

POOR-LAW MEDICAL REFORM.

The following letter has been addressed by Mr. Griffin to the Medical Officers of Unions:—

"12, Royal Terrace, Weymouth, November 9th, 1859.

"DEAR SIRS.—It is now some months since I had the pleasure of addressing you individually; but the time has arrived for us to prepare for the approaching session of Parliament, when I hope the Poor-Law Board will bring in a Bill for an amendment of the laws relating to the medical relief of the poor. Should they, however, decline to carry out the promises of their predecessors, it is right that we should be prepared with a Bill for an independent member of the House to introduce, and it is with this view I now submit for your consideration the draft of a Bill, which is an amendment of the one previously brought under your consideration. The alterations in it are founded upon the suggestions I have received. The dread of opposition to the defining of the class of persons to be entitled to medical relief has led me to omit that clause, though I still think it would be well for the sake of the community at large, that all poor persons whose earnings are only a few shillings per week, should have a right to gratuitous medical assistance, and not be left to the caprice of a relieving officer to give or withhold an order; this change would be the means of saving innumerable lives, and much loss to the poor-rates. The suggested alterations in the qualifications of future medical officers, are founded upon the double qualification required by the Poor-Law Board [Art. 168] coupled with those required by the Medical Act to allow of registration, and a desire that our Irish and Scotch brethren should have equal privileges with ourselves.

"The important clauses relative to remuneration, are founded upon the suggestions of the late President of the Poor-Law Board, the Right Hon. T. Sootheron-Escourt; and, as the plan proposed is based upon just principles, I trust it will meet with your approval. The vaccination clauses may or may not be the subject of a separate Bill; but I think it right that we, as practical men, should lay before Parliament our views on the subject. The working of the vaccination act has, to a considerable extent, been a failure, and such it will continue to be, until medical men are fairly rewarded for their services. There are other clauses, though of minor importance, still worthy your attentive consideration, and I feel sure you will not fail to give me your candid opinion of them; but before doing this it would be well to call a meeting of your colleagues in each Union, to discuss the several sections. My sole object has been to frame an Act that will meet the requirements of the profession, the poor, and the rate-payers; without this combination it will be impossible for us to get the legislature to pass any Bill. The medical journals of the last few months, have, with their usual liberality, informed you that the cause has not been permitted to lie dormant; for, immediately upon the appointment of the present Poor-Law Board, I addressed a letter to them, the last paragraph of which is as follows:—'Once, again, I beg your Hon. Board will take up our cause without delay, and carry out the promises made by your honourable predecessors in office, and that you will carefully remodel a system which is cruel in the extreme to very many of your officers, and, I greatly fear, is also injurious to the sick poor.' To this I received a reply 'that as soon as the Board is complete, your communication will be brought under the notice of the President.'

"On July 16th, I again addressed the Poor-Law Board, enclosing for their consideration the draft of a proposed Act of Parliament (in substance somewhat similar to the one I now send you, excepting the vaccination clauses.) To this I received the following reply:—'I am directed by the Poor-Law Board to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 16th instant, in which you transmit to them the draft of the Bill which you are desirous should be introduced into Parliament for the better regulation of medical relief to the poorer classes in England and Wales.' The answer, I grant, is a mere acknowledgment of the receipt of the Act; but still I feel sure the introduction of a Bill will follow, if you will act with decision, and respectfully demand that justice shall be done to the three parties concerned—the Union-surgeons, the poor, and the rate-payers.

"During the last session of Parliament, an excellent review of our previous labours, from the pen of a Union surgeon (I regret he will not allow me to publish his name), appeared in *Meliora*, a Quarterly Journal of Science. This I obtained leave to re-print, and sent to each M.P., in order that our cause

might be brought before the attention of the new members, as well as kept in remembrance by those in the previous Parliament. I also sent with it a pamphlet containing the correspondence of Mr. Pullin with the Board of Guardians of St. Thomas Union, and the Poor-Law Board, as the proceedings of the Guardians towards their medical officer, and the poor, were anything but creditable, and ought to be made known to the Members of the House of Commons, in order that they might see the necessity of a law which would protect the medical officer in the faithful discharge of his duty and could not be capriciously broken through by a Board of Guardians.

"It would give me great pleasure to call you together, and especially the Committee, to discuss the proposed Bill; but, as the expense to many of you would be considerable, I have adopted the course of sending the draft Act to such of you as are subscribers to the Association, or have been elected since January, 1858. I would gladly send a copy to all, but I do not feel justified in incurring a further outlay upon those who for upwards of three years have been passive spectators of our struggle, and have rendered us no assistance;—it is not, however, too late for them to subscribe; it is never too late to do well. For some months past, I have received but very few subscriptions, and the printing and postage of this Bill will entirely exhaust the resources of the Association. I must, therefore, again appeal to you for assistance, and trust you will endeavour to arouse your colleagues to a sense of their duty, and beg them not to allow a cause to flag after so much time and money have been expended. No one denies the justness of our complaints, but Parliament requires us to prove our case; we must, therefore, again and again, if need be, publish our *grievances*, and send a copy of our proposed Bill to each Member of Parliament, with a commentary on it—which cannot be done without money; a few shillings from each Union Medical Officer is all that is required; but, I regret to say, not half of the present officers have contributed a single shilling to prosecute this great labour, which, if successful, and successful it sooner or later must be, will increase and equalise their salaries, and elevate their status in the opinion of the world, and, need I add, it will conduce largely to the good of the poor, and be ultimately a saving to the rate-payers.

I am, dear Sirs, faithfully yours,

RICHARD GRIFFIN, *Chairman.*

"To the Poor-Law Medical Officers, and the Committee especially."

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Communications have been received from:— DR. P. H. WILLIAMS; DR. HASSALL; MR. C. J. EVANS; MR. A. A. JOHNSON; DR. SKINNER; MR. DULVEY; DR. RADCLIFFE HALL; MR. F. FRY; DR. ARMSTRONG; MR. W. SANKEY; MR. R. S. FOWLER; MR. A. B. STEELE; MR. H. TERRY, JUN.; MR. CROSBY LEONARD; MR. JNO. DIX; A SURGEON; MR. OLIVER PEMBERTON; MR. G. MAY, JUN.; MR. J. PARSONS; MR. A. G. FIELD; MR. J. JONES; MR. W. WEBBER; DR. C. HANDFIELD JONES; DR. HERAPATH; MR. T. HOLMES; DR. D. THOMSON; DR. LIONEL BEALE; MR. S. H. SWAYNE; MR. EDWARD PARKE; MR. F. J. BUTLER; DR. J. STONE; DR. R. MOFFAT; MR. RICHARD GRIFFIN; and MR. T. GRIFFITH.

BOOKS RECEIVED.

[* An Asterisk is prefixed to the names of Members of the Association.]

1. The Pathology and Treatment of Pulmonary Consumption; and the Local Medication of Pharyngeal, Laryngeal, Bronchial, and Nasal Diseases mistaken for, or associated with, Phthisis. By *Jno. Hughes Bennett, M.D., F.R.S.E. Edinburgh: A. and C. Black. London: Longman and Co. 1859.

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