle, Dublin,
7th December, 1868.

Sir,

In consequence of a temporary absence from Ireland, I have been obliged to delay my reply to your letter, in which you express a wish to publish the correspondence relating to your letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan, previous to, and having reference to, the Dublin election.

It is not usual for a member of a Government Department to publish papers connected with his office, but as you have stated to me in a subsequent interview that you consider it desirable in vindication of your character, I will not interpose an objection.

I must, however, add that had I been aware of your wishes, I should have stated at greater length my motives in addressing to you my last letter.

After a perusal of your second letter, it appeared to me that in subscribing to the expenses of Sir Dominic Corrigan's election, your object was a professional and not a political one, and that your letter to him had been published by another party. Though you acknowledged that you had consented to its publication, I was under the apprehension that this consent had been given subsequent to its despatch; and I felt myself justified in not placing too strict a limitation to the departmental rule.

Your subsequent acknowledgment, at our personal interview, that you wrote it with a view to its publication, has left a somewhat different impression on my mind.

With every sincere desire not to interfere in any way with the free exercise of the elective franchise, it does appear to me that the subordinate officers of your department may find it difficult to distinguish between the rule laid down for them, and that which I applied to a letter written, as it now appears, with the object of active interference in an election.

Your obedient servant,

J. WILSON PATTEN.

John M'Donnell, Esq., M.D.

Poor Law Commission Office, Dublin,
9th December, 1868.

Sir,

I am, I assure you, sorry to trouble you with another communication.

I do not propose to controvert the conclusion at which you have arrived; but merely to point out that it is based on an entire misapprehension on your part of what I have written to you, and of what I said in my interview with you on last Saturday.

You say—"Your subsequent acknowledgement, at our personal interview, that you wrote it" (my letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan) "with a view to its publication, has left a somewhat different impression on my mind." At our interview, on your remarking that my letter had been published by another person without my knowledge, I immediately interposed, saying—"Excuse me, I permitted the publication of my letter;" and in my letter in reply to your's of the 14th November, I said—"When I wrote it" (my letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan) "I had no thought of its being published. I did not publish it, but I permitted the publication of it."

I do not anticipate the difficulty you allude to on the part of the subordinate officers of this department. I confidently expect that they will do me the justice to believe that if any of them interferes in the election of a member of Parliament, in the

way the Clerk of the Youghal Board of Guardians did, so as to forfeit the confidence of the Poor Law Commissioners and the public in regard to his faithful and impartial discharge of his duties, I will not hesitate to join in censuring or dismissing him ; but that if he interferes in such manner as in no way to affect the confidence of the public or Commissioners in him, I will not be a party to pronouncing upon him the smallest censure.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

J. McDONNELL.

The Right Hon. Colonel Wilson Patten.

The Castle, Dublin,

10th December, 1868.

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 9th, it is quite true that my former letter to you was written under the impression that, although you had consented to the publication of your letter to Sir Dominic Corrigan subsequently to its being written, you had not written it with a view to its publication, and that at our subsequent interview you left a different impression on my mind, namely, that you had written it with that object, or at least with the knowledge that it would be published. If you had no such object or knowledge, I can only repeat, that I am not

anxious to adhere too strictly to the departmental rule.

With respect to the concluding remarks of your present letter, I must remind you that the rule of non-interference, as partizans, in elections by officers of the Poor Law Board is one which for other public reasons than those referred to in your letter, it is desirable that they should observe.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

J. WILSON PATTEN.

J. McDonnell, Esq., M.D.

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