

**A letter from the committee to the governors of the General Dispensary,  
Aldersgate Street, on the resignation of the medical officers.**

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

**Publication/Creation**

[London] : J. Masters, printer, 1833.

**Persistent URL**

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A

LETTER

FROM THE COMMITTEE

TO THE GOVERNORS

OF THE

GENERAL DISPENSARY,

Aldersgate Street,

ON THE

RESIGNATION OF THE MEDICAL  
OFFICERS.

23rd SEPTEMBER, 1833.

BY THE EDITOR

# LETTER

GENERAL DISPENSARY

FROM THE COMMITTEE

FOR THE IMPROVEMENT

OF THE GOVERNMENT

# GENERAL DISPENSARY

MY LORDS, I AM AND YOUR LORDSHIPS

GENERAL DISPENSARY

# KNIGHTS OF THE MEDICAL



TO THE GOVERNORS  
OF THE  
GENERAL DISPENSARY,  
Aldersgate Street,

FOR THE RELIEF OF THE SICK POOR,

INSTITUTED 1770.

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“ When vice prevails and impious men bear sway,  
The post of honour is a private station.”

*Vide Dr. Roberts's Speech upon his Resignation.*

---

MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,  
How far the above quotation of Doctor ROBERTS can be applied, either to the Governors of the Institution or its late Medical Officers, it is not for us, the undersigned members of the Committee, to decide; it is sufficient to give the Doctor the benefit of it, as he is probably the best entitled to it, and confine ourselves to the task of answering the charges which have been made against the Committee by him and by his coadjutors, Drs. BIRKBECK, CLUTTERBUCK, and LAMBE, and Surgeons SALMON and COULSON, and this we do very reluctantly, having no ambition to figure before the public either as authors, or as the antagonists of those who are so much better entitled to that distinction, and it is only to protect the Institution, (for the benefit of those who are driven to seek relief from it,) and to repel the attacks which the Medical Officers have thought proper to make upon the Committee, and



upon the Governors at large, which induces us again to address you; and, if in doing so, it should be thought by some that we have applied to any of the professional Gentlemen stronger language than is necessary to support the cause we wish to advocate, let it be remembered that strong and unwarrantable language has been used towards us, imputing motives which never could exist in the minds of honourable men, and volunteering to advance charges against us, and against the eighty-six Governors who voted in the majority at the last general meeting, which, if true, would justly inflict upon them as well as upon us the censure of the public.

The Committee at present consists of sixteen Governors, annually elected, besides the Life Governors and the Medical Officers, and it is right to declare, that those who are not Medical Officers possess no greater advantage in the Institution, and have no greater patronage to bestow, than any other Subscriber to its funds—their services are wholly gratuitous, and their duties are frequently laborious and unpleasant; and if, in addition to these, they are to be subject to the annoyances they have lately experienced, few men will be found to undertake the task of administering public charities, and the poor will soon be deprived of the benefits which such institutions afford them; and though it may sometimes occur that men may differ as to the best mode of effecting good, yet their characters ought to be a shield to protect them from aspersion as well as from a belief that they have been actuated by any other than honourable motives, until the contrary shall be proved: and such ought to have been the case in the present instance; for what other than the best of motives could actuate either the Committee in recommending, or the Governors in adopting, any regulation for the government of the Charity, whether it affected the Medical Officers or any other branch of the Institution.



In recommending the alteration of the law under which the Governors were in future to vote for the election of Officers, the Committee did not do so without the subject having previously undergone many discussions in the Committee, at which some of the Medical Officers were generally present, and took a part in the proceedings, and all of them might have been, as they were regularly summoned with the rest of the Committee for the purpose ; and it is here right to state that the subject was taken up in the course of a general revision of the laws, and the Committee became convinced of the necessity of an alteration being made in the privilege of voting, their attention being called to the comparatively small increase of Subscribers in the years 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831, as compared with previous years, as the following statement will show :—

In 1825 there was an increase of . . . . .	43
1826 . . . . .	66
1827 . . . . .	93
1828 . . . . .	25
1829 . . . . .	20
1830 . . . . .	21
1831 . . . . .	18

In 1832, in consequence of the exertions made that year by the Committee in getting up a public dinner, at which Lord MORPETH presided, the numbers were increased from 18 to 34.

The Committee could not also but be surprised to find how few of the Governors had attended the last three elections of the Medical Officers ; and how it happened, that, upon the vacancies being declared, gentlemen who were desirous of offering themselves as candidates were deterred under this *now* favourite law from canvassing the Governors, stating that they found, upon the beginning of their canvass, that the votes of the Governors had been so far secured, previously to the



vacancy being declared, that left others no chance of success. Upon the election of Dr. WOODFORDE, (a near relative of Dr. CLUTTERBUCK,) in 1828, only ten Governors voted; and upon the subsequent election of Dr. ROBERTS, only the same number voted; and upon the more recent election of Mr. PEREIRA, who succeeded his brother as the House Apothecary, with a residence and an allowance of £120. a year, and £30. a year for an assistant, only eleven voted.

With these facts before them, the Committee must have been blind, or entitled to the charge of "Favouritism," which has been so lavishly bestowed upon them, had they not seen that, without some alteration in the system, the Election of Medical Officers to the Institution was becoming a mere farce—that the Medical appointments were daily approaching to a period when they would be claimed as the vested rights of those in power to appoint whom they should think proper to be their successors. It was to break down this growing monopoly, and to give to every respectable and talented Medical Practitioner a like opportunity of being a Candidate, with an equal chance of success, and to instil new life and vigour into the Institution, that the Committee came to the resolution of recommending to the Governors an alteration of the law for the future election of its officers; an alteration that will continue to prevent the making of *Proxy Voters upon the eve of an Election*, which was not the case when Drs. BIRKBECK, CLUTTERBUCK, and LAMBE were elected, any Person being at that time, and for several years afterwards, allowed to Vote either by Proxy or otherwise, provided the Subscription had been paid *only four days before the Election*. In January, 1825, this law was altered, declaring that no Annual Subscriber should from thenceforth *be allowed to vote who had become a Subscriber within six months before an election*; and it was at the last General Meeting again altered, by reducing the period



for new Subscribers to Vote by Proxy, from six months to two months, allowing, however, any person to attend and vote personally, who should become a Governor seven days before the election. But, to prevent any improper use of the Proxy Votes, all Elections must take place, and the vacancies be filled up, *within six weeks* after such vacancies have occurred. And it is upon the latter alteration, carried by the Votes of 86 Governors against 47, leaving a majority of 39, that the Medical Officers have grounded their complaints against the Institution.

We might, however, assign another reason for their bitterness ; which is, that at the time the above alteration was made, a regulation was also added, as an additional security to Candidates, declaring “ *every person to be incompetent to be a Candidate, who, either directly or indirectly, shall solicit, or authorize, or permit any person to solicit, the Vote of any Governor in his favour previously to the notification of the vacancy by public advertisement ;*” and to prevent the fears expressed by the Medical Officers being realised, that under the new regulations incompetent persons might be elected by the weight of their purse, a rule was introduced by the Committee, and passed into a Law by the Governors, “ *That no person shall be eligible as a Candidate for any Medical Office whose testimonials shall not have been previously approved of by the Medical Committee.*” So that, if any incompetent person should, by any chance, succeed in getting himself elected, he could only do so, by neglect of duty on the part of the Medical Committee, in reporting a Candidate eligible, who, by the laws of the Charity, is declared to be ineligible.

Notwithstanding the alteration of the rule, as regards the future right of voting, has given so much apparent offence to the Medical Officers of this Institution, a similar regulation, but without the same



protections, will be found to exist in many of the other Dispensary Institutions ; and in some of the public Hospitals, (particularly that of St. Bartholomew,) every Medical Officer, whatever be his rank or qualification, the moment he is elected to any medical appointment in the Hospital, becomes disqualified to act as a Governor. And a question may here be asked, whether the contributors and supporters of an Institution, existing only by *voluntary aid*, are, or are not, entitled to frame the laws under which they choose the Charity to be governed, without subjecting themselves to the animadversions of its officers, and having their names dragged before the public, to defend themselves against unfounded charges, which any person may think proper to make ; and it is with extreme regret we find ourselves placed in this situation.

In a Circular addressed to his Royal Highness the DUKE of SUSSEX, and the other Governors of the Charity, dated the 7th instant, (only four days before the last General Meeting,) signed by Doctor BIRKBECK, and the rest of the Medical Officers, they say, “ We  
 “ beg to state, that rather than the harmony which  
 “ ought to be characteristic of a Charitable Institution  
 “ should be disturbed, *we are desirous, in the event*  
 “ *of your confirming the proposed alterations, of re-*  
 “ *signing our appointments, feeling, as we do*  
 “ *strongly, that to remain in office with your Commit-*  
 “ *tee, as it is at present constituted, is incompatible*  
 “ *with utility to the Dispensary, a due regard for*  
 “ *the dignity of the medical profession, and a just*  
 “ *respect for our own characters.”* Thus holding  
 out a threat to the Governors, that if they dared to confirm the Minutes of a previous meeting, that they, the Doctors and Surgeons, would all resign ; and they accordingly did so, and without affording the Governors an opportunity of previously appointing others to take care of, and attend to the relief of those objects of the Charity, whom the Governors might, in the mean



time, recommend: *the only boon offered upon their retirement* being, that they would see, at their own houses, *those persons then upon their books*. And not content with their threat of resignation, but they must add to it an insult to the Committee, by stating, that to remain in office with them, was incompatible with utility to the Dispensary, a due regard for the dignity of the Medical profession, and a just respect for their own characters. Although we could, as members of that Committee, with feelings of *dignity* equal to any of the Medical profession, and with equal respect for their own characters, repel with indignation the insinuations thrown out against the Committee, we will, in mercy to the dignity of the profession, so virtuously represented by the authors of the paragraph, refrain from doing so. We may, however, be permitted to observe, that if the dignity of the Medical profession consist in attacking the characters of private individuals,—if it consist in holding out threats of resigning charitable appointments, because they cannot have the patronage of appointing their successors,—if it consist in endeavouring to prevent the streams of charity from flowing, except through motives of interest,—if it consist in deserting the poor and the wretched supplicants, leaving them to the chance of obtaining relief from others,—if it consist in charging individuals with exercising their public trusts in acts of “Favouritism” and “Inconsistency,” which cannot be proved, then, indeed, will these gentlemen entitle themselves to be the champions of their order, and maintain a just respect for their own characters.

We presume it was to maintain their dignity, and in justice to their own characters, that, in the same Circular they venture to make the following charges:—  
 “We acknowledge that many beneficial changes might  
 “be made in the laws of the Dispensary, yet you may  
 “probably think with us that it is somewhat remark-



“able, that while your Committee have recommended  
 “innovations which individually affect ourselves alone,  
 “they should have taken no notice of many glaring  
 “improprieties and acts of favouritism, especially con-  
 “nected with the management of the Charity, They  
 “could not, however, have so done, without exposing  
 “the inconsistencies of some of their own body, nor  
 “could they have concealed the fact, that that  
 “salutary law which formerly existed, and by  
 “which any member of the Committee was precluded  
 “from serving your Institution with Drugs,\* or other  
 “articles, was illegally rescinded by a body of Go-  
 “vernors made for a particular purpose, in a manner  
 “similar to that now recommended for your approval.

Before they put their names to this Circular, which was to go forth to the world, charging Mr. HERRING and other Members of the Committee with having violated a law of the Institution, they ought to have ascertained the correctness of it, and, had they done so, they would then have found that no such law as the one alluded to had ever existed, and consequently none had been violated. It is not necessary for us to speak in praise of the character of Mr. HERRING, which is too well known and appreciated, not only by his neighbours and friends, but by the Governors at large, for any of them to believe that, in his connexion with this or any other Institution, he would be guilty of any act unbecoming an honourable man; and it was in consequence of the deservedly high estimation in which his character is held, that nearly Two Hundred of the Governors, about Six Months ago, signed a Requisition soliciting him to permit them to propose him as the Treasurer of the Institution upon the late Vacancy, to which office he was unanimously elected; and so far from Mr. HERRING, or any Person connected with his house, applying to the Committee to supply the

\* “The Treasurer of the Charity, Mr. Herring, and other Members of the Committee, are in this precise situation at the present period.”



Institution with Drugs, it was the Committee who, *Twenty Years ago*, made the application to his house, and that in accordance with a Recommendation signed by three Medical Officers, Dr. BIRKBECK and Dr. CLUTTERBUCK being two of them; and yet, with all these facts, these two gentlemen, with Dr. LAMBE and Dr. ROBERTS, and the two Surgeons, in support of the dignity of the Medical Profession, coolly and deliberately publish to the world that Mr. HERRING and other Members of the Committee, through "Favouritism," have been permitted to supply Drugs and other articles to the Institution contrary to its Laws. And then Dr. CLUTTERBUCK, in his ingenious Letter, published in the Times Paper, on the 16th Instant, affects to be surprised that Mr. HERRING should express any displeasure at the statement which had been thus publicly made, with his, Mr. HERRING's, name attached to it, admitting, however, that there was no foundation for the charge, adding "no one suspects" "or doubts that Mr. HERRING has acted in any other" "way than honourably, in his manner of supplying" "Drugs to the Dispensary." But no sooner has the worthy Doctor attempted to heal one wound than he opens another; for, in the same Letter, and before the ink of his recantation is dry, he charges the Committee with an act of "Favouritism" to Mr. HERRING, in permitting him to have a Steam Engine upon his own Premises adjoining to the Dispensary: the Engine, be it known, having been erected for a period of upwards of Sixteen Years. at which time only three of the present Committee were members, Dr. BIRKBECK and Dr. CLUTTERBUCK being two of the three.

Another of Dr. CLUTTERBUCK's charges of "Favouritism" against the Committee, is that of having permitted Mr. SMITH, the late Treasurer, to open a private Door, for the use of his family, in the common Passage leading from Aldersgate Street to the Dispensary, which Door was opened by permission of the



*then* Committee *Twenty-six Years ago*, (not one of us being on the Committee at that time,) Dr. BIRKBECK and Dr. CLUTTERBUCK not only being members of that Committee, but present and consenting parties to the agreement; and that no injury should arise to the Dispensary, Mr. SMITH entered into a proper Deed of Covenant to pay an annual acknowledgment for the permission, undertaking to close it up whenever he should be required so to do. Besides being a neighbour, Mr. SMITH is one of the oldest Governors, and one of the best friends of the Charity, having subscribed to its Funds a sum of upwards of £200.—So much for the Doctor's charges of "Favouritism."

Equally futile and weak are the other subjects of his complaint: the system of espionage which he charges the Committee to have established upon the Medical Officers, is nothing more nor less than the re-appointment of a House Committee, which for several years had fallen into disuse, but which is common in all institutions having buildings and an establishment like this, and requiring a superintendance beyond that of the Medical Officers.

Another of the worthy Doctor's complaints is, that of increasing the number of the Committee from sixteen to twenty-four, which, says the Doctor, has been done to increase the power of the Committee. We have usually understood, that the larger the number, the greater the check. The Doctor may be right, the Governors may be wrong: we think the Governors are right.

With regard to the auditing of the accounts, of which the Doctor complains, he must have known, or as a Member of the Committee he ought to have known, that no person supplying the Dispensary with any articles ever audited his own bills; he also ought to have known, at the time he made this charge, that one of the new Rules lately passed, was the appointment of a Board of Auditors, to consist of five of the Gover-



nors, to be appointed at a General Meeting, only one of whom is to be of the Committee.

Another of Dr. CLUTTERBUCK's *serious* charges is, that at the ordinary General Meetings, when the Committees are appointed, seldom any of the Governors are present, except those of the Committee, consequently they vote for their own appointment. This is a grievance the Committee would cheerfully see removed; and we are among those who hope the Governors will feel the force of the Doctor's remark, and in future be more constant in their attendance, being quite sure that the oftener they attend, the more satisfied they will be with the general government of the Institution, and the appropriation of their bounty; and, as so many charges have been brought against the Committee we invite the Governors to institute an inquiry into our conduct and proceedings, and satisfy themselves, by a personal examination of facts, whether the charges which have been made by the late Medical Officers, or any one of them are well or ill founded. At the same time, we think that those charges, whether just or unjust, which do not refer to those alterations which are said to affect the dignity of the Medical profession, would have come with a much better grace either before the Committee, of which the Medical Officers were Members, or before the Governors at a General Meeting, instead of being made, as they have been, the subject of a Letter in a public Newspaper.

In answering, as we have been called upon to do, the charges which have been made against the Governors, and against the Committee, we have not intended any disrespect to the general body of the Medical Profession; on the contrary, we acknowledge, as we are bound to do, that no class of Society contains Gentlemen of more honourable feelings, or more ready to devote their talents to the relief of their necessitous fellow-creatures, or men more desirous of aiding the philanthropist in the support of those



Institutions where Medical or Surgical skill is requisite: and in taking the view we have done of the alterations which have been made, as to the future elections of our Medical Officers, neither ourselves, nor the Governors by whose votes they were carried at the late meeting, have been actuated by any other than honourable motives, as regards the objects of the Charity, and a desire to throw open *to the whole Profession* the benefits of the appointments, and, if possible, prevent the same monopoly in this which the Profession are endeavouring to destroy in their own public institutions. And though we, and the Governors who have thought with us, may be wrong in the view we have so taken, yet we cannot but believe, that when the charges against the Institution, and our replies, are laid before the Profession, and better understood, that the majority of them will approve of the alterations, and at the same time will agree with us, that the proceedings *adopted* by our late Medical Officers are not those which are calculated either to maintain the dignity of the Medical Profession, or raise the character of these gentlemen in the estimation of the public.

We are,

MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient humble Servants,

R. ANDREWS,

W. BARNARD,

R. BIGGAR,

W. CLAY,

S. FISHER,

E. GODSON,

F. H. GROOM,

G. HODGKINSON,

T. LLOYD,

J. C. LUCAS,

E. MOTTRAM,

W. L. NICHOLL,

J. RIDER,

G. SPEARE,

R. UPSALL,

W. WALTON.

*Dispensary-House, Aldersgate Street,*

*23d September, 1833.*

P. S. We have much pleasure in announcing that, notwithstanding the difficulties thrown in the way of the Committee, the Dispensary has been attended every day since the General Meeting by Physicians and Surgeons of high respectability and talent, who have kindly consented to continue their assistance until the Elections take place.