

Observations extracted from the public journals on the resignation and conduct of the late medical officers of the charity, Drs Birkbeck, Clutterbuck, Lambe and Roberts, and Surgeons Coulson and Salmon.

Contributors

Royal College of Surgeons of England

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GENERAL DISPENSARY

IN

ALDERSGATE STREET.

1833.



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GENERAL DISPENSARY,

IN

ALDERSGATE STREET.

Observations,

EXTRACTED FROM THE PUBLIC JOURNALS,

ON THE

RESIGNATION AND CONDUCT

OF THE

LATE MEDICAL OFFICERS

OF THE CHARITY,

DRS. BIRKBECK, CLUTTERBUCK, LAMBE, & ROBERTS,

AND

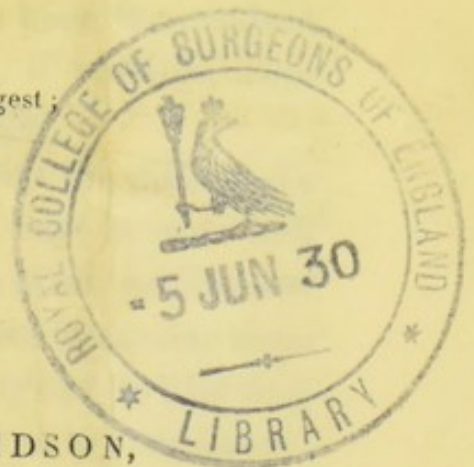
SURGEONS COULSON AND SALMON.

First—Read, Mark, Learn, and Digest ;
Then—Decide and Vote.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY G. H. DAVIDSON,
TUDOR STREET, BLACKFRIARS.

October 10, 1833.



GENERAL DIRECTIONS, &c.

ALBANY STREET

QUESTIONS

RELATIVE TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH

RESIGNATION AND CONDUCT

LATE MEDICAL OFFICERS

OF THE ARMY IN INDIA

BY SURGEON COLONEL AND MAJOR

LONDON

30

1841

GENERAL DISPENSARY,

IN ALDERSGATE STREET.

SUPPORTED BY VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS.

INSTITUTED 1770.

TO THE GOVERNORS OF THE INSTITUTION.

My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

FINDING that a Special Meeting of the Governors of the Charity is convened to be held at the house of the Dispensary, on Monday the 14th day of October instant, at twelve o'clock, “ *To consider the causes which led to the resignation of His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex (President) and that of the Medical Officers of the Institution; and to adopt such measures as the emergency of the case may require;*” and believing, as I do, that such meeting has been got up through the means of the late Medical Officers, with a view of removing the Committee, and procuring their own restoration to office, it was my intention to have addressed you more fully upon the subject than I shall now do, in the hope of being able to direct your more immediate attention to what has been the conduct of the Medical Officers, and prevent them, if possible, from obtaining your sanction to their proceedings.

I am, however, rejoiced to find that the differences between those persons and the Governors have been so well discussed by several of the most respectable of our public journals, that I cannot serve the Charity better than by causing them to be re-printed in their present form; feeling as I do that they have only to be read, to bring conviction home to your minds; that if you wish to protect the Charity from falling into the hands of a few medical monopolists, or if you wish to extend the benefits of the Charity to the poor, who alone should be the

objects of your bounty, or if you wish to preserve a due respect for your own characters, you have only one straightforward course to pursue; which is, to support your Treasurer and Committee against the unwarrantable attacks that have been made against them:—refuse to rescind the laws which were at the last General Meeting confirmed by the votes of 86 Governors out of 113 who attended that meeting—and, above all, throw your protection over those talented and respectable gentlemen, who with so much honour and credit to themselves, have dared to come forward to supply the vacancies occasioned by the voluntary desertion of men, by whom no pains have been spared to bring the odium of their professional brethren upon the Candidates, as well as upon the Governors, and every means been used to deprive the poor of the advantages of your Charity.

Be it recollected, such has been the combination of the late Medical Officers to get the whole power of the Institution into their own hands, and to secure a continuation of that power to their successors, that they have convened public meetings of the profession, to support them in their designs; addresses have also been presented to them; and other honours, no doubt, still further await them. Charges not less unfounded than frivolous, have been publicly made, both against the Treasurer and the Committee; and, as if determined to demolish and destroy all who shall stand in the way of their ambition, the “Lancet,” the mighty and unsparing Lancet, with its renowned and immaculate Editor, have, together with the “London Medical and Surgical Journal,” been called in as auxiliaries to aid an unprincipled attack, not only against the Governors and the Committee, but against Dr. Yates, the Physician, also Mr. Dalrymple and Mr. Casswell, the Surgeons; who, with so much humanity, stepped forward to relieve and succour the poor, at a time when the former officers deserted them.

To show in what light the Governors are held by some of the abettors of the late officers, it is only necessary for me to refer you to an incorrect account of the late Meeting, inserted in the London Medical and Surgical Journal, published on the 14th of September, by Renshaw and Rush, Medical Booksellers, 356, Strand, which account the writer concludes with the following observations:—

“ We are satisfied that the time is at hand when
 “ the respect due to *our* profession will be duly estimated;
 “ and when interested tradesmen, clerks, and shopkeepers—
 “ men of narrow ignorant minds—will, as Governors, be di-
 “ vested of their insolence and impertinence to *their supe-*
 “ *riors.*” And so Dr. Roberts must have thought, when at
 the meeting he concluded his retiring speech with saying:—
 “ Looking at every thing that has occurred, I do not know
 “ that I can take leave of the Institution better than in the
 “ words of Cato:—

“ When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway,

“ The post of honour is a private station.”

Words not spoken in the warmth of a debate, and upon cooler reflection recalled,—but intended to convey a premeditated insult to the Governors, the voluntary supporters of the Charity; for it must be remembered, that the desertion of the Medical Officers was not the result of a moment; but, on the contrary, they attended the Meeting fully prepared to throw up their situations; to insult the Directors; and desert the Dispensary, without any other professional aid as regarded the future patients, except such as the House Apothecary could afford.

They likewise were prepared with the resignation of His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, the President of the Charity, which they had obtained upon an ex-parte statement: a resignation the more to be regretted, inasmuch as His Royal Highness has been President for a period of ten

years, and has presided as Chairman at several of the Charity Dinners; having contributed to its Funds the sum of Ten Guineas, which His Royal Highness would no doubt have added to, had he continued to occupy the Chair as President, and not have resigned it, as he has been induced to do, through the instrumentality of an interested party.

— The Poor, too, are not the only persons who have a right to complain against the sudden desertion of the medical officers; for there is a class of gentlemen called medical students (and they are not a few) who have an equal claim to put in a charge against them:—gentlemen who, for their permission to attend the Dispensary Patients, have made to Drs. Clutterbuck, Lambe, and Roberts, *the customary little pecuniary compliments* of from five to seven guineas each. They, also, by the desertion of the physicians, have been left in the lurch, as well as the patients; and, unless the worthy Doctors can get themselves restored by your votes to their former situations, they will be placed in the awkward predicament of having to restore to some of these young gentlemen a portion of the fees they have received from them.

But enough:—I have written more than I had intended, and I will now refer you to the able opinions of others, confident that you will not betray the Charity again into the hands of these Medical Philistines, but continue to preserve it as one of the most valuable and useful of our Institutions in the British Metropolis. That it may long continue to be so, is the sincere wish of

A GOVERNOR.

London, 10th October, 1832.

MORNING HERALD,

Saturday, October 10, 1833.

The dispute between the Committee of the Aldersgate-street Dispensary and the late Medical Officers of that Institution, involves some points of public interest, and on which, therefore, we think it right to express an opinion. Institutions supported by voluntary subscription, for the purpose of affording medicine and medical advice gratuitously to the sick poor, are among the most useful of our public charities, as long as they are well governed. But if once turned to private advantage by a careless or corrupt system of government, it is unnecessary to say that they become undeserving of public support, and that the very beneficence of their original object makes their application the more grievous and disgraceful.

“The Aldersgate Dispensary is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest institution of the sort now existing in London. Being, like every institution which is supported by voluntary subscription, dependant upon public opinion, the length of time during which it has flourished affords a strong presumption in favour of its general good management, and makes it the more necessary to examine well the grounds of any accusation brought against those who are intrusted with the control and regulation of the charity. The accusation in the present instance does not come from abroad. It is not a complaint made by the subscribers to the institution, or by those for whom its relief was intended. The accusers are the medical officers—most competent authority, it must be admitted, in all that properly belongs to the medical department. If regulations have been adopted by the governing body which interfere with the full and efficient exercise of their professional duties, and render their skill, knowledge, and experience less available to the suffering objects of the charity than they ought to be, the medical officers have done rightly, not only in resisting such regulations, but in appealing to the public from the decision of the Committee, though we question that, under any circumstances, they were justified in suddenly leaving the patients of the charity destitute of medical aid. In our opinion, humanity required that, if they felt it a duty to resign, they should have also considered it no less a duty to attend the patients as before until the election of their successors. It is true they offered to attend at *their own houses* those persons *then* upon the books; but why this limitation in the case of a public charity, from which, in a course of years, some of those medical gentlemen had derived very considerable advantages? What was to become of those who could not attend at their houses, or of those who became patients after their resignation? Why should a hostile feeling towards the Committee be indulged at the expense of the suffering poor?

“Let us next see what was the cause of that hostile feeling. The Medical Officers put the quarrel upon the ground of their opposition to an improper regulation touching the election of Medical Practitioners? What was that regulation? It appears that formerly the

practice was to allow every person who became an Annual Subscriber, or Life Governor, to vote either personally or by proxy, provided the subscription had been paid *only four days before* the election. This the Committee, in their letter to the Governors, states to have been the practice when Drs. Birkbeck, Clutterbuck, and Lambe, were elected, and for several years afterwards. It was a practice undoubtedly liable to great abuse, because a candidate, if there were anything like a close competition, might, by the seasonable subscription of a few guineas in the names of other persons, *buy himself in*, the whole of the spurious votes being available by proxy. In the year 1825 this practice was superseded by a regulation which prescribed that no Annual Subscriber should thenceforth be allowed to vote, who had become a Subscriber within six months before the election. Did this regulation secure the purity and independence of election? The facts proved it did not. It was, indeed, very inefficient in reducing the Funds of the Institution, a matter of some importance to an Establishment supported by voluntary subscription, and it so greatly diminished the number of persons who actually took a part in elections, that in 1828, when Dr. Woodforde was elected, only ten Governors voted; only the same number gave their suffrages on the next election, which was that of Dr. Roberts; and, subsequently, when Mr. Pereira was chosen to succeed his brother as House Apothecary, no more than 11 voted, although one would have thought that the emoluments of the office would have induced considerable competition, there being a salary attached to the office of 120*l.* a year, with a house, and 30*l.* for an assistant.

“It may be easily understood how subsidiary the regulation of 1825 could be rendered to closing the door of the Dispensary against the free competition of the general talent of the profession, by putting the remaining case. Suppose a Medical Officer intending to resign, having got some better appointment, or for any other cause, wished to secure his place for some relation or friend; suppose he told that relation or friend of his intention some months before he openly and formally announced it, and in the mean time the favoured person went round and secured the whole, or the greater part, of the votes for the next election, no vacancy being yet declared, of what use would it be for a far more able Physician, Surgeon, or Apothecary, not possessing those secret advantages, to come forward after the public were made acquainted with the fact of a vacancy having happened, or being about to happen, by its formal announcement? Would not unfriended talent—talent not fostered under the protecting shade of the family compact, find the place which he thought was open to public competition as completely disposed of as if it had been sold? The Medical Profession we regard as a liberal and honourable profession. Its annals are not scantily adorned with the names of men of the highest attainments in science united to those moral qualities and generous feelings which do credit to human nature—yet the charges made by the profession in general against their own privileged bodies—such as the College of Physicians—the College of Surgeons—the Apothecaries’ Company, &c.—show that medical men do not

place implicit confidence in the immaculate purity of their professional brethren, when the temptation is strong and the opportunity favourable to the establishment of a system of exclusiveness, favouritism, and jobbing. Without meaning to cast the slightest reflection on the Medical Officers of the Aldersgate Dispensary, we must say that the governing power of that institution was in duty bound to alter a regulation which could be made so serviceable to the selfish purpose of establishing a sort of family compact, and excluding the profession at large from the advantages of open competition.

“ Now let us see what were the alterations proposed. In the first place, an increase in the number of voters was insured by reducing the period for new subscribers to vote by proxy from six months to two months—allowing any individual, however, who should become a Governor seven days before the election, to attend and vote in person. To prevent that abuse of the proxy-voters which had taken place on former occasions, it was ordered that all elections must take place, and the vacancies be filled up, within *six weeks* after the occurrence of the vacancy. The rule so qualified prevented the possibility of *making any proxy votes* for the occasion. So far a stop was placed on the *buying-in* system. This latter regulation was carried by the votes of 86 Governors against 47, and it is a most extraordinary thing that those medical officers who wish to take the credit of being, in some degree, martyrs to principle, not only opposed this regulation, but made it the chief ground of their hostilities to the government of the institution.

“ Another regulation was adopted for the purpose of preventing the canvass which used formerly to take place, sometimes before a declared vacancy; and it will be seen that this regulation was well calculated to strike at the root of a family compact, if it should be attempted by such means to reduce the medical establishment, as far as the election of the Officers was concerned, to the state of a close borough. The regulation runs in the following words:—‘ Every person to be incompetent to be a candidate, who, either directly or indirectly, shall solicit, or authorise or permit any person to solicit, the vote of any Governor in his favour, previously to the notification of the vacancy by public advertisement.’ To obviate the danger of incompetent persons being elected, the Committee introduced another rule, which received the sanction of the Governors. It declares, ‘ 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.’ According to this rule, to adopt the words of the Committee, ‘ 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.’

“ We regret to find that the Medical Officers, or rather some few individuals among them, brought matters of complaint against the Committee, to which they were themselves, years ago, consenting parties, but which we have not space more particularly to allude to at present. Nor should we conceive why they should take offence at

the re-appointment of a House Committee which had fallen into disuse, but which we believe is customary in most, if not all, similar establishments, and which appears to us to be absolutely requisite for the regulation and control of their domestic arrangements. If the Governors of Public Medical Charities can only act as the Medical Officers dictate, then the Medical Officers are, in reality, self-governed and self-elected. They have the whole of the charity in their hands without check or control. Do the public wish it so? We think not.

BELL'S NEW WEEKLY MESSENGER,

October 6, 1833.

ALDERSGATE STREET DISPENSARY.

“We look with some compassion upon that short-sightedness of the great body of the Medical Profession of the metropolis and the provinces, which has induced it to make common cause with the Physicians and Surgeons of the London Aldersgate Street Dispensary, in their late attempt to monopolize the government of the institution, of which they were only the elected servants, by obstinately sticking for the maintenance of a law, the existence of which was found to be greatly lessening the amount of funds periodically accruing to the Charity, and of which 86 Governors out of 133 have now willed the discontinuance. But to be understood by all our readers, it is requisite that we preface our further remarks by stating that, formerly, subscribers to the Dispensary were allowed to vote, either by proxy or otherwise, in the election of Medical and other Officers, provided their subscriptions 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 weeks* 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 this latter alteration upon which the Medical Officers have grounded their complaints against the Committee and Governors of the Institution, and in consequence of which they have resigned their appointments.

“Now, we can readily imagine that a law under which the friends and the *protégés* of the MD.s and Surgeons could be elected at the pleasure and under the auspices of the latter, without expense and without exertion, must be far more agreeable to those gentlemen than one which throws a wide gate open to competition, by enabling candidates to encounter the influence of station and office with that of gold; but we do think it a pity that they should have so far taken the matter in dudgeon as to throw up their places in a huff, and break out in all manner of unseemly reflections upon the integrity

of the intentions of the Committee and the Governors, because they chose rather to act for what *they*, at all events, considered to be the best interests of the Charity committed to their care and dependent upon their support, than in accordance with the views and wishes of some half-dozen gentlemen who are most probably better skilled in pills than policy, in the letting of blood than in the making of laws. These Physicians and Surgeons, in one of their newspaper addresses to their 'medical brethren,' remark that it was with the view of preventing the Poor from receiving injury under the new law of election, by the appointment of 'ill-educated or otherwise improper persons' to vacant medical offices, that they left the Institution. Now, it appears, from an able justificatory Pamphlet, which has been issued by the Committee, that, by a Law of the Dispensary, it is enacted, '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, as the Committee of Governors well observe in the pamphlet in question, '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.' But even had this not been the case, we humbly, and in our ignorance, conceive, that if the new law did actually favour the promotion of 'improper persons' to the medical offices of the Institution, the resignation of the 'marvellous proper men' in office at the time of its enactment, was rather calculated to favour than to prevent that promotion, and, in consequence, rather to bring direct injury upon the Poor, than to hinder them from receiving it. But their 'character?' Ay; their 'character!' It is strange manœuvring, however, to pull down a bank to keep out a flood, out of pure consideration for the bank's reputation for stability: yet such has been the policy of the late Medical Officers of the Aldersgate Street Dispensary.

“ But the wonder of wonders in this mighty affair is, that the vast, enlightened, and industrious body of General Practitioners and Medical Students should not discern that this dictatorial conduct of the Physicians and 'pure' Surgeons of the Aldersgate Street and other Medical Charities, is only a part and parcel of that vile system of monopoly and ridiculous affectation of superiority, which has so long closed the doors of our Hospitals and Dispensaries to the great body of the Profession, to the overthrow of which system we consider the spirited conduct of the Aldersgate Street Dispensary Governors as a direct step; and are happy to know that it is already a matter of serious contemplation with many hundreds of the supporters of our Medical Charitable Institutions, whether, seeing several late specimens of the conduct of the 'Exclusives,' the interests of those Institutions would not be greatly advantaged by the throwing open of their Physicianships and Surgeoncies to the competition of the entire Medical Profession, instead of restricting them to MD.s and Surgeons guiltless of the horrible enormities of Pharmacy and Midwifery.

To recur for one moment to the subject of the Aldersgate Street

Dispensary—we cannot think that the Profession is so lost to a consciousness of what it owes to the poor and to the public, and, consequently, to itself, as to suffer the private influences of the resigned officials and the bullyings of Mr. Wakley, of the *Lancet* (who spouts in ‘Cambyses’ vein’ about branding all candidates for the vacant offices with ‘the mark of Cain,’ and such like nonsense), to interfere with their coming generously and honourably forward to the succour of the thousands of poverty-stricken invalids who depend for health and even life upon the gratuitous medical aid afforded to them by that excellent Charity: nor can we conclude this article without offering our humble meed of praise to those medical and surgical gentlemen who, during the interval intervening between the resignation of the old and the approaching election of the new medical officers, have hitherto rendered to the Dispensary those gratuitous services, in the absence of which, to use the words of the Committee, ‘the poor recommended by the Governors, after the resignation of the late officers, would have been left without medical assistance.’ These truly charitable men need be under no apprehension of Mr. Wakley, his *Lancet*, or his ‘mark of Cain.’

THE GUARDIAN,

October 2d, 1833.

“Our announcement in the last ‘Guardian’ of an approaching amicable termination of the schism which has unfortunately arisen between the Medical Officers and the Board of Management of the Aldersgate Street Dispensary, was, we are concerned to hear, premature. We were induced to repose a willing faith in the statement from its appearance in the columns of a respectable evening contemporary.

Assuredly this broil between parties honourably embarked in the same sacred cause of charity is deeply to be lamented, and by none more so than ourselves. In delivering our testimony yesterday to the unanswerable vindication of their own character and proceedings which the Board of Management had published, and a copy of which, in common no doubt with the whole of the public press, had been obligingly forwarded to us, we were and could be actuated by no feeling save that for the prosperity of a valuable charity. We had no personal knowledge of or connexion with any of the contending parties; nay, more, if on either side we might be suspected of undue bias, it would not certainly be against the professional party. It is but recently that we have afforded some proofs of our regard and attention to the best interests of the medical profession by the zealous support which almost exclusively we volunteered in its favour against the partial system and unjustifiable monopoly of the College of Physicians as a body. We may fairly therefore claim some credit with our medical readers for wishing them no ill. A better evidence still of our friendly disposition will be to remonstrate against their undue assumption of functions which are not or ought not to be within their

attributes, and to restrain them within the position to which their ambition was originally limited and ought never to have soared beyond—that of good faithful servants of a charitable institution.

“The origin of the dispute between the Board and its Medical Officers, has been sufficiently and notoriously enough blazoned forth to the public. For to do them justice, the latter have displayed considerable tact in getting hold of the Press—it may however be of use to restate it, and for that purpose we avail ourselves of the letter from the Committee of the body of Governors.”

After giving several extracts from the address published by the Committee, the Editor thus proceeds :—

“In the discussions preceding this alteration of the law some of the medical gentlemen were present and took a part, and the whole of them might have been, as they were regularly summoned. Most uncalled for, therefore, as well as insulting, was their subsequent declaration, in a letter to the Duke of Sussex and the Governors, on the 7th of last month, that if this alteration of the law were carried into effect they could not *remain in office with the committee as at present constituted*. We should be the last to dispute their right to resign upon a question of feeling or of conscience, but the manner of doing so, and the liberal imputation of motives against the managers of the Charity, excite equally our surprise and reprobation. The whole body threw up their appointments without giving time for preliminary arrangements to replace them by others less dictatorial and more humane, leaving numerous victims on the bed of sickness, and many perhaps precipitated to a premature grave as the consequence of this freak and splenetic effusion of the moment. Had the managers yielded to this sort of arrogant domination, they must have sunk and would have deserved to be held in utter contempt. The resignations were accepted as tendered, and the tardy offer of the medical gentlemen to carry through the outdoor cases on the books whose treatment they had commenced, we are constrained most unwillingly to regard rather as a desire to leave open a door for their recall than as arising from some compunctious visiting or a response to the appeal of suffering humanity.

But not content with abruptly throwing up their employments, the professional gentlemen published and circulated a justification, which had it been confined to its legitimate purpose no man could or would have found fault with; but so far from a vindication of their own motives it consists almost entirely of imputations upon others such as are not warranted by the conventional usages of respectable society. Into these we shall not enter now—they have been triumphantly disposed of by the injured party. Their bad taste is equally conspicuous with their gross injustice, and our greatest regret is to see people throwing stones whose own premises are so exceedingly well glazed.

“Candidly to speak, the medical officers of a charitable establishment are out of their places when sitting on a committee whose servants, strictly considered, they are. In many of the best-regulated institutions of the country such an abuse is carefully guarded against. They might and they ought to constitute a board of reference on cer-

tain specified points, and even for absolute control in others, but for the consideration or enactment of laws affecting their own interests or privileges they are as much disqualified as any other portion of flesh and blood. Far be it from us to detract from the value of their labours, yet it would not be difficult to show that the returns are not entirely a matter of disinterested calculation. Whilst we are disposed to concede every honourable and much substantial stimulant to the career of skill and talent philanthropically in the main employed and directed, there ought to be and must be, if the intentions of the benevolent are not to be frustrated, a controlling power lodged somewhere, and in whose hands so properly as those who contribute their purse and time to smooth the bed of sickness and administer to the necessities of the poor? The profession, we say it without disrespect, are but too prone to calculate upon an Infirmary as a school of science, in which the art is to be advanced rather than the poor victims of disease—the halt, the maimed, and the blind—restored to health and their country; lectures, demonstrations, and apprentice fees partake the medical man's cares equally with the claims of suffering humanity. Beyond a certain point these cease to be praiseworthy considerations.

“ The rigid restriction of the right of voting at elections, however justifiable in various points of view, and we are far from denying the weight of argument in its favour, has been, like many other reforms, carried farther theoretically than practically it has been found to work beneficially. Until human nature can be constituted differently, and adjusted to circumstances as the victims of Procrustes were to his bed, it is in vain to argue for unattainable perfection. The predominant interest ought never to be lost sight of for minor considerations, and that interest in the present case is identified with the best means of attracting the rich to the succour of the poor, the infirm, and the distressed.

ALDERSGATE STREET DISPENSARY.

To the Editor of the Guardian and Public Ledger.

SIR,—The dispute between the governors and medical officers of the Aldersgate Street Dispensary is of importance to every man who has an interest in any similar institution. This must be my excuse for addressing you on the subject.

Undoubtedly it appears unreasonable that any medical man should be able, by spending a certain sum of money, to become a medical officer of a Dispensary. In these searching times especially, any regulation which favours the obtaining of a responsible situation by means of money, is sure to be most suspiciously regarded. It partakes too much, in appearance at least, of that system of corruption, jobbing, and favouritism, which the nation has recently marked with its strongest indignation, and has risen as one man to extirpate.

But let not our passion deprive us of reason. In our dread of the phantom, let us not give admission to the reality. Let us not in our

zeal to destroy jobbing and favouritism, adopt measures which shall indirectly and secretly invigorate them. Let us consider calmly by what mode of action the object of our disgust is most likely to be rooted out;—whether by the plan proposed by the governors or by that which is sanctioned by the medical officers. There is yet another question to be calmly determined, viz, who are the masters and who are the servants? Does the institution belong to the medical officers? Did they establish it, and have they attracted to its support a certain number of confiding subscribers? If so, their conduct is justified: but what a farce is an election. If, on the other hand, the institution was established by the governors, who afterwards elected certain medical men to its offices, then, I think, it is rather presuming on the part of the officers so elected to interfere with any regulation which the governors may deem necessary. Still more extraordinary that the ELECTED should assume to be judges paramount as to the best mode of election.

“To return to our mutton. There can be no doubt but that whenever a valuable office is to be obtained, influence of all kind, in proportion to the value of the office, will be used, and that of money will not be forgotten; openly or covertly it will be employed. Could the Institution be secure of possessing, in all time to come, Medical Officers as disinterested as are those who recently belonged to it, there would be no danger; but who can answer for their successors? Let us imagine that, in the year 1883, the Physician of the Dispensary shall agree with the Surgeon as to the plan to be adopted in the event of a vacancy, which vacancy will necessarily be known to themselves long before it is to any one else. Their mutual recommendations are arranged, their powers circulated, and, when the scheme is ripe, the vacancy is announced. Can any one, aware of the weakness of our nature, fail in filling up the picture?

“If, by the plan proposed by the Governors, money, by means of new voters, may buy these offices, may not, on the other hand, the medical officers of 1883 think it desirable that one of them should be filled by a clever pupil, who has paid him so much for his instruction, or another by a still more clever pupil, who paid him double as much? But it may be said, admitting that the medical officers may turn the institution to their own private advantage, yet greater ability will be secured. The patients of the Dispensary will be sure to have the service of the best men qualified for their office. I ask why? What valid security will be insured by this plan over the other? The probability is, that the mode sanctioned by the medical officers will destroy competition. Men educated out of particular schools will have no chance; for, whatever may be the disinterestedness of the present officers, it is probable that some of their successors may have their opinions strangely biassed in favour of a—for some reasons—favourite pupil. From long acquaintance, they may be unable to discover the beam in their pupil’s eye, though they can without difficulty detect the mote in that of the intruder. And now as to recommendations: will any one venture to try for the appointment without them? Will the Governors pay no attention to this point? Even admitting all

this, the patients of the Dispensary have still a security for skilful treatment: for it is impossible that any one can get the office who has not been declared by the College of Physicians, or by the College of Surgeons, to be fully qualified for it. This is the best security. The colleges do their duty, and the public may choose any one whom they have declared to be qualified, without fear of ignorance. Candidates for the office must have been licensed as being qualified to practise on any of his Majesty's subjects; and it follows that they are qualified to practise on the patients of the Dispensary.

“ But there are of course among the number who pass the Colleges some of superior ability; and now comes the question, whether the man of ability has not a better chance against the long purse of an ignorant competitor, than against the influence of the Medical Officers exerted in favour of a pupil who may have already exhibited to them the powers of a long purse. The two untalented competitors may oppose with an equal power of purse their abler opponent; and what matters it to him whether the money be spent openly in the shape of qualifying voters, or covertly in the shape of an apprentice fee? But the difference is great to the funds of the Dispensary.

“ And the funds of the Institution, be it observed, are of as much consequence, at least, as medical skill. It will, I think, be granted that there are two essentials to the existence and utility of a Dispensary—first money, next medical skill. It is with regret I place money first; but in this, as in too many other instances, it will claim pre-eminence. What medical skill would have been connected with the Aldersgate Dispensary, but for the punctuality of payment of its subscribers? Well then, of these two essentials. As regards the former, there can be no doubt but that the funds of the Dispensary would be benefited by the rule of election proposed to be established by Governors; as regards the latter, the Governors may rest perfectly satisfied, because no one can become a candidate, who has not first been declared qualified by the highest medical authority of the kingdom.

To conclude, I consider that the plan proposed by the Governors has the advantage over that espoused by the Medical Officers, inasmuch as it leaves the latter free from all suspicion of jobbing or favouritism, and taking from them all prejudicial power, it yet secures to them the immense influence of free and salutary recommendation; inasmuch as it will be the means of greatly assisting the funds of the institution, while it secures to the patients the service of men of equal ability to those who could be chosen by the other plan; because, happen what may, the patients are quite secure of being treated with the same degree of ability as is thought sufficient for the great majority of their fellow subjects.

3d October.

THE END.

