

**Letter on the subject of the appointment of chaplains to the Belfast District Lunatic Asylum / by the rev. H. Montgomery.**

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LETTER

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE

APPOINTMENT OF CHAPLAINS

TO THE

BELFAST

DISTRICT LUNATIC ASYLUM.

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BY REV. H. MONTGOMERY, LL.D.,

A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS.

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REPRINTED FROM "THE NORTHERN WHIG" OF FEBRUARY 26, 1853.

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CALENDER-STREET.

1854.

LETTER

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POINTMENT OF CHAPLAINS

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BELFAST



DISTRICT LUNATIC ASYLUM

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BY REV. H. MONTGOMERY, LL.D.

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BELFAST  
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CALVERLEY STREET



# LETTER.

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE NORTHERN WHIG.

SIR,—The history, principles, designs, and associates of the Editor of *The Banner of Ulster*, being well known, I have not deemed it necessary to notice any of the systematic abuse and misrepresentation with which he and his fellow labourers have, for several years, been pleased to honour me, in common with some of the most eminent Ministers of their own Church. I feel bound, however, to depart from this system of silent contempt, in relation to an editorial article in his publication of Tuesday last—not, as you well know, on account of its unjustifiable references to myself, but solely because it affords an opportunity of making a few statements upon a subject which has awakened an extraordinary interest in the public mind, viz., the proposed appointment of Chaplains in the Belfast Lunatic Asylum.

That Institution was founded twenty-four years ago; and shortly after its establishment, a most judicious plan was drawn up for the Christian edification and comfort of such of the unhappy Inmates as might be qualified to profit by religious services. The framer of this plan was the late eminent Bishop Mant; and every Member of the then Board of Governors, lay and clerical, concurred in an arrangement which permitted the private attendance of such judicious Clergymen, as patients or their relatives might desire, in all cases when the Physician deemed it prudent to admit them. Convalescent patients, besides, were allowed to visit their respective places of worship, accompanied by an attendant of their own communion; and, so truly advantageous were these arrangements found to be in practice, that they were carried out, not merely without complaint, but with general approbation, until the Autumn of the year 1851. At that period, on examining a Plan for the extension of the Asylum, sent down by the Board of Works, the Governors were surprised to see a great apartment marked



“CHAPEL,” to be fitted up for 270 worshippers; although, in the opinion of our Resident Physician, not half-a-dozen, perhaps, of the most numerous sect would, at any time, be in a condition to attend upon religious services. This Chapel affair, besides entailing a large and unprofitable expenditure, in addition to some £14,000 required for necessary purposes, evidently implied the appointment of salaried Chaplains; and the Governors immediately consulted their skilful and experienced Resident and Visiting Physicians, Drs. Stewart and M’Cormac, as to the probable effect of such appointments on the mental condition of the patients. The opinion of those gentlemen was clear and unhesitating. The inmates consisting of *seven* denominations, each of which would be equally entitled to a separate Chaplain, our Physicians declared that such a succession of teachers, inculcating their peculiar opinions, to be immediately followed by the inevitable mingling and discussions of the patients in the grounds and corridors of the Asylum, must necessarily produce mischievous excitement, and other most disastrous results. This view of the matter, founded on the extensive reading and large experience of two most intelligent men, and sustained by the known opinions of their distinguished predecessors, the late Drs. M’Donnell and Thomson, is so evidently confirmed by common sense, that, in my mind, nothing except the professional bias of Clergymen could lead any sound-judging man to dispute it. Suppose, for a moment, that, in the excitably religious and political condition of this district, 270 sane men and women were shut up within the walls of the Asylum, and compelled to listen to the discordant teachings of *seven* or even of *three* Chaplains, every Sunday, besides receiving occasional visits from their spiritual guides, every one must see that the inevitable results would be clamour, revilings, assaults, and, possibly, derangement. This is no picture of the fancy; for such scenes have actually occurred in certain Workhouses, from the mischievous meddling of Chaplains; as the Poor Law Commissioners well know to their deep sorrow and vast annoyance.

Feeling these things, the Governors of the Belfast Asylum sent a respectful remonstrance to Lord Clarendon against both Chapel and Chaplains; in consequence of which Dr. White, one of the Inspectors of Asylums, came specially to Belfast to enlighten the Board. His statements, however, only strengthened our previous



convictions; and at a subsequent meeting expressly called to decide the question, *ten* Governors against *four*, determined to send a statement to Lord Clarendon, embodying their objections to Chaplains. The minority were the Bishop of Down, Bishop Denvir, Dr. Edgar, and the Rev. Mr. Monsell; the majority were R. J. Tennent, M.P., Rev. Dr. Montgomery, Ed. Bruce, J.P., R. B. Blakiston Houston, J.P., C. B. Grimshaw, James Stirling, Mayor; W. Dunville, John Clarke, J.P., William M'Cance, J.P., John Sharman Crawford, J.P. To the views of this majority, the following Governors gave their assent at different times:—Lord Downshire, the Dean of Ross, Rev. Dr. Cooke, William M'Gee, M.D., Mayor of Belfast; Robert Gordon, J.P.; and, so far as I know, all the other lay Governors are of the same opinion.

The Lord Lieutenant submitted our statement to the Inspectors, who, as a matter of course, reported in favour of their own views; and, without allowing us an opportunity of replying to their Report, his Excellency summarily decided the question against us.

Believing our cause, however, to be just, and supported, so far as we could ascertain, by the unanimous opinions of the respectable laity of all Churches, and the Public Press of all parties, we sent a deputation consisting of Lord Downshire, Mr. Gordon of Florida, and Mr. John Sharman Crawford, to wait upon Lord Eglinton, and solicit him to reconsider the whole affair. Again, as I believe, through the representation of the Inspectors, our remonstrance was rejected: but, as we heard nothing more on the subject for eight or nine months afterwards, we began to hope that the matter had been silently permitted to drop.

This hope proved to be fallacious; for, during the absence of Lord St. Germans, the Lords Justices lately nominated a Presbyterian Chaplain; though we have, as yet, no Chapel, and *can* have none, for probably nine months to come. The Governors, having carefully studied the powers conferred upon them by "An Order in Council," of which they had not been previously aware, resolved, with the single dissent of Dr. Denvir, to prevent this intrusion on their rights, and forbade the admission of the Presbyterian Chaplain. At the same time, having much confidence in the candid and manly character of the present Lord Lieutenant—having now a more distinct view of their own privileges—and being fortified by



what they considered to be irresistible facts and arguments, as well as by new and practical authorities, both medical and clerical, they determined to forward a fresh statement to Lord St. Germans, and to follow it up by a comprehensive deputation, consisting of Sir Robert Bateson, Bart., Very Rev. Dean Stannus, R. B. B. Houston, Esq., Rev. Dr. Montgomery, and J. Sharman Crawford, Esq.

On Friday last, his Excellency received that deputation, with a courtesy most gratifying, and heard us with an attention and patience never equalled. At our request, the Inspectors, Drs. White and Nugent, were present, during an interview of more than three hours, and took a large share in the discussion. Of our statements, or of any remark made by the Lord Lieutenant, I have never supplied one word to any newspaper, directly or indirectly: for I should consider it a breach of *decorum* to do so, until his Excellency's promised consideration and decision shall be given. In one event, which is not improbable, we may be compelled to submit the whole case to the public; and, if so, I trust it will appear that, while shewing due respect to the high office, and still higher character of Lord St. Germans, we did not forget what was due to ourselves, to the public interests, and to the unhappy inmates of the Asylum.

*The Banner of Ulster* bears evidence that some party present at the interview (not one of the deputation) has failed to act upon the becoming and honourable principle by which I have been guided; and still more, that the individual acting so indecorously has either made a wilful misstatement, or, what is more likely, stated a *fact* which the unscrupulous Editor has converted into a *fiction*. *The Banner* says, "Dr. Montgomery acted as spokesman for the deputation, but he did *not* confine himself to general principles. Although himself an *Unitarian* Minister, he had the delicacy to prefer personal objections against the *Orthodox* Presbyterian Minister appointed, and this, too, in his absence, and under circumstances precluding all explanation or defence, as the case might require. The Learned Doctor, we believe, has scarcely any personal knowledge of the Rev. Mr. M'Cullagh, and could not possibly have uttered a word of disparagement on his own responsibility."

To this ridiculous and unfounded statement, I might content myself with a simple denial of its truth; for, no one who knows



me could believe me capable, under *any* circumstances, of "disparaging" a man's character on account of his "orthodoxy;" and to allege that I did so in the presence of Lord St. Germans and my fellow-deputies, all of whom are assuredly orthodox, is transparently absurd. The subject of discussion had nothing to do with religious dogmas, and, consequently, the question of *doxies* was never mooted; but, I suspect, I know the very simple materials out of which the Editor coined his elaborate fiction; and, as a statement of facts, in relation to this point, will open up the very worst part of the Chaplaincy affair, I proceed to give it.

It was admitted in all the medical authorities cited to shew the value of Chaplains, and concurred in by the Inspectors themselves, that religious instruction would be *detrimental* instead of *beneficial*, unless it were communicated with extraordinary gentleness, tact, and judgment—in fact, that Chaplains for Lunatics ought to be men of gravity, experience, and consummate knowledge of human nature; or, as the Inspectors had quoted with emphasis, from the letter of Dr. Rogan, of Derry, "Chaplains ought to be most judicious Clergymen." Having pinned them down to this opinion, I inquired by what means such highly qualified men could be ensured for the benefit of the poor lunatics! Dr. Nugent's reply was—"Oh! they will be appointed on the recommendation of the heads of their different Churches; and *they* would not recommend any but competent persons." Then, said I, on your own shewing, the Presbyterian Chaplain does not possess your indispensable qualifications; for, although he is, I believe, a very intelligent and respectable young man, he has been but recently ordained, and cannot have sufficient tact or experience; and I know, on the authority of two of his senior brethren, that he was *not* recommended by his Church. Dr. Nugent then said that the Inspectors knew nothing at all of Mr. M'Cullagh's appointment; but that Dr. Denvir had nominated a Mr. Fagan, and the Vicar of Belfast (I believe), a Mr. Carroll—both young.

The *Inspectors* then, in their zeal, and not I, forced Mr. M'Cullagh's name and qualifications into the discussion; and I do not see, that, to say a man is young and inexperienced, when he really is so, can be any "disparagement," or that youth is "a personal objection," which a man's "presence" would enable him "to explain or defend."



So far as Mr. M'Cullagh is personally concerned, I have a sincere interest in his prosperity, on account of his connexion with a most estimable family; but whilst, with all his piety and experience, the Rev. William M'Ilwaine declares that *he* scarcely ever ventured to give religious instruction, even to convalescents, without regretting the experiment, I do not hesitate to say, that I look upon the appointment of raw, inexperienced Ministers of *any* Church, to a task so delicate and difficult as that of inculcating religion upon the insane, to be a melancholy sacrifice of the well-being of the most helpless class of our fellow-creatures, on the altar of party politics or individual interests. I care not whether the person appointed be a juvenile *protege* of Dr. M'Knight and other Tenant Leaguers—or a young Priest just issuing from Maynooth, under the unquestionably respectable auspices of Dr. Denvir—or an estimable young Curate nominated by the worthy Vicar of Belfast—or some boyish Unitarian Minister recommended by myself: I fearlessly maintain that all such appointments would be most injurious and unbecoming in themselves—rendering the welfare of the afflicted subservient to the aims of political parties, or to the desire of individual patronage, for the sole purpose of conferring pecuniary advantages upon a number of inexperienced, though probably respectable, Clergymen, of different Churches. Would such a course be pursued by sane men in relation to any of their ordinary worldly concerns? Would any one employ a Barrister, newly invested with a wig and gown, to conduct an intricate suit in Chancery—or a young Surgeon, just out of College, to perform a dangerous and difficult operation—or a clever youth, fresh from school, to keep the books of a great mercantile establishment? Not a judicious man in the world would act so absurdly—although, from careful professional education the Barrister, the Surgeon, and the Accountant must possess considerable theoretical, and even some practical knowledge of their respective arts: and yet grave men tell us that unfledged Clergymen, who probably have never entered an Asylum, read a single sentence concerning insanity, or studied the peculiarities of human nature, are abundantly qualified “to minister to minds diseased—to pluck from the memory its rooted sorrows”—and to act as “medical aids” in the sanitary care of the lunatic poor! Would Government appoint a Resident or Visiting Physician, of *such* profes-



sional qualifications and standing, to superintend the humblest Asylum in the land? Assuredly not. And yet, whilst very many of the highest medical authorities, and of the most experienced Managers of Asylums, earnestly deprecate the introduction of authoritative and systematised religious teaching and ordinances, even if administered by the *most judicious Clergymen*, our helpless poor are threatened with the visitation of inexperienced youths!

But, it has been inquired, what right have the Belfast Board of Governors, and especially Dr. Montgomery, to interfere with the question of Chaplains, which is simply a religious question? I reply, that we are invested with a right to care, in every way, for the comfort and improvement of the insane, according to our best judgment; and we repudiate the appointment of Chaplains, of any Church, because we sincerely believe that both their *presence* and *services* would be, in many respects, most pernicious. We are, besides, the guardians, in the Asylum, of the public purse; and, although we have proved our readiness to sanction all expenditure calculated to promote the comfort and restoration of the patients, we are not prepared to countenance an additional expenditure, which, although it might benefit some respectable young Clergyman, would, in our deliberate estimation, be eminently injurious to the unhappy individuals committed to our care.

According to *The Banner of Ulster*, however, we are most unworthy of our trust—being a Body of men utterly unprincipled, and acting under false pretences. The Editor politely calls us—“A local Cabal, who wish to retain in their hands any stray patronage which may occur within their boundaries, and then to employ for the restoration of Derbyism, all the interest thus gained. This is the secret of nine-tenths of the opposition *affected*.” Now, this is a very malignant, though a very bungling calumny. The Editor says, in effect, that the four-fifths of the Governors of the Belfast Asylum are “a local cabal.” Now, a cabal means a small body of men, secretly plotting to secure certain unworthy objects, by concealed and indirect means. Have *we* acted thus? So infinitely the reverse has been our course, that *every line* we wrote was laid before our three Reverend opponents, submitted to their criticisms, frequently altered at their suggestions; and sent forward to Government with their remarks, protests, dissents, and counter-propositions appended! There may



have been caballing, both political and religious—I believe there has been—for I know that various representations have been made which *we never saw*: but, the idea of our caballing, or going indirectly towards our object, is as absurd as it is unfounded.

But our “cabal,” it is alleged, had for its object the obtaining of “patronage.” How could this be? So far from seeking patronage, we actually *opposed* the very appointments which might have placed it in our hands.

The assertion that we opposed Chaplains, “to restore Derbyism,” is only worthy of the Editor of *The Banner*, whom the Member for Mayo (Mr. Moore), once his crony, lately described, with perhaps more truth than delicacy, as “next door to an idiot.” How the non-appointment of Chaplains in the Belfast Asylum could unseat Lord Aberdeen and replace Lord Derby, no sane man could imagine. Possibly, however, we have more power than we dreamt of. But, with all our deep political designs, we opposed Chaplains as strongly *during* Lord Derby’s Administration, as we have ever done *since*—of course, according to the Editor’s principle, “in order to restore Russelism,” by our mighty influence! And, after all, we are strange “caballers for the restoration of Derbyism.” The public mind has become familiarized with coalitions; but, the combination of the Belfast Asylum Governors to put out the present Government would transcend them all. Look at the names coalesced against Liberalism—R. J. Tennent, Edward Bruce, J. Sharman Crawford, C. B. Grimshaw, William M’Cance, William Dunville, all determined and consistent Liberals—and Dr. Montgomery, who is, in spite of factious misrepresentations, as sound a Whig and as true a friend of rational Tenant-right as any man in the kingdom—though no leveller, no robber of landlords, no mean, envious hater of rank and affluence.

Men will naturally wonder how a mis-statement, so absurd, could ever have been conceived or published; but, “the why is plain as way to Parish Church;” it is simply this. The Board of Governors is composed of many of the most influential landed proprietors, merchants, and professional gentlemen in the Counties of Down and Antrim, *of all Churches and parties*: and their all but unanimous opposition to Chaplains, supported by an equally remarkable concurrence of public opinion, is felt to be “a heavy blow and great discouragement” to the aims of selfish and trading



politicians, who hope to recommend themselves to the Irish Executive by advocating the appointment of Chaplains, this year; although, *last year*, "they were dumb dogs"—some of them, indeed, snarlers on the other side!

Insinuations have been well denominated "coward lies;" for they are base attempts to give currency to falsehoods, which even the most worthless men are ashamed to state *directly*. Such, so far as I am concerned, is Dr. M'Knight's insinuation, that, "within the last few mouths, applications were made to the Derby functionaries for the very appointment now condemned on general principles." *The Belfast Mercury*, in its usual generous and manly spirit, has endeavoured to fix this imputation *on me!* I now pronounce it to be a gross and wicked fabrication, by whomsoever invented, and by whomsoever endorsed to give it currency amongst my friends.

*The Mercury* was pleased, some time ago, to say that the proceedings of the Governors, in this matter, wanted "common sense." Perhaps they did, as time will shew; but I humbly submit that, as the Editor knew nothing of them, he might, perhaps, have acted as wisely in suspending his authoritative decision. As to the later assertion of the same writer, that the Governors should not have made such a noise about their proceedings, I again submit that we made no noise at all; for no Governor, I sincerely believe, ever took one step, or wrote one line, out of the Board-room, upon the question.

The same amiable writer benevolently published *The Banner's* false insinuations against me, personally; but, of course, "he did not believe them." In fact, he only threw the filth to afford me the agreeable occupation of wiping it off! But old times and memories stop my pen, except to say:—

"Who would not *blush*, if such a man there be?  
Who would not *mourn*, if Atticus were he?"

One sentence, and I have done. I attach no blame, in this matter, to the Irish authorities, past or present. I am sure they *have* acted, and *will* act, according to an honest judgment—though, unhappily, they may have relied, and may yet rely, upon erroneous opinions.—I am, Sir, &c.,

H. MONTGOMERY.

DUNMURRY GLEBE, *Feb. 24th*, 1853.



