

[Proposals for the establishment of a new infirmary].

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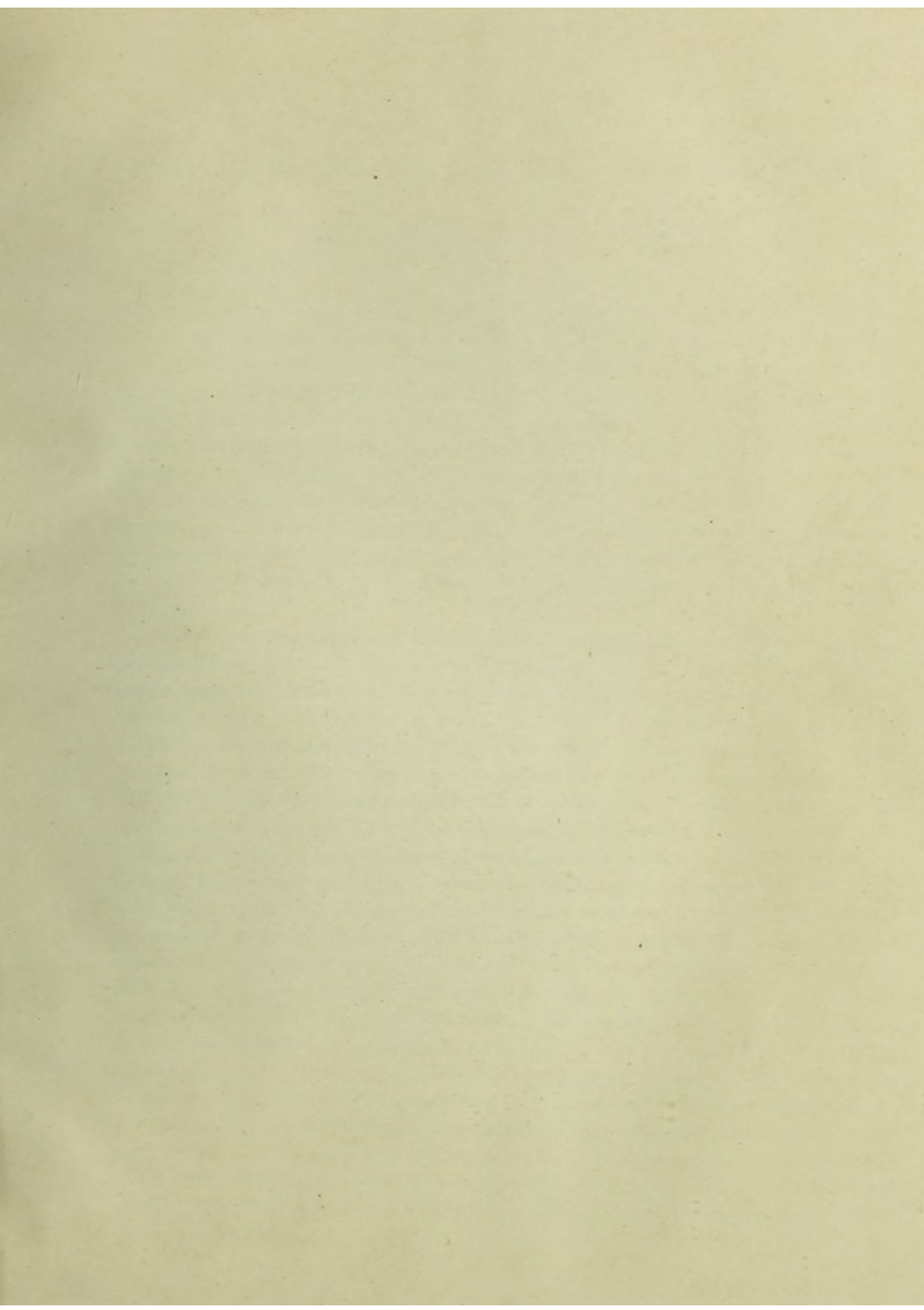
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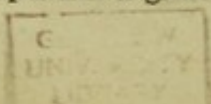
PROPOSALS

FOR THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW INFIRMARY.

ESTABLISHMENTS, for the reception and relief of the diseased and the wounded, have long existed, under various names and regulations, throughout Europe; and the benefit derived from them is so important, the necessity for them is so evident and urgent, that they seem to bear almost a regular proportion to the increase, or, at least, the accumulation of society. Hence their number and magnitude in large cities, and hence the interest taken in their welfare among all classes of the community, wherever free inquiry and the expression of public feeling are allowed by the constitution of the state. Benevolence, though generally engaged in the formation and promotion of these establishments, is not the only agent to which they are to be ascribed; for motives of a different kind, but perfectly compatible with it, and rendered imperative by the condition in which providence has been pleased to place our species, are equally obvious and powerful. Some of these may be briefly noticed.

It is a duty of magistracy and police to prevent, as much as possible, the extension of contagious and pestilential disorders, though, unhappily, in the fulfilment of it, some of the dearest sympathies of life must be occasionally sacrificed to the common good. It is no less the duty than it is the interest of individuals, whose circumstances do not permit the adoption of the most efficacious measures for the cure of such disorders, and of any others of a formidable and threatening nature, to consent to a temporary separation from their families or friends, in the hope of successful treatment, and of a more speedy return to usefulness and comfort than could have been effected while they remained in their own abodes. Very similar in principle, and perfectly justifiable, is the removal of servants, when seriously indisposed, from the families with whom they reside, and to whom, as few keep more than are absolutely necessary, their illness and confinement, by the double operation of increased claims on attention and diminished power of exercising it, never fail to be experienced as a grievous inconvenience, even by the most compassionate and beneficently disposed. The expediency of aiding and accelerating the recovery of the health of the lower classes, especially those members on whose industry others are dependent for support, is quite unquestionable, though there were no higher reasons to enforce it than the policy of preventing or obviating the necessity for an augmentation of poor rates. Lastly, the instruction which such establishments afford those persons who are destined to practise the various branches of the healing art, besides being of a nature and degree unattainable, at least by many, in any other way, ultimately becomes advantageous to all ranks of society. Altogether, therefore, the policy of such establishments is as manifest, as the obligation to contribute to their support is clearly and imperatively deducible from the spirit and the precepts of religion.



If, descending from general views of the expediency, the claims, and the influence of such establishments, we contemplate the history of that institution of the kind in which the citizens of Edinburgh are particularly concerned, and towards which they have uniformly evinced a well-merited liberality, we shall find ample reasons for gratitude and commendation ; while, perhaps, it will be impossible to avoid the conviction, that its extent and locality are neither commensurate nor suitable to the amount and wants of the present population of the metropolis, and that its arrangements do not admit of all the benefits which such establishments are capable of yielding. On these points, the projectors of a new, and, it may be imagined, a rival Infirmary, would touch with extreme tenderness ; for, assuredly, they would deeply regret being obliged to utter a single expression, which, directly or by implication, censured what they have every disposition to esteem, or which could be construed as an invidious recurrence to a discussion that long and painfully agitated the well-wishers of a valuable institution. It is the ardent hope of the present projectors, that the Royal Infirmary may continue to deserve and to receive universal patronage ;—nay, it is their solemn and conscientious belief, that the success of the plan, which they think themselves fully warranted in recommending to the adoption of their fellow-citizens, will ere long be decisive in enhancing the claims of that institution, as well as in vindicating their exertions to establish another ; and, beyond a doubt, they never could have calculated on a single fraction of the means by which their own hopes are to be realized, unless they had both relied on and shared in the intensity of the friendly feeling with which that institution is justly regarded.

Notwithstanding this frank and sincere avowal of their sentiments, the projectors must be allowed to entertain the opinion, which, so far from having been lightly formed, has been forced upon them, in spite of their early prejudices and most anxiously fostered associations, that, while, on the one hand, an increase of population to at least the double of its amount when the Infirmary was established, taken in conjunction with circumstances respecting the building and its relative position, indicates the necessity of additional accommodations for the diseased and wounded,—a necessity, by the way, plainly admitted in the fact of Queensberry House having been occasionally employed as a subsidiary hospital,—they should think, on the other hand, they were judging very unjustly of the progress of science and the extension of liberal feeling in Edinburgh, if they concluded that no modifications of management and economy could be suggested with the prospect of very beneficial results. But it is their wish to give enlarged benevolence another field for its exercise, and not to urge a comparison to the prejudice of an old favourite. They proceed, therefore, to specify what seems to them no less desirable than urgently to be required in the constitution and operation of an Infirmary, not only calculated for the relief of the poor, but likewise designed at once to afford advantages to other classes of society, and to promote the interests of medical science.

I. The great proportion of persons, for whose behoof such establishments are formed, is derived from a rank and condition of life, which rarely permit any provision being made for the adequate employment and remuneration of the means necessary to the cure of disease. But this very peculiarity, it is well known, frequently serves as the ground of objection to having recourse to them, on the part of individuals, not indeed in affluent circumstances, but whose highly commendable love of independence generates a dislike to the

reception of gratuitous, or, so to speak, charitable services, whether professional or otherwise. This remark applies particularly to persons resident in the country, who, with a view to obtain the best medical assistance, would gladly avail themselves of the benefits to be derived from such institutions, provided it were understood they were expected to make some acknowledgment for their temporary accommodation in them. Farther, it cannot be doubted, that many strangers, perfectly able and willing to remunerate, might, when taken suddenly ill, or meeting with serious injury, be induced to think it more advisable to have recourse to them, than run the risk of employing private practitioners. Now, it is imagined, there is no difficulty whatever, while there certainly would be immense convenience, in reconciling the arrangements requisite for a charitable institution with those of a Medical Hotel. Indeed, it is evident, the emolument arising from one of these departments might be found no inconsiderable source of support to the other; and thus, while the avowed principles of the institution, and the intended publicity of its economy, would furnish a guarantee for reasonable fees, strangers and others, who sought and paid for its benefits, would have the satisfaction of knowing, that, in discharging their own obligations, they contributed essentially to the relief of the indigent sick.

II. Such an institution, from its nature and the measures requisite to its welfare, is to be considered as a sort of public property; and, consequently, it is essential that its condition and procedure be as open and manifest to the community as is consistent with the safety, and, it may be added, the comfort and the right feelings of those to whom it administers its blessings. In order to secure all the benefits which its publicity, to the utmost safely practicable extent, can afford, it is proposed, that, besides the regular duties of a Board of Directors, chosen in the most liberal and comprehensive manner, at a general meeting, the privilege of visiting the house shall be common to all subscribers, subject only to such laws and intimations as the medical officers shall deem expedient.

III. The prosperity of such an Institution must very materially depend on the services of a class of men who are almost proverbially known to be ready to give them, whenever an opportunity of doing good presents itself, namely the members of the Medical Profession. Where so many are to be found, as in Edinburgh and its vicinity, every way competent to the duties which an appointment to such an institution would devolve on them, the task of selection is equally difficult and ungracious. Perhaps, in the absence of circumstances imperiously pointing out preference, the adoption of a principle of most general application and calculated to secure the ends of the institution, so far as medical men are concerned, is all that can with safety and delicacy be suggested on this topic. It is proposed, then, that the Members of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, in general and without partiality, be respectfully invited to contribute their assistance periodically, but with this condition, that their undertaking the offices, to which they shall be called, be held as a pledge that they will deliver clinical lectures on those cases which come under their care. In this way, it is imagined, not only an effectual medical and surgical staff will always be obtained, but the institution itself will derive no small profit from the students who would be induced to attend it by the hope of reaping instruction.

IV. In one particular, the proposed institution may singularly promote the cause of a science which must ever be held in the highest degree interesting to mankind. The observation, record, and publication of facts, regarding the history, treatment, and results of

diseases, are universally admitted to be of primary importance to the advancement of medicine. These then, it is proposed, shall be enforced and encouraged by an obligation on the medical officers to prepare and publish periodical reports, say monthly or quarterly, of the cases received into the Hospital,—qualified, of course, as to the names and conditions of the patients, so as not to make unnecessary or painful disclosures. The Members of the Medical Profession will be unanimous in appreciating the utility and desiring the fulfilment of this duty, which, it may also be remarked, may eventually become a source of profit to the institution. A Museum, to illustrate the lectures, would be an acquisition of peculiar value.

Enough has been said in illustration of the general views of the projectors, who would chuse to refrain from expressing themselves on sundry minor but highly important points, till the approbation of a respectable proportion of their fellow-citizens imposed the duty, and awarded the satisfaction, of delivering their sentiments, either in public, or before a Committee empowered to mature a plan for commencement and procedure. They judged it advisable, in the first instance, simply to suggest the subject in a general manner, leaving explanations to be afterwards made as they became necessary, and not to burden their proposals with minute details, which were fitter for an authorized report than the voluntary offering of private individuals.

As to the site and relative position of the proposed establishment, the projectors will not conceal their having experienced difficulties of a nature and magnitude which rendered decision of opinion on their part imprudent, had it been practicable, before they had ascertained the amount of the means by which their views were to be accomplished, and the sources from which it chiefly proceeded. They may nevertheless mention, that, though almost any situation in the suburbs, provided it were sufficiently open and unembarrassed by neighbouring houses, seemed to them eligible, they could not help thinking that the preference was due to the line of direction between Edinburgh and Leith. On this point, however, they are equally prepared to assign their own reasons, and to listen to those of others,—their main object being as exempt from private interests, as it is unconnected with party spirit.

In conclusion, they must be allowed to persuade themselves, that, as they claim no other merit than that of having ventured to express what they know many hundreds of their fellow-citizens have long thought, and to propose what, in wishes at least, has been often determined on, they cannot be charged with the very serious offence of recommending any public establishment, without having taken every proper means, and used all due caution, to arrive at a sober and sound conviction as to the probability of its being accomplished; and that, while in the enjoyment of the self-satisfaction thence resulting, they are readily induced to entertain most sanguine hopes of a successful result, they conceive they are merely doing justice, in idea and by anticipation, to the claims of the distressed, the sympathies of the merciful, the obligations and the interests of mankind.

A GENERAL MEETING of the Inhabitants of Edinburgh, Leith, and the Vicinity, will be held in the WATERLOO TAVERN, on Wednesday the 18th May, at 1 o'Clock.

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