

Letter and protest addressed to the chairman and management of the Royal National Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor : 31st August, 1881 / by H. Jamieson.

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LETTER AND PROTEST

ADDRESSED

TO THE CHAIRMAN

AND

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

OF

The Royal National
Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor,

BY

H. JAMIESON.

3^{1st} AUGUST, 1881.

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JUNIOR CARLTON CLUB,
LONDON, 31st August, 1881.

*To the Chairman and Board of Management of
The Royal National Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor.*

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour of addressing you with reference to the resignation of my seat at the Board of Management of The Royal National Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor.

As a member of the Board of Management I have, during the last three years, attended the fortnightly and other meetings of the Board with strict regularity, at the offices of the Hospital, Pall Mall, and I have during the whole of that period given my unremitting and best attention to the welfare of the Institution, in which I feel a deep interest, and to the funds of which I have been a subscriber for some years.

The Hospital, I need hardly say, is professedly managed under the laws of the Institution, which are explicitly set out, from pages 24 to 30 inclusive, in the Report issued for the year ending December 31st, 1880. Amongst these laws, it is provided that "the Board of Management of the Institution" (which is to consist of the President, Treasurer, Chairman and Deputy Chairman, and twenty Noblemen and Gentlemen, with power to add to their number) shall have the sole control and management of the Hospital and its property; also that the Board may appoint Sub-Committees, either from amongst its own members, or from the general body of Governors, and that the meetings of the Board be held twice in each month, and that three members form a quorum.

The Board of Management possesses no extraordinary powers, and the members thereof profess to follow the customs and usages adopted by every similar Institution in the Kingdom.

The usual and customary mode of calling a Board meeting of such an Institution as The Royal National Hospital for Consumption, is for the Secretary to issue to every member of the Board a printed notice with "Agenda," specifying in such "Agenda" the nature of the business to be transacted at such meeting. Indeed, this duty of the Secretary is specially provided for in the 48th law, which requires that "the Secretary issue notices for all general meetings and committees, as may be required conformable to the rules of the Hospital; that he do personally attend all general and committee

“meetings, and enter the resolutions which shall be passed in a book, to be kept by him for that purpose ; that he produce at every meeting the proceedings of the previous meetings so entered ; and that he have no authority to act except by order of the Board.”

This rule has, however, been persistently ignored, and a system has for years been adopted of calling together a few members of the Board of Management, and asking them, without any notice to the others, to attend at the business establishment of the Treasurer in the City, and there discuss and transact business relating to the Hospital, which ought to be discussed and transacted only at a Board meeting duly called by notice given to *every* member of the Board of Management, and held at the office of the Institution.

I may mention, as an instance of this irregularity, that when the lease of the offices in Pall Mall was recently about to expire, the question of finding other offices was discussed at several meetings of the Board, and certain members of the Board of Management, of whom I was one, offered to look about for new premises, and to report to the Board, at a further meeting, what suitable offices could be obtained. The offices looked at were not reported favourably upon to the Board.

Offices in Craven Street were shortly afterwards seen by some members of the Board, and, without any report being made to the Board, as arranged, a private meeting, of which only a few members had notice, was called by the Treasurer, and held at his place of business in the City, at which meeting negotiations were entered into and resolutions passed for taking a lease of these premises for a term, as at that meeting decided upon I believe, for fourteen years, and at an annual rental of £110. The first and only notice I received about these new premises, was to attend the usual fortnightly meeting to be held at the offices in Pall Mall, for the purpose (amongst other business) “of signing the lease for the new premises in Craven Street.”

I have always objected to the holding of such irregular and unauthorised private meetings, and I still assert that thereby the duly-constituted Board of upwards of twenty members is ignored, and the laws of the Institution are not complied with, either in letter or in spirit, as it appears to me that the members of the Board who thus meet without due notice to the others, and transact business affecting the Hospital, arrogate to themselves the power of managing the affairs of the Hospital when and where they think proper, and without regard to the laws of the Institution. The Secretary is in attendance at these private meetings, and carries with him, I presume, to the place where they are held, such books and official papers as may probably be required. The conduct thus pursued is

not practised in other public Institutions, and to my mind it is highly reprehensible.

The practice usually adopted by public Institutions in cases of emergency, is for the Chairman, not as in this case the Treasurer, to act promptly, and desire the Secretary to issue circulars marked "urgent," requesting the attendance of members at the offices of the Institution at a specially-early date, to give consideration to the case requiring to be dealt with out of the usual routine of business. The Treasurer's duties are defined by clauses 30 and 31, and they are limited to matters of finance only. When a Treasurer takes upon himself to call meetings with reference to leasing premises, sewage, and other such questions, he arbitrarily usurps the duties of Chairman and Secretary, and causes irregularity in the proper discharge of the duties of their respective offices. Cases of emergency are sure to occur, and if the ordinary course is pursued no inconvenience can possibly arise; but with regard to this Hospital, no regular system seems to be laid down for dealing with such cases.

During the extremely hot weather of this summer, the cesspools of the Hospital overflowed, and a communication was forwarded to London as to what steps should be taken. This was a decided case of emergency, and ought to have been dealt with by a specially-summoned Board. The Board of the Hospital was not summoned; a few members of the Board only (of whom I was one, but was not present) were asked by the Treasurer to meet at his business establishment in Cannon Street, to give their consideration to this matter. I mention this case pointedly to show how irregular the proceedings have been.

In the case of the Craven Street lease, I had a legal protest carefully prepared. I left it at the office of the Hospital with the Secretary, who was desired by me to place a proper notice of its contents upon the "agenda" paper, for the next fortnightly meeting. The Secretary did not place it upon the "agenda" paper as desired, but removed the protest from the office. On the day of the fortnightly meeting I applied twice at the office for this private document, and was told by the Secretary that it had been placed in the hands of the Solicitor, who would present it at the meeting of the Board. I attended the next Board meeting, prepared to read and explain the protest and all matters connected with it, and to point out that my object in having it prepared, was not to embarrass the Board in this particular case, or to throw any difficulty in the way of signing the lease of the premises, but to call the special attention of the Board to the danger of holding informal meetings, and dealing irregularly with the affairs of the Hospital. When the Solicitor

presented my protest to the Chairman, I demanded possession of it, as being, until presented by me, a private document. On the protest being returned to me, I withdrew it at once, and decided to take other action upon it.

Upon this occasion I was assailed in intemperate language, accompanied with personal abuse and attempted intimidation. I have been attacked in this manner upon different occasions when I have taken up subjects of vital importance, in my humble opinion, to the present and future welfare of the Hospital; notoriously so in the case some months ago in which, having ascertained that the irregular and highly-improper practice prevailed of members of the Board supplying goods to the Hospital, I took action, and had a clause introduced into the laws of the Hospital, prohibitory of such a pernicious and obsolete system. Violent language and personal abuse are not argument, and ought never to be allowed by any Chairman at a Board meeting.

Such conduct inevitably leads to lowering the status of the Board, and to the retirement of members of any position or independence.

I instructed my Solicitors to submit the case to an eminent Queen's Counsel.

The case was accordingly laid before Mr. HORACE DAVEY, Q.C., and his opinion is, that undoubtedly all the meetings of the Council at which it is intended that the business of the Institution shall be transacted, ought to be notified to *every* member of the Board, and notice given of the business to be transacted; that resolutions passed at any informal meetings will have no legal force or effect whatever, and that in the case of the new lease, he thinks that the proceedings were in the highest degree irregular, and such as I and other members of the Board were entitled to complain of.

This is all I have contended for in the protest, a copy of which is enclosed, and I have, by the opinion above referred to, the satisfaction of informing the members of the Board, including the Solicitor present at the meeting, that my views are upheld on every point raised in the protest.

I have written fully expressing my opinion on the subject of Board management; and as a subscriber to the Hospital, I hold myself at liberty to make what use of this letter I think proper.

My views and ideas on the Board management of public Institutions are entirely at variance with those held by the managing body of this Hospital.

It is beyond the power of any one member to contend against organised opposition, and few gentlemen would care to attempt it, or to retain a seat at a Board where unanimity is insisted upon, and

upheld as a first condition of office. The idea of unanimity at a Board simply amounts to the old slavish doctrine of passive obedience to the will of others.

I can look back upon my term of office with a feeling of satisfaction at having, with watchful care and regular attendance, discharged the duties and trusts attaching to a seat at the Board, and I may be allowed to add that upon different occasions my services have been officially and handsomely acknowledged. I have at all times endeavoured to work harmoniously with the Board, but from my experience of recent proceedings I can no longer hold a seat at the Board, and in withdrawing, I do so with a strong feeling of relief that I shall be free from all responsibility in the future proceedings of this Governing Body.

I now place in your hands my resignation of a seat at the Board of Management of the Royal National Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor, an admirable institution, well deserving of public support, and to the future prosperity of which I shall look forward with much interest.

I have the honour to be,

GENTLEMEN,
Your obedient Servant,
H. JAMIESON.

COPY OF PROTEST.

To the Chairman of Meeting of the Board of Management of the Royal National Hospital for Consumption, Ventnor, appointed to be held at the offices of the Hospital, No. 12, Pall Mall, London, on Monday, the 2nd day of May, 1881, and to the Treasurer and Secretary of the said Hospital, and all others whom it may concern.

I hereby protest against the action of certain members of the Board of Management, in negotiating for the renting of new offices, and in agreeing verbally or otherwise to take such offices, without having previously obtained the sanction of the Board of Management thereto at a meeting duly called for that purpose, pursuant to notice given to every member of the Board of Management. And I further protest against the signing of any agreement or lease of new offices until the terms and conditions of such

agreement or lease have been fully explained to, considered by, and assented to, by the said Board of Management, after notice given as before mentioned.

H. JAMIESON,

*One of the Vice-Presidents of the said Hospital,
and Member of the Board of Management.*

NOTE.—I have attended the fortnightly Board meetings with strict regularity, at the offices of the Hospital, Pall Mall, and I regret being compelled to lodge this protest in consequence of the action taken by a few members of the Board at a private meeting, when proceedings seem to have been most informally taken, and negotiations entered into for taking on lease new offices for the Hospital at 34, Craven Street, Strand.

The first and only intimation I had of these proceedings was by notice from the Secretary to attend the fortnightly meeting on the 19th April, 1881, "to sign the lease of the new offices, No. 34, Craven Street Strand."

H. JAMIESON.

