

NAVAL ASSISTANT-SURGEONS.

(House of Commons: Committee of Supply, February 21.)

Colonel BOLDERO reminded the committee that in 1850 he advocated the cause of the assistant-surgeons, and carried a resolution which declared that the accommodation provided for them was inadequate and insufficient for securing the full benefit of their professional services. He was anxious to know what were the views of the present Board of Admiralty? The Lords of the Admiralty issued a memorandum on the 17th of July, 1850, which was not calculated to give effect to the resolution of the House. The memorandum was, indeed, extremely offensive to that class of officers, and was considered an insult to the whole medical profession. According to that memorandum they were to be allowed cabins only when the space on board would admit of it. This last exception would leave the whole matter to the Board of Admiralty, and defeat the resolution which the House had passed in 1850. He had received returns from the Mediterranean station, and out of twelve assistant-surgeons who had passed through all the ranks of their profession only five had received cabins; and only two had those little advantages which were enjoyed by the other officers in the ward-room. The result of this was that the *élite* of the candidates at the London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other colleges shunned the navy. In the event of a sudden war, where would the Government obtain assistant-surgeons when such was their treatment? How could Government expect candidates for medical situations in the navy when for three years they must remain in the cockpit, where study was next to impossible? What was the effect of such a system? Mr. Guthrie, in his lectures, said that medical officers could not be found qualified for the navy, and that the system adopted by the Admiralty, instead of raising the value of the service, deteriorated it by employing persons of an inferior description. Was it desirable that they should continue a system which disgusted young men, and deterred them from entering into the naval service? It was even more necessary that there should be well qualified surgeons in the navy than in the army. The sailors depended entirely upon the assistance of medical men, and, if those men were such surgeons as were employed in 1809, what confidence could the service have in them?

Admiral BERKELEY would ask the hon. and gallant officer how he would like, as the colonel of a regiment, to have the discipline of his regiment and the internal arrangements of his regiment regulated by a naval officer? That was really the question. Admiral Berkeley affirmed that very great improvements had taken place on board ship, and that great additional accommodation had been afforded to the medical officers attached to the naval service. The Board of Admiralty had done all that was possible to carry into effect the resolution of April, 1850, and he expressed his regret to find the hon. and gallant officer doing so much to create dissatisfaction in the navy by his efforts to place the assistant-surgeons above their superior officers—the mates. The fact was, that the assistant-surgeons were, on the whole, very well off; and, so far from there being any want of candidates, no fewer than fifty-four had entered within the last few months.

Mr. HUME said, that the question was whether the navy ought not to obtain as able and efficient medical assistance as the army. He could see no reason why both officers and men in the navy should not receive the best medical talent that was to be had; which, however, was impossible so long as the assistant-surgeons were treated as at present.

Mr. OSBORNE said that the resolution of April, 1850, to which the hon. and gallant officer had referred, was carried by surprise in a thin house of eighty-eight members. He contended that for many years past there had been no class of men whose comforts had been more attended to than those of the assistant-surgeons. In 1840 a commission, composed of the Duke of Wellington, the Duke of Richmond, Sir George Cockburn, etc., reported that there were practical difficulties in the way of allowing the assistant-surgeons in all cases to mess in the ward-room; but that this was less essential, as they had ascertained that the accommodation afforded them of late years was so improved as to render it unnecessary for them to make any recommendation in that respect. The hon. and gallant officer had characterized the memorandum of July, 1850, as an insult to the medical profession. The recommendation of that memorandum was, that the assistant-surgeons should be allowed cabins where space would admit of them. He (Mr. Osborne) could not see where there was any insult in that. (Hear.) He found, from a return furnished in May, 1851, that the recommendation of the Board had been carried out in all cases, except where it

had been found utterly impossible; and what more would the hon. and gallant officer have? (Hear.)

Colonel BOLDERO assured the hon. and gallant admiral (Berkeley) that nothing was further from his intention than to create dissatisfaction in the navy, and that he had taken up the question solely as a matter of public duty. (Hear, hear.)

Captain SCOBELL was astonished how the Admiralty had found it practicable to find cabins for so many. Cabins were impediments to clearing for action. There were other classes—such as the mates, who would be our future admirals—struggling upwards, who had claims for cabins as well as the assistant-surgeons, who were, no doubt, a very respectable class of men; but it must be considered that a ship was like that house—if all were to have seats, there would be no room for them.

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