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[James Russell].**

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LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

TREASURER

OF THE

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

BY

JAMES RUSSELL,

**REGIUS PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL SURGERY
IN THE UNIVERSITY,**

EDINBURGH:

Printed by Neill & Co.

1818.

[P.]

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A

LETTER, &c.

SIR,

I have often regretted the parsimony of the Inhabitants of Edinburgh, in their annual contributions for the support of the Royal Infirmary. The total amount of the contribution is not quite Four Hundred Pounds a year,—a very small sum for so numerous and opulent a population; not One Four-Thousandth part of the annual expenditure of the inhabitants, including only those inhabitants who pay Police-Money; and a large additional sum is spent by individuals who are not subject to the police tax. The correctness of this statement may be easily verified by a very obvious computation.

Considerably above Twenty Thousand Pounds a year, may be collected for the Police, upon a charge of Seven *per cent.* of the rent of houses above a certain value. The one-seventh part of this sum, about Three Thousand Two Hundred Pounds, would be equivalent to One *per cent.* upon the rent of houses. Supposing house-rent to constitute one-tenth of the annual expenditure of a family, then this sum of Three Thousand Two Hundred Pounds would be the one-thousandth part of the expenditure of those who pay Police Money. But as One-Tenth may be too small an allowance for the expence of rent, it may be taken at One-Fifth, which is probably much above the average proportion. The total amount of One *per cent.* upon the expenditure, would thus be reduced one-half, or from Three Thousand Two Hundred Pounds, to One Thousand Six Hundred Pounds. The One-Fourth of this sum, or Four Hundred Pounds, would be one four-thousandth part of the annual expenditure of one class of inhabitants,—fully equal to what is contributed at present by the whole population.

Another very considerable part of the population, not included in this estimate, still remains to be considered. This part is composed of tradesmen, domestic servants, and labourers, who, though

not opulent, nor able individually to contribute much, are all able to contribute somewhat. The greatness of the numbers compensating the smallness of the individual contributions, will, upon the whole, form a considerable sum. I am not acquainted with any data upon which the number of this class of inhabitants can be estimated with accuracy. But assuming them at Ten Thousand or Twelve Thousand individuals, will, I presume, be admitted to be a very moderate assumption. I shall likewise assume their individual contributions, at a rate so moderate, as to be far below the sum which they can easily afford. There are a great many Bible Societies established in Town, to which it is usual to contribute One Penny a week, or Four Shillings and Fourpence a year. It is surely not unreasonable to expect, that those persons who are able to contribute Four Shillings and Fourpence a year for the advancement of an object, which, however laudable, is yet remote and contingent, and for the benefit of strangers at a distance whom they never saw, will be able to contribute a small proportion of this sum, One-Fourth part for instance, towards the support of a Charitable Institution of the most obvious and extensive utility to themselves, and to their dearest friends and relations. A Farthing a week, or, less

than a Farthing a week, One Penny a month, would be One Shilling a year ;—a sum too inconsiderable to be felt as oppressive by any person in a situation to contribute for any charitable purpose. And the most zealous advocates for the universal distribution of the Bible, will not regard this proposal of allotting a small sum for the support of their sick and helpless brethren at home, as at all inconsistent with the purest principles of Christian benevolence. Less than One Farthing a week, therefore, merely One Shilling a year from Twelve Thousand People, or Twelve Thousand Shillings, would amount to the sum of Six Hundred Pounds. By this means, then, a Fund would be created of great importance to the Hospital, and from a source which at present yields nothing.

The Royal Infirmary has farther just ground of expectation to receive liberal support from several of the neighbouring Counties, which annually send a number of Patients to Edinburgh for gratuitous medical advice and assistance. The Three Lothians, Berwickshire, Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, Peebles-shire, Stirlingshire, Clackmananshire, Kinross-shire, Fifeshire, part of Perthshire, and a great many from the Orkney Islands, employ the Royal Infirmary as a place of refuge in a great variety of diseases. These Counties

might all be expected to contribute in proportion to their extent, population, opulence, and proximity to Edinburgh. It is not easy to appreciate the sum which they would afford. But from so many Counties, one might reasonably expect to collect several Hundred Pounds annually, without entertaining an extravagant opinion of their liberality. The very moderate average of Twenty-Five Pounds a year, would yield the sum of Three Hundred Pounds, which, I am confident, might be procured by making proper application to the different Counties.

Now, adding all these supposed contributions together, One Thousand Six Hundred Pounds from the Inhabitants of Edinburgh who pay Police-Money, Six Hundred Pounds from those who are exempt from the Police-Tax, and Three Hundred Pounds from the surrounding Counties, would produce the aggregate sum of Two Thousand Five Hundred Pounds a year. The portion of the population of Scotland, to which the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh grants an asylum in cases of distress, could thus contribute annually to the extent of Two Thousand Five Hundred Pounds, agreeably to the above distribution, without the smallest inconvenience, or without exacting a sum from any individual, which would make a perceptible diminution of his income.

But, however reasonable the grounds of this calculation may appear, I am well aware of the necessity of making very large deductions from any estimate founded upon political arithmetic. Moderate, therefore, as my expectations are, I would deduct one-half, or even more than one-half from the aggregate sum, and still leave enough remaining to be of most essential service to the Royal Infirmary.

Supposing, then, that only Two-fifths, or One Thousand Pounds, were to be collected by annual contributions, this sum would make an addition of Six Hundred Pounds a year to the present Funds of the Hospital, and enable the Managers to conduct matters in a style far superior to what is practicable with their now more limited income. It is most desirable to place such a sum at the disposal of the Managers, as will permit them to be more liberal in their allowances to their domestics, —to adopt any improvements which may be suggested,—and to provide for various unforeseen incidental expences which are perpetually occurring.

However reasonable any public measure may be, there will always many practical difficulties occur in the execution, from the various tempers, feelings, and prejudices, of individuals. These

will, doubtless, to a certain extent, diminish the success of the measure. I have made ample allowance for every diminution proceeding from these causes, or from other unknown sources of disappointment, by deducting more than one-half from the computed aggregate sum.

Having thus explained how very small a portion of the income of the community would afford most effectual assistance to the Royal Infirmary, Could there be any impropriety in making personal application to individuals for their support? Would any person, who is actuated by proper feelings of humanity, who admits the utility of public establishments for the reception of the Poor, when labouring under disease, and who is satisfied that such establishments are of all charities the least liable to abuse and mismanagement, be unwilling to give such assistance as his situation permits? Every one is the best judge of his own circumstances, and I am not for pressing upon any one from external appearances in his way of living. Such a mode of proceeding, would be to extort by importunity what ought to be entirely voluntary. Nor do I believe importunate applications at all requisite on the present occasion. The good sense and just feelings of the public, will induce them to act properly when the business is fairly

presented to their consideration. Many, I am persuaded, are able, and would be willing to contribute to the Infirmary, were their attention once fairly directed to the subject. With them, nothing more is necessary than a simple statement of facts. Such a statement would secure an impartial consideration of the subject, and in many cases would call forth the declaration, that they had not subscribed heretofore, because the state of the Infirmary was unknown to them, and that they would endeavour to repair the omission by a regular contribution in future. In talking over the matter with a Gentleman lately, he described his own feelings much as I have represented above, declaring, that the business of the Infirmary had entirely escaped his notice, till the accidental mention of the subject, led to self-examination of his own conduct, when he at once perceived the propriety of contributing his share to the support of the Royal Infirmary, and some other public charities. This instance, I am persuaded, is by no means solitary. Many, I am confident, would be found, who would feel and act in the same liberal and honourable manner. The experiment at least merits a trial. And in making the experiment, care should be taken to provide against the causes of failure, which proceed from the

carelessness of mankind. For many individuals neglect their duty on public occasions, more from carelessness than unwillingness to bear their proper share of the common burden. They content themselves with expressing their approbation of what is right, without thinking more of the matter. But if the very same individuals were prompted to take an active part in the business, by a seasonable hint, they would cheerfully contribute as much as could be expected from persons in their situation. A subscription-book presented by one or two respectable inhabitants, would arrest their attention to the subject, and procure an Annual Contribution. When and how, and by what persons, such subscription-book ought to be presented, are points which can be determined only by a due consideration of circumstances. But if all who take an interest in the success of the Infirmary, contribute themselves, and encourage others to contribute, there will be no difficulty in concerting the subordinate arrangements which may be requisite to make the contributions effectual.

Some variation will, no doubt, be requisite with regard to the manner of addressing that part of the population which does not pay the Police-Money. Their number is so great, and the sum

to be expected from each individual so small, that the trouble of making a personal application to every one, would exceed the value of their respective contributions. They must, therefore, be addressed by those who have naturally a more immediate and intimate connection with them. Heads of families, master manufacturers, master tradesmen, conductors of public works, enjoy the best opportunity to communicate with all in their employment. To them they could explain the nature and utility of the Institution, and point out the duty incumbent on every one to give it his cordial support, so far as his circumstances permit. They are the more called upon to come forward, from the chance that they themselves, or their immediate connections, may become the objects of the Charity : For such establishments are, in reality, instituted for the benefit of the less opulent part of the community. In promoting the welfare of the Royal Infirmary, therefore, they are virtually serving themselves. If they understand their true interest, therefore, and feel the full force of the obligation, they will set a good example, by making every exertion in their power to ensure the prosperity of the Hospital.

The Ministers of Religion, if they choose to exert the influence which their dignified situa-

tion gives them, might be of essential service on this occasion, by enforcing the truth of these doctrines, and recommending the Royal Infirmary as a proper object of charity in their private communications with their friends and people. This, perhaps, strictly speaking, is no part of their pastoral duty. But then these voluntary exertions would be the more meritorious on their part, and would be certain to procure the most grateful acknowledgments of every wellwisher to the Royal Infirmary.

The Counties, it is obvious, will come to be addressed through the intervention of the established official characters, the Members of Parliament, the Lords-Lieutenant, the Sheriffs-Depute, and Conveners of Public Meetings. It will be sufficient to state the business in a plain and explicit manner, to secure the co-operation of Gentlemen so well disposed as the Landed Interest of Scotland, to promote every patriotic measure, and who will doubtless regard a charitable Institution, established in the Metropolis for the general benefit of the country, as entitled to some share of their patronage. I make this assertion with confidence, not merely from the favourable opinion which I in general entertain with regard to the liberal sentiments which actuates the Scottish

Country Gentlemen, but more particularly from the result of my conversations on the subject with individuals, who displayed the most commendable generosity in their manner of viewing the business of the Infirmary. They expressed themselves to the following effect:—That they did not think it sufficient merely to pay attention to the objects of distress on their own estates, and in their immediate neighbourhood, but they likewise felt it their duty to extend their charity to Edinburgh, where, from various circumstances, a great number of individuals requiring assistance, must necessarily be collected.

Such, I trust, would be the prevailing sentiments, at all the County Meetings where the business of the Royal Infirmary was brought forward.

The Royal Infirmary has now been established for above seventy years, and has been conducted in a manner which does honour to Scotland. There is no Hospital at which the Physicians and Surgeons attend with more punctuality, nor at which the Patients receive more frequent visits. The terms of admission are most liberal. Every person who presents himself under a disease suited to Hospital practice, is admitted without any special recommendation. The moderate terms

upon which the Establishment is supported, shows that proper attention is paid to economy. And the late investigations, which have attracted so great a share of the public attention, and in which many of the most respectable inhabitants have taken a deep interest, out of regard for the prosperity of the Hospital, have brought forward the most honourable testimony in favour of the Managers, on account of the purity of their motives, the uprightness of their intentions, and of their disinterested and unwearied zeal to promote the object of the Institution. A more respectable set of individuals could not be found, nor of individuals who would discharge the trust committed to them in a more conscientious manner. So that, whoever contributes to the support of the Royal Infirmary, may rest assured that the whole of his contribution will be faithfully applied to the purpose of its destination, without embezzlement or peculation of any kind.

I am,

SIR,

Your most obedient servant,

JAMES RUSSELL.

EDINBURGH, }
31st March 1818. }

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I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your most obedient servant,
James Buchanan