

Office of the Hospital for Sick Children.

Contributors

Hospital for Sick Children (London, England)

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Office of the Hospital for Sick Children,
32, Sackville Street, Piccadilly,
March, 1850.

SIR,

The Provisional Committee of the Hospital for Sick Children, feeling that the success of their endeavors to establish such an institution in London must depend mainly on the degree in which it obtains the approval and receives the help of members of the Medical Profession, have commissioned us to submit to you the following statement of the grounds upon which they venture to urge upon you its special claims to your support. By their desire we avail ourselves also of this opportunity to explain more fully than would be fitting in an address designed for the general public, the reasons for some of the proposed arrangements; and to anticipate, and, if possible, to remove any objections likely to present themselves to medical men, which might induce them to hesitate in lending their aid to this philanthropic object.

The high rate of mortality in early life, still little diminished by the efforts of the last fifty years; the small amount of accommodation for Children which our Hospitals afford; the success which has attended the establishment of Children's Hospitals in seventeen other cities of Europe, and the benefit to all classes of the community likely to flow from a similar institution in our own land—are the topics on which the Committee have dwelt in urging its claims on the benevolence of the Public. But while arguments derived from these considerations do not appeal more forcibly to the Public in general than to members of our own profession, they alone can

estimate the importance of a Children's Hospital, as affording the means of instruction to the student, as well as furnishing opportunities for extending the boundaries of our knowledge concerning a class of diseases, frequent in their occurrence, dangerous in their character, and often very obscure in their symptoms.

We are sure that no elaborate proof is needed of the evils which have flowed from the want of such an institution, and that we may appeal confidently, in corroboration of our statements, to your own remembrance of the time when at our schools of medicine, and in our largest hospitals, you rarely had the opportunity of familiarizing yourself with their symptoms, and of becoming acquainted with the peculiarities of their treatment. We appeal to your recollection of the early days of your professional career, in which the diseases of Children were as a sealed book to you, or as one the characters of which you had to learn to decipher at a time when the life of your patient and your own reputation both hung upon your reading them aright; and we ask you, then, to look around your library, and to compare the scanty contributions to our knowledge of those diseases made by English writers, with the large debt which we owe in this respect to our Continental brethren, who, both in France and Germany, are fortunate in the possession of opportunities of which our country is destitute.

On these grounds, then, we entreat you for the sake of our profession, as well as on the common ground of Charity, to assist the Committee in their endeavour to establish in London, a Hospital for Sick Children, to which our countrymen may freely resort; and where they may obtain that knowledge, which, without it they must altogether forego, or at best acquire slowly, painfully, and imperfectly; for Dispensaries for Children (even were they as numerous as unfortunately they are few) can never afford opportunities for the

advancement of medical knowledge, or for the instruction of the student, at all comparable with those which would be furnished even by a small Hospital.

The only serious objection that has ever been urged against the establishment of a Children's Hospital is founded on results supposed to be furnished by the large Children's Hospital at Paris; and is the expression of a not unnatural fear, that the high rate of mortality which is assumed to exist there would be found inseparable from any similar institution. To a great extent, however, this apprehension rests upon erroneous data, and has arisen from persons confounding the Foundling Hospital of Paris with the Hospital for Sick Children. *Muguet*, *Induration of the cellular tissue*, and several other diseases, which are often spoken of as though they were the scourge of the latter institution, occur exclusively among the infants of a few days old, who, neglected from their birth, are brought in a sick or dying state to the Foundling Hospital, and when there are nourished in part, or altogether, with artificial food. The mortality in the *Hôpital des Enfants*, appropriated to Children between the age of two and fifteen years, is 15.5 per cent. of the admissions, while that in the *Hôtel Dieu*, appropriated to adults, is 12.5 per cent.; or, reckoning the medical cases only, among which the highest mortality occurs, the numbers are respectively 17.6, and 14.3 per cent.* These figures do not show a greater proportionate mortality among the inmates of the Children's Hospital than might be naturally anticipated by any one who bears in mind,

* A small number of Children being received into each of the general hospitals of Paris as into those in our country, it may be right to mention that the above statement is based on the results afforded exclusively by the adult population of the *Hôtel Dieu*. The mortality there is somewhat higher than in the other hospitals of Paris, owing to its receiving a larger proportion of severe cases; but even in *La Charité*, in which the mortality is lower than in any other of the general hospitals, it yet amounts to 12.3 per cent. of the medical cases.

that the early years of life are those in which diseases of almost every kind are most fatal.

But, it may also be remarked that the mortality in the Children's Hospital at Paris, though progressively diminishing, is still kept up far beyond the minimum point, by causes which are by no means inseparable from a Hospital, but which might be entirely removed by some improvements in the construction of the building, and by increased attention on the part of those who superintend the general arrangements of the institution. The mortality which in the year 1822 amounted to 22.5 per cent., has now been reduced to 15.5 per cent.; but the wards are still imperfectly ventilated, and liable to considerable variations of temperature—the floors are in many instances tiled instead of boarded, the sheets and body-linen of the patients are not changed sufficiently often, and the number of nurses that wait upon them is too small. That a much greater reduction of mortality might still be effected cannot be doubted by any one who is conversant with the details of hospital management, and is proved by the fact, that in the Children's Hospital at St. Petersburg, with 100 beds devoted almost exclusively to medical cases, the mortality on an average of 10 years is only about 15 per cent.; at Vienna with 50 beds, and on an average of 12 years, as nearly as possible the same, although many young infants are received into that institution; and at Moscow with 100 beds, and on an average of 5 years, only 10.2 per cent.

This explanation will, it is hoped, suffice to remove from the minds of all, an apprehension, which, were it well founded, would afford a most cogent reason for at once abandoning the undertaking.

It can scarcely be necessary to assign any reasons for the proposed regulations concerning the age of patients to be admitted into the Hospital. After twelve years of age the peculiarities of early life

are no longer stamped upon the diseases that invade the system; and, before the completion of their second year, Children cannot with propriety be separated from their mothers. One other limitation besides that founded on age is generally adopted, and with much propriety, in Hospitals for Children, namely—the restriction of surgical cases received into the Institution to a comparatively small number; since the surgical ailments of early life present but few peculiarities; and it would be defeating the object of the Hospital to open its wards for the reception of those cases of accident and local injury to which persons of all ages are equally liable,

The importance of most of those hygienic conditions which the Committee have mentioned as, in their opinion, essential to the success of a Children's Hospital, is so self-evident as to need no comment. Difference of opinion, however, having prevailed in the profession as to the expediency of appropriating distinct wards in Hospitals to the reception of cases of fever, it may be right to state that the practice is adopted with the best results in the Children's Hospitals at Vienna, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. In all the most recently constructed Children's Hospitals also, special provision is made for ensuring the complete separation from the others of Children suffering from the eruptive fevers. The necessity of this precaution, too, is not only insisted on by the most eminent authorities on Children's diseases on the Continent, but is most cogently enforced by the fact, that at the Hospitals in Paris, where this plan is not rigidly enforced, the eruptive fevers often prevail to a formidable extent, and the mortality of Children attacked by them while in the Hospital is to that of those admitted on account of them in a higher ratio than that of three to two.

But there still remains one objection which is not seldom raised to the very principle of this undertaking, and which must therefore not

be left unanswered. It is said by some, why set in motion all the complicated and costly machinery of a new institution, instead of adopting the simpler plan of opening a ward or wards for Children in each of the existing Hospitals? They who start this objection do not say whether they propose to accommodate the Children at the expense of adults, for whom, while the metropolitan population has more than doubled in the present century, there has been an increase of Hospital accommodation since the year 1750 of less than 500 beds. Neither, assuming the proposal to be that of adding to the Hospitals, do they stop to inquire whether there is room on the site of several of the existing Hospitals for any addition to their size, or whether the locality they occupy is in all instances such as to be most favorable to the recovery of the sick and feeble child. But, supposing all of these difficulties to be overcome, it must be borne in mind that Children of opposite sexes must be placed in different wards; that those affected with contagious fevers must be secluded from the rest, and the convalescents kept apart from the sick; while for all there must be a different diet scale, different hours must be observed, and different regulations adopted from those suitable to adult patients. Let this be done, however, and it will be at once seen that the question was not one of merely opening an additional ward in a Hospital, but of appending to it a new Institution, a scheme which, how desirable soever it might be, would yet be found attended with difficulties at least as great as those likely to be met with in founding a special Hospital for Sick Children.

Each point of importance has now been passed in review; and if the facts which have been stated, and the arguments which have been adduced, have satisfied you that the object is one, the success of which will advance the interests alike of science and humanity, may we entreat you to lend to it the weight of your sanction, and to

assist the Committee with your advice and suggestions, which will always be most gladly acknowledged and most maturely considered. Will you further interest yourself in behalf of the Institution, by making its design known in your own neighbourhood, (for which purpose you can be furnished with as many copies of the enclosed Address as you may require) and by receiving subscriptions in aid of its funds. Should your engagements, however, preclude you from undertaking this office, the Committee earnestly request that you will furnish them with the names of any persons likely to assist in this good work, and that you will second their application with your influence.

We have the honor to be,

SIR,

Your obedient Servants,

PETER M. LATHAM, M.D.

GEORGE BURROWS, M.D.

ROBERT FERGUSON, M.D.

H. BENICE JONES, M.D.

CHARLES WEST, M.D.

All communications addressed to the Honorary Secretary, H. A. BATHURST, Esq., at the Office, 32, Sackville Street, Piccadilly, will meet with immediate attention.

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