

**Letter to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, on their rejection of the petition of Francis Black, M.D. / [John Rutherford Russell].**

**Contributors**

Russell, John Rutherford, 1816-1866.  
Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.  
University of Glasgow. Library

**Publication/Creation**

Edinburgi, 1842.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/gv4snq5s>

**Provider**

University of Glasgow

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The University of Glasgow Library. The original may be consulted at The University of Glasgow Library. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

# LETTER

TO THE

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS  
OF EDINBURGH,

ON

THEIR REJECTION OF THE PETITION

OF

FRANCIS BLACK, M. D., EDIN.

BY

JOHN R. RUSSELL, M. D., EDIN.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY THOMAS ALLAN & CO.

265 HIGH STREET.

---

1842.

LIBRARY

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS  
OF EDINBURGH

THESE  
THESIS  
PRESENTED  
TO THE  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MEDICINE  
BY  
JAMES WILSON  
M.D.  
1881



## LETTER, &c.

---

GENTLEMEN,

IN addressing the Members of your College, my object is not to express any momentary irritation I may have felt, on account of what I conceive to be a wrong done to an esteemed friend and colleague, much less to attain a notoriety no ways enviable, by directing public attention to my own case, nor to appear in the character of a censor of the conduct of the College, which I am not so arrogant as to assume; but it is to remove certain misconceptions which I believe to prevail regarding the opinions espoused by Dr Black and myself, to protest against the injustice of the sentence you have pronounced, and to record the motives from which I formed, and those from which I have now abandoned, the resolution to seek admission into your College.

As I understand that the opposition to Dr Black was not put upon the ground that he is immoral in character, irregular in conduct, or of insufficient professional attainments, nor indeed upon any thing that can be considered personal to him, I am entitled to assume that those who opposed his admission were influenced solely by a regard to the opinions which he professes, and that, therefore, the door which was shut against him, will remain shut against all who hold those opinions, and of course against myself.



As a Graduate of the University of Edinburgh, you are aware that I am entitled to claim, and you would be obliged to grant me, a Diploma as a Licentiate of your College, which would enable me to practise on precisely the same footing as a Member; and therefore the reason assigned for our exclusion, a desire on your part to protect the public from the practice of a system you deem to be dangerous, is evidently futile. You cannot deprive me of any legal privilege or qualification possessed by your Fellows,—you do, on the ground of my peculiar medical opinions, withhold the privilege of your Fellowship.

What, then, are those opinions that require so decided reprobation from your College?

The only general grounds—because the only ones peculiar to homœopathy—upon which your opposition to it can be based, I take to be two,—*first*, the belief it imports in the prevalence of a general law by which we are guided in the discovery of a specific remedy in each case,—“*Similia similibus curantur*,” expressed technically,—or, in plain English, that the same substance which produces a disease in the healthy, will cure it in the sick man; *second*, that the remedies are given in quantities so small as to be powerless.

For I cannot suppose that the practice of never giving but one medicine at a time, to enable us the better to observe its effects, and of always testing the action of a substance on those in health, before we administer it to those in disease, can be considered seriously objectionable.

In regard to the *first*, it would be out of place here to enter into a consideration of the proof by which this law has been established: it is enough to observe, that a practice similar to that which arises out of it is not unfrequently adopted by yourselves.

Is it, then, because we believe that mode of practice to be of general, or rather of universal application, which, in many diseases, you are in the habit of using with success, that you have thought it your duty to pass so severe a censure



upon us, without having yourselves ascertained, by experimental observation, whether or no that general law exist, in the belief of which we adopt an uniform method of practice?

The *second* ground of objection is, that the medicines we give are in quantities too small to produce any effects. On this subject there exists, I conceive, no small degree of misapprehension. *Hahnemann practised homœopathically before he diminished the doses.* The smallness of the doses is not included in the law of homœopathy at all. The practice of giving very small doses has arisen *entirely* from the *experience of their utility*; and the only limits which we acknowledge are, that, on the one hand, the dose shall never be so large as to be injurious to the patient by its physiological action; nor, on the other hand, so small as not to produce its therapeutic effects. Is there any thing so repugnant to sound reason in this practice, that, without any trial of the effects of Medicines as we employ them, we are to be publicly condemned for entertaining a belief in their efficacy?—a belief not rashly adopted from theoretic views of the action of remedies, but one which forced itself unwillingly on our conviction. We believe in the efficacy of small doses, not because *Hahnemann*, or any other man, has stated it, but because, during a long course of observation of cases, we have seen the most marked and undeniable benefit result from their administration.

The truth of our belief may be tested by any one who has courage to expose himself to the ridicule of his less liberal brethren; and, true or false, our system leads to consequences certainly far less disastrous than opinions which have been held by members of the profession, without having exposed them to the censure of any of the Colleges.

But besides these *positive* objections to our system of practice, I am aware that there are not less frequent, if not better founded, negative ones urged against it. Ours are faults of omission more than of commission. In this matter it seems



to me that the enlightened Members of your College might have been more careful to distinguish between the expressed sentiments of one or two homœopathic writers—and these perhaps not of acknowledged authority—and the consequences that necessarily flow from the principle of homœopathy. If we reject blood-letting, it is not that we are fettered by the dogmas of Hahnemann; for we admit no bonds of personal authority, and hold ourselves entitled to bleed or not to bleed, to give or to withhold a purge, as the urgency of each case may require; and no one has a right to question our liberty in the matter. If we abstain from the use of these measures, it is only because we deem it right never to resort to a remedy severe and uncertain, when we have the command of a mild one, which experience has taught us to be efficient. We do not exclude the one set of remedial measures from our rubric; we merely prefer the other in our practice.

Believing these, then, to be the grounds upon which we are excluded from your Fellowship, and holding, as I do, that they are quite insufficient to support your sentence, I must protest against it as unjust. And let it not be said that we experience no hardship; that wholly differing, as we do, in our practice, there could be no object in our union. It is hard, when we extend the hand to petition your Fellowship, to have that denied us. There may have been higher motives than a regard to professional status, and so-called respectability, which made us cherish the wish to be Members of your College. It may have been an anxious desire to live in perfect harmony with the members of a profession for which we cannot but feel the highest esteem,—supported as it is by so much talent, graced by so much piety; and if these were our views,—and I affirm they were mine,—is it no wrong to us that we are refused admittance, as holding opinions so dangerous or disreputable, as to disqualify us for your society? I cannot doubt, that had you paid the same attention to the claims of homœopathy which



we have, that the like conviction of its truth would have forced itself on you, and have driven you—against all preconceived opinions and all opposition—to adopt and practise it. And were I allowed to tell you how dangerous is the principle which, by this your judgment, you have established (the principle, that a diversity of opinion and practice in Medicine is a good ground of exclusion from your College), I would remind you, that this is not the first revolution in the science of Medicine, and recall to your memory the variety of sentiment on almost every subject which prevails among your Members,—and the growing disbelief in the utility of Medicine at all,—and ask whether you are best consulting the interests of science, by excluding us, not because we are deficient in medical knowledge, but because we hold certain opinions on Therapeutics, of which you have not demonstrated the falsity, and which therefore *may* be true. If it be meant that this, your public censure of us and of our opinions, shall be held up *in terrorem* to those who might be inclined to adopt them, I can only hope that no such considerations will prevent them following wherever truth seems to lead. If you have lighted up this lamp to be a guide-star to other Colleges, who may have it in their power to follow your track, I can only trust that it will rather be a beacon to warn them from so rash and disastrous a course, as judging without facts, condemning without a hearing, and scouting without inquiry, a proposal entertained in other countries by men of worth and ability, for improving the present sadly uncertain and defective state of Therapeutics.

I remain,

GENTLEMEN,

Your obedient humble Servant,

JOHN R. RUSSELL.

19 RUTLAND SQUARE,

22d Feb. 1842.









