MR. J. G. GUTHRIE
AND THE
POOR-LAW COMMISSIONERS,
AND
HIS GREAT REFORMS,
UNDER
EIGHT SOLEMN OATHS, IN THE
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.*

—
“4, Berkeley-street, Berkeley-square,
July 15, 1842.

“DEAR SIR,—In my letter of March 12, I gave you some explanations of the medical order of the poor-law commissioners for the better payment of medical officers of unions for what is called their extraordinary services, and I assured you that my endeavours should be continued, with the view of effecting a change in the manner in which they were paid for their ordinary services. I have now the pleasure to acquaint you that these efforts have been successful, and that the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Sir James Graham, and the senior poor-law commissioner in London, Mr. Lewis, have been pleased to accede to the suggestions I had the honour to make to them on the part of the council of the Royal College of Surgeons on this point. Sir James Graham intimated his intention to propose them to the Government, to state them in Parliament, and to have them carried out under the Act now awaiting the sanction of the Legislature.

“The act of grace and favour which they will thus bestow upon the medical profession will be most important, as it will complete the emancipation of its members, employed under the poor-laws, from the degradation to which they were obliged to submit under the existing regulations. It will, together with the medical order of March last, obtain for the poor that strict and good medical advice and assistance, of which I fear hitherto they have had rather the semblance than the reality; and I can assure you that the Secretary of State and the poor-law commissioner only yielded their assent to my observations, on their being convinced that the

* The communication to which we have affixed this heading was sent to us with the following note :—

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

Sir,—I beg leave to hand for insertion in the next number of your Publication, if you please to insert it, the accompanying copy of a letter which I have received from the late president of the Royal College of Surgeons. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

T. HOVELL.

Five Houses, Clapton, July 23, 1842.

grant of an additional sum of money, equal to that already paid for the medical relief of the poor, was absolutely necessary for their comfort, when suffering from the misery and distress which sickness must always bring with it, and which an insufficient medical attendance may render permanent. The details of the measure thus nobly granted by the Secretary of State and the poor-law commissioner, as much, indeed more, for the benefit of the poor than of the medical profession, will be in proper time explained by them. I have also the satisfaction of assuring you that I have spoken to many members of both Houses of Parliament of different political sentiments on this subject, and they have all assured me in the strongest manner of their determination to support the Secretary of State in anything he might think fit to recommend in furtherance of this object. In thanking you for the kind manner in which you and the other members of the deputation have been pleased to express yourselves towards me, for the interest I have taken in this matter, I assure you that I do not feel that I have deserved more than the very ordinary reputation of doing what I felt to be a duty. I have been very fortunate in having some private influence with Mr. G. C. Lewis, which has enabled me to press my representations in a manner which I could not otherwise have done, and I am thankful it has been of use. The pains I have bestowed upon the object which is now, I trust, about to be attained, are only a continuation of that interest I have felt my duty more particularly to take in everything relating to the profession of surgery, since I became one of the governing body in London in that department of medicine. On my appointment to the council of the College of Surgeons, I devoted the first year to the examination of its records and its regulations, with the hope of being able to assist in rendering it what it ought to be, one of the greatest and most useful institutions in Europe. My early education with men of all ranks, characters, and opinions, the necessity in which I found myself placed of controlling, and sometimes governing, large bodies of men, at an age when many had scarcely begun to learn obedience, taught me that strict fairness, honesty, and justice, were the principal means by which this was to be effected. I brought these opinions with me into the council of the College of Surgeons, and after I had made myself thoroughly acquainted with its rights and privileges, as well as with its defects, I applied myself to the removal of all the various grievances and abuses which had crept into the management of its affairs, or were incidental to its constitution, and not adapted to the spirit of the times. My elder brethren, all since dead, did not receive these efforts very kindly; they pronounced me to be a greater radical than even Mr. Joseph Hume

and declared that they would not sit at the same table with me if they could avoid it. These opinions, much as I respected the private virtues and acquirements of my colleagues, did not influence me much on points in which the public was concerned. I steadily pursued my objects, and year after year have proposed and reposed, and when beaten have returned again to maintain my opinions: until now, when retiring from the office of president, I can fairly say there is not one abuse or grievance remaining. I believe I may say that much has also been done for the advancement of science, for the improvement of knowledge, and that little or nothing has been left undone which can give personal ease, comfort, or satisfaction to the members of the body generally.

"I might, if I pleased, congratulate myself upon being, and having been, the most successful reformer in the profession, although I admit that many have talked and written a great deal more about abuses and grievances than I have done, but no one has had the good fortune to remove so many. I apprehend, however, that the word reform does not bear with many gentlemen the same meaning as is usually attributed to it, and that with them it is understood to imply destruction, or the subversion, not the reformation, of the existing order of things, in which sense I am not a reformer, for I am not a destructive. Having on eight different occasions taken a solemn oath to preserve and maintain the honour and integrity of the college, it has not occurred to me that the best way of doing this would be by aiding in the establishment of one faculty, or any other society, by whatever name it may be called, which would interfere with the utility, the rights, or privileges of the College of Surgeons, and end in its destruction. Although I have not supported any of these schemes, and have expressed my determination to resist them whenever officially called upon to do so, I have not yet had occasion to say one word on the subject, having never met with any one member of any government who did not at once declare them to be visionary, and that they had themselves never thought of subverting the existing ancient medical institutions of the country, however earnestly desirous to see them undergo any alteration and improvement that could tend to the advancement, honour, and character of the profession. It has been urged against the council of the College of Surgeons that it is self-elective, and its examiners are appointed for life, two points which it is not in the power of the council to amend without an alteration of their charter; and in the year 1834, a supplemental charter and ordinance were prepared, and steps were taken by the council of the college to obviate these evils, and to appoint examiners in midwifery. These improvements were deferred in consequence of the introduction of Messrs. Warburton

and Hawes' Bill into Parliament, which, if they did no more, have at least prevented the council of the college from trying to effect these desirable objects. I will not relax in my efforts while anything remains to be done, which, in my opinion, is likely to be advantageous to the public and the profession; and I shall be at all times happy to advise with you or any other gentlemen who may think my services likely to be of use to them. I am, my dear Sir, very faithfully yours,

"G. J. GUTHRIE.

"To Thomas Hovell, Esq.,

Senior Member of the Deputation from the Surgeons of the London Unions, to the President and Vice-presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons."

PETITIONS

AGAINST

NEW CHARTERS TO THE OLD COLLEGES.

(From the "Great Northern Advertiser.")

IN the House of Commons, on Tuesday, the 5th instant, some questions were put to Sir James Graham by Lord John Russell, from the answers given to which, it would appear that the Home Secretary intends, before the close of the present Parliamentary session, to ask leave to introduce a Bill for enabling the Crown to grant new charters to the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons in London, which would come into operation immediately, while the Medical Profession Bill, which the right honourable secretary means to submit to Parliament, cannot be discussed until next session.

The council of the North of England Medical Association, conceiving that the granting of the said charters would prejudice the *general question* of medical reform, have petitioned both Houses of Parliament not to authorise the giving of the said charters until the *whole* subject shall have been discussed by the Legislature. The council have also taken steps for sending petitions of a similar kind from Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, Durham, Carlisle, Berwick, North and South Shields, &c. The following is a copy of their petition to the House of Commons, which has been duly signed and forwarded for presentation to Lord Howick. (The Bishop of Durham has been requested to present the petition to the upper house.)

To the Right Honourable the Commons, &c.

The Petition of the President, Vice-Presidents, and Council of the North of England Medical Association, assembled at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, July 9, 1842,

Humbly sheweth,—

That your petitioners represent a society consisting of one hundred and seventy duly