

# THE LANCET.

LONDON: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1850.

WE have often commented upon the absurd manner in which the present Poor-law Board is constituted. It is, indeed, a most egregious folly that a board presiding over the administration of medical relief should not have upon it a single medical man of any kind. Two or three lordlings and lawyers, learned, but not in physic, are thought by the Government quite equal to order and arrange the momentous subject of medical relief to the poor. We have before us one of the results of this infamous system. It presents the spectacle of laymen exercising a formal judgment in medical matters affecting the lives of thousands of the pauper-sick of these kingdoms.

It appears that for eight years, a Mr. HOLLAND, who has held the appointment of medical officer to a district of the Honiton Union, has practised globulism upon the poor entrusted to his charge. In June last, Sir EDMUND PRIDEAUX, one of the guardians, brought this flagrant matter before the Board of Guardians, and subsequently communicated with the Poor-law Board upon the subject. Upon this the following letter was addressed to the guardians from the Poor-law Commissioners:—

"No. <sup>33,867</sup><sub>50.</sub>

Poor-law Board, Somerset-House, July 13, 1850.

GENTLEMEN,—The Poor-Law Board have been informed that Mr. Holland, one of the medical officers of the Honiton Union, has for some time past adopted the practice of homœopathy in the treatment of the sick poor under his care.

Although the Board are not prepared to express any opinion on the value of homœopathy, as compared with other systems of medical treatment, they believe that the homœopathic system has not yet been recognised by any of the constituted medical authorities of the country; and the Board therefore would not feel themselves justified in consenting to an arrangement by which the sick poor of any district are confided to the care of a medical officer, who adopts that system *exclusively*.

I am accordingly directed to state, that if Mr. Holland, in the treatment of the sick poor under his care, adopts the system of homœopathy, and is unwilling to resort to the mode of practice ordinarily recognised by the constituted medical authorities of the country, the Board would not feel themselves justified in consenting to his retaining the office of medical officer for the Honiton Union.

The Board request that the substance of this letter may be communicated to Mr. Holland, and that they may be informed of the course he purposes to pursue.

I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

To Messrs. P. and H. V. Mules, Clerks  
to the Guardians, Honiton Union."

EBRINGTON,  
Secretary.

We have italicized the word "*exclusively*" which furnished the loop-hole of escape to HOLLAND, and which is deserving of the severest animadversion. This letter was construed by the guardians, the majority of whom had no objection to so cheap a medication of the poor as globulism presented, to mean that HOLLAND was quite welcome to practise globulism provided he mixed up this practice with occasional recourse to regular physic. That is, if he would become dishonest, and practise after two methods diametrically opposed, he might keep his appointment, and the Poor-law Board would not trouble him. This construction is evident from the following letter from the union clerk to HOLLAND:—

"Honiton, July 16, 1850.

DEAR SIR,—I am instructed by the guardians to forward you a copy of a letter which they have received from the Poor-

Law Board, and at the same time to express their hope that you will assent to the request contained in it—to give the paupers their option as to the mode in which they wish to be treated.

The guardians at the same time express their opinion, that you so doing would not, under the circumstances, be any compromise of principle.

I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

E. C. Holland, Esq."

HORACE VIBART MULES.

HOLLAND replied by refusing to give any definite answer to this, as he was "desirous of consulting and advising with the Committee of Management of the Hahnemann Hospital in London previous to doing so." Upon this a second letter was addressed by Lord EBRINGTON to the guardians, in which the evasion and dishonesty implied in the word "*exclusively*" were again twice suggested by the secretary of the Poor-law Board.

"No. <sup>37,716</sup><sub>50.</sub>

Poor Law Board, Somerset House, Aug. 8, 1850.

SIR,—The Poor-Law Board have received from the Guardians of the Honiton Union a copy of a letter which you addressed to them on the 23rd ultimo, and in which you state that you "trust they will pardon your declining for the present coming to any determination as to your ulterior course," in respect of the practice of homœopathy in your treatment of the sick poor of the district, of which you are the medical officer.

It is not within the province, nor is it necessary for this Board to discuss the professional merits or demerits of homœopathy, or any other exceptional mode of treatment which may be adopted by a medical officer. If a peculiar system of treatment, opposed to that practised by the faculty generally, disavowed and disapproved by the College of Physicians, and unsanctioned by any legally constituted medical body, is systematically and exclusively adopted by a medical officer, the Board consider themselves bound, in the exercise of the powers confided to them, to prohibit such a mode of treatment, and to prevent the sick poor from being subjected to it, by removing, if necessary, the medical officer who shall continue so to practise it in defiance of that prohibition.

The Poor-Law Board were, on a former occasion, reluctantly compelled to remove the medical officer of the Wells Union, because he declined to abandon the general practice of homœopathy amongst the sick poor of his district; and the Board will, with equal reluctance, be obliged to adopt the same course towards you, unless you will give them an assurance, which they will receive with much pleasure, that you will not continue to practise that system exclusively in treating the patients under your care, as one of the medical officers of the Honiton Union.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

EBRINGTON, Secretary.

E. C. Holland, Esq., Medical Officer, Honiton."

HOLLAND's answer to this oblique epistle consisted of a lengthened tirade against regular medicine, which he described as being "positively murderous in its results;" but he ended by accepting the evasion suggested to him by Lord EBRINGTON, and explained by the clerk to the guardians. HOLLAND wrote to the Poor-law Board, in reply to Lord EBRINGTON,—"*Considering the immense multitude of the poor who would be deprived of the benefit of homœopathic treatment were I to resign my appointment, I am willing to act in compliance with your views, and as regards medical treatment, put the poor on a level with the rich, by giving them a choice as to the plan on which their complaints shall be treated.*"

Even supposing the Globulistic humbug were true, what can be more monstrous than the spectacle of a man quite willing, at the wish of an ignorant pauper, and according to the "views" of the Poor-law Board, to treat him according to the system which he pronounces to be "murderous," and in which, no doubt, he speaks from his own experience. In the whole history of the old Poor-law Commission nothing more horrible transpired than this consignment of the sick poor, in the miseries of suffering and want, to such farcical proceedings as that described by our correspondent, Mr. BALLARD. It is

profoundly unfortunate that the health of the poor should have fallen into such hands as the present Poor-law Board, who meets a renegade, not with a punishment, but with suggestions for an escape by a dishonest evasion.

Lord EBRINGTON's first and second letters were well understood and appreciated by the person to whom they were addressed. It was not wonderful that he should have fallen into the course indicated so plainly.

The following letter, which thus far completes the transaction, is, we venture to say, a flagrant instance of official turpitude, which could be equalled in no other administrative department at the present day. It is a vile expression of full complicity with the trickery of a public servant, the trickery, in the first instance, emanating from the Poor-law Board. Here is the precious letter; and we say, in conclusion, that this nefarious transaction, apart from all questions of the truth or falsehood of medicine, shows the Poor-law Board to be utterly unfit for the duties with which it is entrusted.

"No. <sup>39,793</sup><sub>50.</sub>

Poor Law Board, Somerset House, Aug. 27, 1850.

SIR,—I am directed by the Poor-Law Board to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 19th instant, containing your remarks with reference to the practice of homœopathy, and your medical treatment of the sick poor of the district in the Honiton Union, of which you are the medical officer.

The Board observe with satisfaction the assurance you give them, that in the medical treatment of the sick poor you will hereafter act in conformity with the views of the Board, as expressed in their letter of the 8th instant.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
HUGH OWEN, Clerk to the Board.

To E. C. Holland, Esq., Medical Officer, Honiton."

This is nothing more than an indirect and dishonest sanction of the treatment of the poor by globulism. It applies not only to the poor of Honiton, but to the entire pauper population.

By all means let the Board reinstate Mr. WELLS, whom it so "reluctantly" displaced at Wells, and give the Taunton pastrycook a post under the Poor Law! We need not say that the proceedings of the Poor-law Board should now be watched more narrowly than ever, and exposed by the medical profession.

THE selfishness of the Council of the College of Surgeons in no instance more forcibly manifests itself than in the manner in which they dispose of the question of Sir GEORGE GREY, as to what the College Council would do with "that class of "medical practitioners, not members of the College, who have "been termed general practitioners, and whose incorporation "as a body has been strongly pressed." The answer of the Council is as follows:—

"The Council feel some difficulty in furnishing a suitable and satisfactory statement in reply to this request. The meaning which they attach, and which they presume would be legally attached, to the term 'general practitioner,' is the designation of one who has obtained the diploma of the College of Surgeons, either as member or fellow, and the licence of the Society of Apothecaries, and who, in conformity therewith, practises as surgeon, apothecary, and accoucheur; such general practitioners constitute the larger part of the class, who, possessing the qualification, medical and surgical, required by the poor-law commissioners, are appointed as medical officers of poor-law unions. Such are the general practitioners whom the National Institute professes to represent, and of whom they urge the incorporation as a College of General Practitioners.

"Other than these, the Council know of no practitioners who can be designated, with any degree of propriety, 'general practitioners.'

"There are, indeed, some, and the Council believe they are not numerous, who, practising as apothecaries and accoucheurs, are merely licentiates of the Society of Apothecaries, and are not members of the College of Surgeons; but who can scarcely, or only by a lax use of words, be considered to have any title to the character of general practitioners. The Council are ignorant of any claim on the part of such licentiates, to be separately incorporated, or that their incorporation forms a part of any 'scheme that has been strongly pressed.'"

Is this a "suitable and satisfactory reply"? It is the answer of an equivocating and unwilling witness, who flinches from the real merits of the question. The Council cannot be so ignorant and blind as to think that such an answer will satisfy either Sir GEORGE GREY or the profession. Does the Council mean to throw overboard the great body of well-qualified gentlemen in this country who practise generally, merely because they are not members of the College of Surgeons of England? Are there no members of the Edinburgh, Dublin, and other medical and surgical colleges, practising generally in England and Wales, some having fortified themselves with the licence of the Apothecaries' Company, whilst others, relying on the spread of liberal opinions, have no such protection? Does the Council profess to be ignorant that there are a considerable number of members of the College of Surgeons in general practice who have no other qualification? What, then, is the meaning of the sneer respecting those practitioners who are "merely licentiates of the Society of Apothecaries?" That Society, whatever be its faults, has always instituted an examination which really tests the capabilities of those who undergo it. The sneer comes, indeed, with a bad grace from the men whose chosen representative declared that the members of the College of Surgeons were only "adequate to the common exigencies of surgery."

On Saturday evening next, Oct. 12, the Medical Society of London holds its first meeting since its amalgamation with the Westminster Medical Society. It is well known that for some years past the Medical Society of London has been getting gradually weaker, and the interest of its proceedings necessarily less and less. The time-honoured Society of LETTSOM and FOTHERGILL seemed to have lived to a condition less vigorous than that of second childhood. Whilst its children flourished around it, the venerable parent was left, as it were, to perish, reversing in reality the fabulous story of old: in that the father was said to have devoured his children: in this the children had all but devoured their parent. And yet it was remarkable that such a Society, with its property, its library, its Fothergillian medal, and other advantages, should die of inanition. It was clear that some reason must exist, apart from mere old age, to account for the decay. Consultations were held respecting the case, and two remedies were recommended—change of air, and the transfusion of blood from a young and healthy subject. The remedies were applied, and behold the Medical Society of London located in the West, having had infused into its veins a vigorous current from its junior the Westminster. It is clear that the advice given and acted upon was the best for the case, and we augur a long and prosperous career of health to the Medical Society of London. And it deserves to be prosperous; for whilst the Medical and Chirurgical Society is retrograding in every way in usefulness, and is becoming a mere dull meeting-room for reading and discussing long and uninteresting papers, with its places of honour the property of a mere clique, the Medical Society has given its laws a more liberal character, and made

its elections, what they should be in every scientific body, dependent upon the suffrages of the entire body of the Fellows. One improvement in the Medical Society is deserving of especial mention, because it involves a most important addition to the value of the Society, and, indeed, must confer a great and lasting boon upon the profession: we allude to the establishment of sectional committees on medicine, surgery, and midwifery. To these, others on chemistry, materia medica, and vital statistics, will be added. These committees will have entrusted to them all questions regarding sanitary measures, new modes of treatment, and the value of new medicines. Like the Académie de Médecine of Paris, the section will give a report on the questions submitted to it; and thus, we believe for the first time in England, will there be a tribunal at which impartial justice may be obtained for a new mode of treatment, or a new remedy. If the Medical Society had done nothing more than this, it would, indeed, deserve to be unusually successful, and to have the support of the entire profession.

The Society, however, contemplates many more important additions to its usefulness, amongst the more prominent of which may be noticed the establishment of Lettsomian professors, to lecture occasionally to the Fellows on variously appointed subjects, similar, in fact, to the lectures at the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons. With these advantages—with a library rich beyond comparison in old and rare books, and gradually but steadily adding modern works to its shelves—with the Fothergillian medal at its disposal annually—with the addition of nearly two hundred of the most rising members of the profession to its list—with its small annual fee—the Medical Society of London will prove a very formidable rival to the expensive, formal, and ill-governed Medical and Chirurgical Society.

BETHLEM HOSPITAL, which attracts so little of the attention either of the profession or of the public, occupies a splendid range of buildings in the southern part of this capital, and was founded for the cure of lunatics. It differs from county asylums in the class of patients admitted, none being eligible who have been more than twelve months insane, nor are any received who are subject to fits, or who are paralytic. In fact, it is essential that they should be apparently in a curable condition. The result of the practice, taking the average of several years, is, that upwards of fifty per cent. of the patients are cured. Now that county asylums are provided for all the insane poor, Bethlem Hospital seems peculiarly well suited to the wants of those who have occupied, and perhaps still occupy, respectable stations in society, but whose means are limited, and who, after providing for the necessary wants of their families, are unable to support their afflicted relatives in private asylums. We find, in Bethlem, patients who have belonged to all the learned professions: officers in the army, gentlemen, artists, tradesmen, farmers, clerks, &c.; and, among the females, the wives, widows, and daughters of the same classes. The ample resources which are at the disposal of the governors of this ancient and royal foundation have enabled them to adopt every improvement which experience has sanctioned, and the obvious comfort which pervades every part of the establishment is the best evidence of the judicious care which is exercised in providing for the welfare of its inmates. It seems

somewhat remarkable that such advantages are not more eagerly sought after, and that although the admissions exceed three hundred in the year, there has always been room for more than have applied for admission. It has never been necessary to refuse a patient from want of room, and yet, when we reflect upon the very large number of those above the rank of paupers who are the subjects of mental disturbance, we can only conclude that the true objects of this splendid charity are not generally known. We believe that in claiming attention for them we are rendering an essential service to a large class of sufferers, at the same time that we are affording information which will be most acceptable to those members of our profession who are occasionally called upon to advise as to the best course that could be adopted in the cases of the insane, who, not being paupers, cannot be sent to the county asylums. To them the doors of Bethlem Hospital are always open. Any friend of an insane person may obtain a "form" of admission, either by personal or written application to "the Steward" at the Hospital. There are no difficulties in the way of admission, and the patient, if eligible, is kept *free from all charge* to the relatives for such time as may be necessary to effect a cure, provided the term does not exceed twelve months. If at the expiration of that time patients are not cured, and present no reasonable prospect of further amendment, they are returned to their friends; but if there be yet a hope of improvement, they may have their time of residence prolonged. Notwithstanding that all the cases admitted into the Hospital are recent, and consequently present greater difficulties in their management and treatment than at any other period of their progress, personal restraint is almost abolished. We have been recently informed that, during the past year, only three individuals have been subjected to any form of mechanical restraint, and one of these was the subject of a surgical disease; in the second case the restraint was only continued during one night in a patient who was making very determined attempts at suicide.

In all respects, Bethlem Hospital is a noble institution, and is well worthy the especial attention of the profession.

WE publish, at p. 399, a remarkable letter by Mr. BALLARD on the proceedings of the Globulistic humbugs in Golden-square. Mr. BALLARD deserves the thanks of the profession for this manly exposure of the placebos and infinitesimals upon which Lord ROBERT GROSVENOR'S guineas are wasted. We trust the exposure will be continued by other medical men who may come in contact with the so-called patients of the pretended hospital. Mr. BALLARD'S communication gives us a pretty correct idea of the kind of instruction which the Editor of the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* was so kindly anxious, at the beginning of the year, that the profession should acquire from his friends the Globulists.

ASSISTANT-SURGEONS IN THE NAVY.—The *Times* of the 25th ultimo contains the following paragraph:—The *Dragon* steam-frigate, Captain Giffard, remains at Spithead. The reason her assistant-surgeon has no cabin is, that the Admiralty have not ordered one to be constructed for him, and the dockyard cannot build one without such orders. Captain Giffard has no influence in the matter. The Admiralty yielded submission so reluctantly to the justice of the case of the assistant-surgeons, that we are not surprised they retard the fulfilment of the order as much as possible.