

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE STUDENTS OF EDINBURGH AND THE NAVAL MEDICAL SERVICE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Knowing the zeal with which you have always pleaded the cause of the assistant-surgeons of the navy, I trust you will give a place in your journal to the accompanying notice, copies of which are being sent to the chief medical schools of Great Britain and Ireland. When you consider how short a time elapsed between the publication of the proposals of the Admiralty and the meeting, you will see that the feeling on this subject is as general and as decided here as in London.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, March, 1855. HENRY MARSHALL.

NAVAL MEDICAL SERVICE.

On the 8th of March, it was made generally known in Edinburgh, that the Admiralty were desirous of obtaining the services of young men between eighteen and twenty years of age, engaged in the study of medicine, but not legally qualified for its practice, to act as dressers in the navy during the expected Baltic campaign.

The position of the assistant-surgeons in the navy has been for many years felt to be such as to render the appointment not adapted for a gentleman. Any prospect of the reform of this crying abuse appeared likely to be indefinitely postponed, if the proposed dresserships were accepted by medical students; for there could be little doubt that these unqualified persons would in reality be employed as substitutes for the medical men who have left the service.

The students in medicine accordingly held a meeting on the following day, in the largest theatre of the University. It was attended by upwards of 600, and the following resolutions were carried by acclamation:—

- I. That this meeting regards the present position of assistant-surgeons in the Navy as inconsistent with the dignity of the profession, and the efficient performance of its duties.
- II. That a reform of this abuse, which has been long called for during peace, for the sake both of the medical profession and of the navy, has become doubly necessary now that the nation is engaged in war.
- III. That, in the opinion of this meeting, it would be greatly to be lamented if the students of Edinburgh should in any way favour the continuance of this abuse.
- IV. That the acceptance of the appointments proposed to students by the Admiralty must tend to postpone reform, by providing substitutes for the want of qualified men, which has been produced by the evils of the present system.
- V. That this meeting, therefore, strongly deprecates this proposal, and earnestly calls upon the students of Edinburgh to sacrifice, on public grounds, any private advantages which it may seem to offer.

Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh,
March 12th, 1855. HENRY MARSHALL, Chairman.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have perused for years with great pleasure the manner in which you have advocated the cause of the assistant-surgeons in the Royal Navy. The grievances of these gentlemen are but too well known to the press and the public at large. During the past week my feelings have been utterly disgusted with an offer made on the part of Government to second and third-year students, inducing them to enter the service as dressers at the rate of 6s. per diem, with rations. Now, Sir, the pay of an assistant-surgeon is 7s. per diem, with rations, out of which he has to find his uniform, support his mess, and maintain his position as an officer and gentleman. I presume these dressers would have to find no uniform, their term of agreement being only for the space of six or seven months, commencing from April 1st, (I think a most appropriate date,) and terminating in October. I have read with great delight in your journal the meetings of the students of several of your metropolitan schools, and am glad to find that the students of London are not singular in their feelings, as a

meeting of the students of the Edinburgh University (about 600 in number) assembled on Friday afternoon last.

But, to come to the point, Sir, I would at once state that I (and I have reason to believe there are plenty more in the same situation) am ready to enter the service as soon as I shall see those regulations altered by the authorities which are so obnoxious to the feelings of an officer and a gentleman. I did not speak at the meeting held here, as I was determined to appear before the public through the medium of THE LANCET. What I would have stated there is, that I saw a letter the other day from a surgeon of a line-of-battle ship, addressed to a Deputy-Inspector of Hospitals and Fleets, stating that there were seventy vacancies in the fleet, and not one candidate presenting himself, and consequently that he (the surgeon) would be glad to accept the services of any one, qualified or unqualified. Is not this most outrageous? The problem readily solves itself. It may be said we are taking advantage of the country being engaged in war. Admitted; but we are only now standing out for that which we have in vain been seeking during the previous long term of peace. Where the assistant-surgeons are to come from I know not—the country knows not—the Admiralty knows not; and it is for this reason that it tries to bribe unqualified students into the service, to be kicked about as powder-monkeys or some other menial servants, to the degradation of their profession and their professional brethren. But I am happy to find that it is not the professional diploma that makes the man a gentleman in his feelings, but that these are implanted in his breast long ere he enters on his medical career.

I could say much more on this most important subject of medical reform, but I forbear, feeling that I have encroached too much already on the space of your valuable journal. I would not have done so but for the interest you have shown towards this ill-used and most useful officer.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Edinburgh, March, 1855.

M.R.C.S. ENG.

LUNACY—THE CASE OF MR. GREENWOOD.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I am sure I need only appeal to your sense of justice for the insertion of the following remarks in one of the earliest numbers of your highly excellent and influential journal. Your first leader in THE LANCET of the 24th ultimo, written with great power, in a most telling style, and in a spirit of honest indignation at a supposed flagrant injury inflicted upon a man alleged to be insane, who, in your opinion, is not so, is itself calculated to inflict a most serious injury upon the two medical men, who, in the deliberate and conscientious discharge of their duty, wrote the necessary certificates for Mr. Greenwood's admission into the Billington Asylum in October last. I wish at once to avow myself as one of the medical men who so signed the necessary documents; and I have no desire to shrink from the responsibility which my view of Mr. Greenwood's case has placed upon me.

I feel quite assured, however, that you will see that responsibility to be in itself sufficient, without your heaping upon me any unnecessary terms of obloquy, and so laying yourself open to the charge which has recently been made against the press, as a "ribald press," by repeating the exact language, which in some parts of your article certainly adds neither strength nor beauty to its argument.

Permit me then to state, that the message for me to see Mr. Greenwood in October last reached me in the course of my usual morning round of visits in the town. I was requested to call, at my convenience, at the Bay Horse Hotel. I there saw Mr. Greenwood, in the commercial-room,—not "in the tap-room,"—and I examined him *alone* most carefully. I then withdrew into a private sitting-room to fill up the necessary document. I am almost ashamed while I add, (but your sarcasm compels me,) that to me the hotel was a private house; I drank nothing, and I saw nothing drunk.

At that time Mr. Greenwood was not suffering from the usual symptoms of much gastric irritation. He could not at all tell me how many brothers and sisters he had. He was fully possessed by the conviction that his brother Robert intended to poison him. When asked by me, what means his brother had taken to effect this object, his reply was, "both in my meat and in my bed-clothes." He was, under this conviction, in a state of great exasperation against his brother. His memory was so very seriously impaired, and his mental faculties generally so utterly unequal to any sustained effort, that there could not exist in my mind the least doubt of his entire incapacity for affairs.