

FACTS CONNECTED WITH THE MEDICAL RELIEF
OF THE POOR IN THE
BRIDGWATER UNION.

Published by order of the Medical Association. Bridgwater, November 13, 1837.

Digitised & edited by Tony Woolrich, 27/04/2021

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BRIDGWATER:

JAMES DARE, IMPERIAL PRINTING OFFICE.

1837.

THE intimate connection to attend them during the diseases and accidents to which they are so liable, renders every attempt at unduly depressing the condition of such Medical Men, an indirect attack on the very existence of the suffering Poor, whose lives frequently depend on professional assistance being promptly and cheerfully rendered, as well as that assistance being continued with a perseverance which nothing short of professional zeal can supply. The Medical Man cannot be expected thus to act promptly, and cheerfully, and perseveringly, if he be depressed and degraded to the condition of a menial, and the consequences of such a degradation, although reaching him, in the first instance, must fall with a more destructive effect on the Poor. — Under this conviction the Medical Practitioners of the Town and Neighbourhood of Bridgwater, have determined to submit to the Public, the following plain statement; not as a matter in which the Profession is especially interested, but as a subject of general interest to the community. — As no man is placed beyond the reach of misfortune, no man can say, the misery, and suffering, and death, consequent on neglect of the Poor cannot reach me; it is therefore as a matter of general, as well as of individual and professional interest, that the patient attention of the Public is solicited to the *"Facts connected with the Medical Relief of the Poor in the " Bridgwater Union."*

At the formation of the Bridgwater Union under the Poor Law Amendment Act, in 1836, the forty parishes comprising that Union were divided into seven medical districts, and given in charge to the following Surgeons, all duly licensed to practise:—

No. 1.—The Bridgwater District, containing the Borough and Parish of Bridgwater, with the Parishes of Wembdon, Durleigh, Chilton Trinity,

and Chedzoy, containing a population of 8833, at the salary of £100, to Mr. Abraham King.

No. 2.—Huntspill District, containing the Parishes of Huntspill, Pawlett, Puriton, Woolavington, Cossington, and Bawdrip, with a population of 3654, at the salary of £50, to Mr. William Lakin Caswell.

No. 3.—Polden Hill District, containing the Parishes of Chilton Polden, Edington, Catcott, Shapwick, Ashcott, Grenton, Moorlinch, Sutton Mallett, and Stawel, with a population of 3697, at the salary of £50, to Mr. Baruch Toogood.

No. 4.—Middlezoy District, containing the Parishes of Middlezoy, Othery, Weston-zoyland, and Lyng, with a population of 2560, at the salary of £35, to Mr. Joseph Addison.

No. 5.—North Petherton District, containing the Parishes of North Petherton, Thurloxtton, Michael Church, Broomfield, Goathurst, and Enmore, with a population of 4967, at the salary of £63, to Mr. Horatio Nelson Tilsley.

No. 6.—Cannington District, containing the Parishes of Cannington, Charlinch, Spaxton, Stockland, Otterhampton, and Edstock and Beer, with a population of 3041, at the salary of £35, to Mr. John Evered Poole.

No. 7.—Stowey District, containing the Parishes of Nether Stowey, Over Stowey, Asholt, and Fiddington, with a population of 1808, at the salary of £25, to Mr. Richard Beadon Ruddock.

A fee of ten shillings was allowed for every case of midwifery attended by an order from the relieving officer or other competent authority.

These Divisions having been found inconvenient, the Board determined at the expiration of the first year to increase the number of Districts from seven to nine, and issued the following notice accordingly.

"BRIDGWATER UNION.

Notice is hereby given that the Board of Guardians of this Union will proceed to the Election of Medical Gentlemen, duly licensed to practice, for the said Union, on Friday, the 16th of June, to commence from Midsummer next, for the following Districts, viz.:

No. 1.—Bridgwater Parish, containing the Borough and Parish of Bridgwater, with a population of 7807.

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No. 2. — Huntspill District, containing the Parishes of Huntspill, Puriton, Pawlett, and Woollavington, with a population of 3001.

No. 3. — Polden District, containing the Parishes of Chilton Polden, Cossington, Bawdrip, Chedzoy, Stawel, and Edington with a population of 2240.

No. 4. — Hill District, containing the Parishes of Catcott, Sutton Mallett, Moorlinch, Shapwick, Grcnton, and Ashcott, with a population of 2659.

No. 5. — Middlezoy District, containing the Paishcs of Middlezoy, Othery, Westonzoyland, and Lyng, with a population of 2560.

No. 6. — North Petherton District, containing the Parishes of North Petherton, Thurloxton, Michael Church, Broomfield, and Goathurst, with a population of 4679.

No. 7. — Cannington District, containing the Parishes of Cannington, Chilton Trinity, Wembdon, Durleigh, Charlinch, and Enmore, with a population of 2394.

No. 8. — Stowey District, containing the Parishes of Nether Stowcy, Over Stowey, Asholt, Fiddington, Edstock and Beer, Stockland Bristol, Otterhampton, and Spaxton, with a population of 3226.

A medical officer will also be appointed to the Union Workhouse who will have the care of the poor in the Bridgwater and North Petherton Workhouses, until they are removed into the new Workhouse which is expected to take place about the mouth of August or September, next.

The salaries, per annum, fixed for medical gentlemen for each of the above Districts are as follow : —

No 1, Bridgwater District	70/
No 2, Huntspill District	40/
No 3, Polden District	30/
No 4, Hill District	35/
No 5, Middlezoy District	35/
No 6, North Petherton District	55/
No 7, Cannington District	30/
No 8, Stowey District	45/
Union Workhouse	30/ ¹

For the above remuneration the medical gentlemen will be requested to find vaccination, and attend all cases of sickness and surgery, and find all medicines and applications that may be necessary for all paupers falling ill within the Division, whether belonging to such Division or otherwise, midwifery alone to be excepted, for all such cases when his attendance is required, and for which he receives a written order from the relieving officer or other competent authority, he shall receive ten shillings per case.

Medical gentlemen desirous of undertaking the duties of the said offices, will be required to send testimonials of competency to the clerk's office, in Bridgwater, (free of

expence,) on or before the 15th of June next, and to appear personally before the board on the day of election.

Bridgwater, May 22nd, 1837."

The Medical Practitioners having found from the experience of the past year that they had been very inadequately paid, and knowing that it was the opinion of the Board that they had zealously, efficiently and humanely discharged their respective duties, they addressed a letter² to the Board respectfully declining to accept the salaries offered in the circular and at the same time declaring their readiness to resume their duties on fair and equitable terms; and in this determination they were sanctioned by the opinions and advice of all the established practitioners in the town and neighbourhood, whose long residence in the districts and intimate knowledge of the duties to be performed well enabled them to form a proper estimate of the value of the services required.³

No answer having been received to this application, a letter, of which the following is copy, was forwarded to the Board

"Bridgwater, June 6th, 1837.

To the Chairman of the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union.

Sir, — The undersigned not having received the common courtesy of a reply to their communication of the 2nd instant, and having heard vague reports of their being charged with uncandid and improper conduct, feel that they are called upon in defence of their personal characters, to deny, directly and unequivocally, the truth of such a charge. It is, we understand, said that at a meeting of Guardians held on the 18th of May, at which the Medical Officers attended, they did not express themselves otherwise than perfectly satisfied with the salaries they received, and therefore such salaries might be considered as a proper remuneration for the ensuing year. The undersigned distinctly protest against the truth of the alleged fact, and the legitimacy of the inference. It was notorious as a matter of fact, that the greater part of the Medical Officers considered their salaries inadequate as a remuneration, even on the most moderate scale, for the important duties which they had to perform. As for the inference founded upon their not having put forth claims for an increase of salaries when they were before the Board, they distinctly state that it would have been improper and indecent for them to have done so. They were requested by a circular letter, to attend the Board for the express purpose of giving their opinion on the division of the Union into Medical Districts : they did give that opinion, without obtruding their own claims on the Board, further than that a

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single observation was incidentally made upon midwifery cases. It is reported that questions are said to have been put to them which were intended to *lead* to an expression of their opinions on the amount of salary. To this they reply that they met the Board in a spirit of fairness and candour. They did not expect that any attempt would be made to entrap them, unawares, by *leading* questions. If they had been fairly applied to, they would have answered frankly and explicitly. — They were called together to give their opinion on the division of the Union into Medical Districts; — they felt that it would be indecent to press their particular claims on a meeting called for a special purpose; and they did not conceive that the salaries of the Medical Officers could in common justice be fixed without giving them an opportunity of stating to the Board, the result of the experience they had obtained since the formation of the above Union. This was their impression, and they have the means of proving, that some influential Guardians of the Poor who were present had no idea that the amount of salaries would be discussed, much less fixed, at that meeting; and that these Gentlemen left the Board, not only with an impression to that effect, but with a distinct declaration made to some of the undersigned, that it was not intended to take the Medical salaries into consideration on that day.

In addition to the above detail, it is, Sir, presumed to be within your recollection that, on some occasions, when the low rate of medical remuneration in the Bridgwater Union has been alluded to, it has been said that the first year was necessarily a year of probation and enquiry; that much information and experience would be obtained in the course of the year; and that adequate salaries could be determined for future years, on a careful investigation of the information so obtained. Under all these circumstances the undersigned were astonished to find that without any enquiry, or intimation given to them, a printed circular was issued by the Board arbitrarily fixing, on a most inadequate scale, the amount of remuneration for attending the Poor of the 40 parishes which comprise the Bridgwater Union. Considering this mode of proceeding, as decidedly unjust towards themselves, and injurious to an honorable profession, the undersigned hastily drew up a communication, which previously to being submitted to your Board, received the sanction of the principal general Practitioners in the District. This communication has not been noticed even by the common courtesy of a formal acknowledgment. — The undersigned are therefore left to gather the charge against them from vague reports. If under these circumstances they have not been accurately informed, such inaccuracies are not to be charged upon them, but on the omission of the Board, in neglecting to attend to the established courtesies which regulate intercourse between educated men.

The undersigned distinctly declare that they have no wish individually or collectively to receive anything beyond a moderate remuneration for their attendance on the Poor; the amount to be determined after a fair enquiry on the extent and nature of their past services. While they express their determination not to submit to any dictation injurious to themselves or to the honorable profession of which they are members, they avow their readiness to acquiesce in any equitable arrangement, founded on enquiry and experience.

To prevent the Poor from suffering by the delay consequent on the course taken by the Board of Guardians, the Medical Officers are ready to continue their professional attendance on the Poor gratuitously until some other arrangement can be made, provided such arrangement be effected within a reasonable period.

BARUCH TOOGOOD, JOSEPH ADDISON,
ABRAHAM KING, W. LAKIN CASWELL,
RICHARD B. RUDDOCK, J. EVERED POOL.E."
HORATIO N. TILSLEY

To this the following reply was sent:

“Bridgwater Union, June 9th, 1837.

Gentlemen, — In reply to your letter of the 6th instant, addressed to the Chairman of this Board, I am directed to inform you that your letter of the 2nd instant was duly received, and that whatever might have been the opinion of the Board on its contents it was not from any want of courtesy towards you individually or collectively that no immediate answer was given.

The Board considered that after the Circular which they had published, proposing certain Salaries for the Medical care of the Union, it would have been deviating from their duty to propose or to treat upon any other terms than those mentioned in the Circular, until the 16th instant, the day therein fixed for the Election of Medical Officers for the ensuing year.

On that day the Board will be ready to consider any proposals in writing, or personal representations, which you or any other Gentlemen may think proper to make ⁴ The Board cannot help lamenting the tone of your communications little calculated to promote that cordial co-operation with the Board, on which the well being of the Poor and the interest of all concerned so essentially depend.

The Board acknowledge the generosity of your offer to prevent the Poor suffering in case any delay should take place in the appointment of Medical Officers.

By order of the Board,
Robert Underdown, Clerk.

On the 16th of June, they offered to take the charge of the Districts marked 2, 6, 7, 8, at fourpence a head; No. 5, at threepence three farthings;

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and the Bridgwater District at threepence, on the gross population of 1832; and the Union House, which is intended to contain three hundred people, at fifty pounds a year.

A clamour was instantly raised against them, and they were accused of combination and — but they forbear to repeat the offensive language and opprobrious epithets which were applied to them by some of the Guardians at the Board, because they believe that they have since regretted using it, and because they feel that neither their characters or conduct deserved it: but this much they may be allowed to state, that it is not the practice of Englishmen to charge men in their absence without affording them opportunities of defending themselves, or to apply language to their conduct or motives privately, which they would hesitate to use personally.

If any combination existed it was on the part of the Board and not the Medical Men. Under the old system the Medical Man made a contract with each Parish separately; but by the new law the Guardians of 40 Parishes met together and dictated such terms as they thought fit to the Surgeons, whose only course was to unite for the purpose of protecting their own interests from such aggression; and this they did by openly calling a meeting of the Professional Men in the Town and Neighbourhood.

The Meeting was attended by Mr. Toogood, Mr. Axford, Mr. Haviland, Mr. Stradling, Mr. Parker, Mr. Tilsley, Mr. King, Mr. Ruddock, Mr. Caswell, Mr. Rendall, Mr. Gill, Mr. Poole, Mr. J. G. Toogood, Mr. Baker, Mr. J. B. Toogood, Mr. J. E. Poole, and Mr. Addison; and the following Resolutions were unanimously agreed to, which will best explain their motives and conduct.

1st. — Moved by Mr. Axford and seconded by Mr. King, That the object of this meeting is to uphold and maintain the honour and respectability of the Medical Profession.

2nd. — Moved by Mr. Haviland and seconded by Mr. Addison, That whilst we disclaim any hostility to the provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act relating to our profession, we will resist every attempt to lessen its usefulness, or degrade its character in public estimation.

3rd. — Moved by Mr. Parker and seconded by Mr. Caswell, That a committee consisting of Mr.

Toogood, Snr., Mr. Axford, and Mr. Haviland, be formed for the purpose of watching over the interests of the profession, and making their report at a subsequent meeting.

4th. — Moved by Mr. King and seconded by Mr. Poole, That this meeting pledges itself not to accept any appointment under the Poor Law Amendment Act, without the sanction of the committee.

5th. — Moved by Mr. Ruddock and seconded by Mr. John Toogood, That this meeting will not recognise, or hold intercourse with, any Medical Practitioner who dishonors the profession by acting in opposition to the foregoing resolutions.

Moved by Mr. Parker and seconded by Mr. King, That a subscription of Five Shillings each be entered into for the purpose of defraying the expence incurred.

John Evered Poole, Honorary Secretary.

The terms were summarily rejected by the Board, and two unqualified⁵ men were appointed to Nos. 3 and 4, the Polden and Hill Districts. The Board then resolved to advertise in the London and provincial papers, and in the weekly periodicals, for Medical Practitioners, which advertisements were regularly continued for three weeks, and during that time the Board authorised the same Surgeons who had previously taken charge of the vacant Districts to attend the Poor at the same rate as they did their own patients. The reasons assigned by the Board for dividing the Polden Hill District into two, were, its extent, and the distance from which the surgeon lived to the extremity of his District. — But at the next board day they appointed one of the unqualified Practitioners to the Middlezoy District, in addition to that which he had before, including altogether ten Parishes, and covering a much larger extent of ground than the whole of the Polden Hill District, which at a former meeting they had decided to be greater than any Surgeon could properly attend, and this they did notwithstanding the Surgeon who had previously contracted for it offered to undertake the duties gratuitously until a satisfactory arrangement could be made.

During the three weeks in which the Poor were to be attended and paid for by each separate case, the Relieving Officers were directed to be sparing in their orders for medical relief, and many cases occurred in which orders were repeatedly refused,

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and during this period many of the Poor suffered severely. Many instances occurred in the Stowey District, amongst which the following is (it is to be hoped) unexampled in cruelty and neglect:— Charlotte Allen, aged 31, who had been suffering for many years from a disease of the Liver, with occasional severe attacks of fever, for which she had often been attended by the Parish Surgeon, was reported by the Medical Officer to be in a critical state and in daily expectation of her delivery. The Surgeon informed the Relieving Officer that under such circumstances, he thought his attendance would be necessary in her approaching labour. The Relieving Officer also considered it necessary, but declined giving an order without the direction of the Board, but subsequently told the Surgeon that his attendance would not be allowed. On the evening of Friday, the 30th of June, she was delivered by a woman, after a difficult and violent labour. For several days afterwards she was extremely ill, and becoming daily worse, a neighbour applied to the Relieving Officer, on the following Monday, for assistance, and was told by him that as there was no parish doctor at that time, no order must be given unless in cases of absolute necessity, *as it was very expensive*. He ordered her to apply to his wife that she may visit her and judge whether it was necessary or not: his wife did not go, but sent to the midwife, who directed the poor sufferer *to take threepenny worth of castor oil!* She got worse and worse until Wednesday night, when her danger became so imminent that an order was at last granted for the Surgeon. He instantly obeyed it, and found the case so formidable that he requested the advice and assistance of a friend. The poor woman had been attacked with Puerperal Fever, the most dangerous and fatal disease to which lying-in women are liable; in addition to which, she had, from the violence of her labour and unskilfulness of the midwife, suffered a dreadful Laceration and a Prolapsus of the Womb, which is not only irremediable, but must render the remainder of her existence miserable to herself and intolerably offensive to those around her. In this dreadful condition was this poor woman kept from Friday, the 30th of June, to the following Wednesday night! She has been confined to her bed nearly ever since, and is, at this time, four months from her delivery, totally unfit for anything, she can

stand upright only a few minutes at a time - and all this suffering has been borne by a helpless woman, to effect a saving of Ten Shillings!

This is by no means a solitary case of the suffering and irremediable injury inflicted on the Poor. The following copy of a letter sent to the Surgeon of the Huntspill District will illustrate the system adopted by the Board of Guardians:

(COPY.)

“ SIR,—I am directed by the Board of Guardians to inform you that you are to discontinue your attendance on the undermentioned Paupers in Woollavington. until you receive further orders from the proper Authorities, viz.: George Reynolds’s Child, Nanny Millard, Kezia Coles, and Thomas Lovibond.

I am, Sir,
Yours Obediently,
J. Stagg, Relieving Officer.
Woollavington, July 1st, 1837.
Mr. CASWELL, Surgeon.”

Here we see written directions given to the Surgeon, to discontinue his attendance: and what follows? Why, the death of one of the Poor Sufferers, who died a few days after this mandate was issued!

It would be tedious and distressing to multiply cases; perhaps the following will be sufficient, with the preceding, to elucidate the fatal effects of the system adopted by the Board of Guardians. This case was that of a child who was attacked with Croup in the night, and for whom the anxious mother sought an order early in the morning, when she was refused by the Relieving Officer, according to the instructions which he had received. The heart-sending particulars of this dreadful case will be best understood by the following letter from one of the Surgeons of this place :—

“To the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union.

Gentlemen,— I consider I am only doing my duty in laying this case before you.

I was requested as a charity this morning to visit John Cook, Mount Terrace, Pig Cross, Bridgwater. I found him suffering from acute Inflammation in the Windpipe, and *literally dying for want of surgical assistance*, his mother having applied to your Relieving Officer, Mr. Newman, who refused to give an order, on the grounds of *no Medical Man being appointed*. She showed me the duplicates of part of his bed clothes, which she had pawned for one shilling and sixpence, and which she offered me in payment of the

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Medicines which I gratuitously supplied her with. This disease is a most dangerous one, and requires very prompt and efficient treatment — and already much time has been improperly lost.

I beg to remain,
Your obedient Servant,
July 14, 1837.

J.C. Parker.

Between twelve and one o'-Clock on the same day an order was received by Mr. King to attend the child until he was directed to the contrary; he instantly attended but as had been foretold by Mr. Parker, so much time had been lost without any attempt to relieve a disease, which of all others requires the most prompt and efficient treatment, that the poor child died the same evening.

The above are some of the consequences of the line of conduct pursued by the Board of Guardians towards the Medical Men; but even these and other distressing examples failed to produce any ameliorating effect. When the day came for making the Medical appointments; the Board, which had first divided the Union into seven districts, and then, finding these districts too large, had further divided it into nine, now determined, in the face of their former resolution, to reduce the number of districts to six thus inevitably inflicting a still further degree of suffering on the helpless Poor. Three new Candidates only offered, and some of the Medical Men who had been previously employed wrote the following letter to the Board : —

“Gentlemen, — I take leave to enclose you my bill from Midsummer last amounting to [*the sum due to each individual was here specified*] and at the same time to offer myself as a Medical Attendant for the district marked No. — in your advertisement of the 17th of June, on the terms contained in my letter of 16th of June. Should this offer of my services be accepted, I will engage to give up the amount of the accompanying bill for attendance on the Poor from the 24th of June, and to commence on salary from that day.

In case the above offer should not be accepted, I hereby offer to contract for district No. — on the terms of your advertisement, in the *Standard*, dated June 24th, and I trust, Gentlemen, that your experience of the manner in which the Medical duties of the district entrusted to me have been performed is such as to justify my again soliciting the confidence of the Board.

I am, Gentlemen, &c.”

Each of the following Gentlemen addressed a similar letter to the Board :—

Abraham King, W.L. Caswell,
H.N. Tilsley, R. B. Ruddock.
J. E. Poole,

The bills alluded to in the letters were for attendance on the Poor from the close of the last Parochial Year to that day. The Medical Men, be it remembered, had offered “to continue their professional attendance on the Poor *gratuitously*,” until some other arrangement could be made. This offer was not accepted, and they were requested to attend the Poor of their respective Districts on the footing of “*private patients*,” until the new appointments took place.

The Board first called on Mr. Tilsley, and appointed him to the North Petherton district, at a Salary of £75, with the *promise of payment of his bill*, which was understood to be carried unanimously. They next called on Mr. King, to whom they proposed the following question, which was not put to Mr. Tilsley :

Whether in the event of the appointment of any non-resident Practitioners who offered in consequence of the advertisements, he would hold any Professional communication with them? and upon his objecting, on the ground that the Gentlemen had been brought forward to oppose him, *against whom not the slightest complaint had been made*, he must decline doing so; he was immediately rejected by a small majority, and one of the new Candidates, elected in his place.

It now came to Mr. Caswell's turn, to whom the same question was put, and by whom the same reply was made. One of the Guardians then proposed for the Huntspill district, the same person who had already been appointed to the Town district, and the Union Workhouse, which were originally intended to be divided into two, but Mr. Caswell was elected by a majority of one. The only district remaining to be disposed of was the Cannington, with which the Board had determined to unite the Stowey district, making altogether Fourteen Parishes, and covering an extent of Country Ten Miles in length and Eight in breadth.

For this district Mr. Ruddock was proposed, and now a most extraordinary scene took place to prevent his Election, and so contrary to all precedent, as to call up one of the Guardians who protested against the conduct of the Chairman as

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being most partial and unfair, and appealed to the Assistant Commissioner whether, in the whole course of his experience, a similar instance of irregular conduct in a Chairman, had ever fallen under his observation.

Two of the Guardians left the room, as it appeared to get up an opposition to Mr. Ruddock, and the proceedings were actually delayed by the Chairman until their return with an *unwilling candidate*, who was elected by a majority of one. This Gentleman, to his honor be it spoken, on learning the real state of the case resigned an appointment, so unfairly obtained. The Board were then compelled to elect Mr. Ruddock, who refused to undertake the care of the whole district, and was allowed to divide it with Mr. J. E. Poole, according to their own arrangement.

The Board of Guardians having been thus far defeated in their attempt to injure the Medical Men, now turned round and refused to pay their bills, although the charges were made on a principle elected by the Board. The services of the Medical Men had been offered gratuitously; that offer was rejected; and it was agreed to pay for the Medical assistance afforded to the Poor, on the terms of private patients. After a most vexatious delay they fly from their own terms, and refuse any payment on the principle which they had themselves selected.

On Friday, October 27, a motion was made and seconded at the Board, that the Medical Officers should be offered double the amount of three weeks' present salaries in lieu of their bills; or in other words it was proposed to pay them *Thirty Eight Pounds, Thirteen Shillings*, instead of *Two Hundred and Forty Eight Pounds*, the amount of their bills according to the agreement entered into with the Board on the 16th of June, making a difference of *Two Hundred and Nine Pounds, Seven Shillings*. — This was carried by a majority of one, 16 voting for and 15 against it.

In refusing to accede to such an unheard of proposition, the Medical Men are not influenced by the mere amount unjustly withheld from them. They protest against the principle of employing Professional Men on terms clearly defined, and then, when the services have been performed, turning round and offering them payment, on some

other terms which were never alluded to at the period of the agreement. Their charges can be proved to be to the amount only of those generally established by the Profession, and admitted by the Public as just and reasonable. That no disposition to exact an unreasonable rate of remuneration existed in them may fairly be inferred from this fact: — they had previously offered to undertake the care of the Poor during the stated period, *gratuitously*.

That the terms required by the Medical Men were moderate, may be further inferred from the fact that the Salaries paid by the Forty Parishes before the Union, was £481, exclusive of casual and suspended orders, which the Board calculated at 20 per cent, additional, but which actually amounted to nearly £200 a year; while the sum required by the Medical Officers, was £528 10s. 4d. annually. The same inference may be supported by a reference to the appendix to the 2nd Report of the Poor Law Commissioners. It is there said

“ I am rather disposed to recommend to the Guardians to be in some degree guided in their calculations by a given price per head on the population, rich and poor, varying the amount according as it is scattered or otherwise. Under ordinary circumstances from 4d. to 5d. per head appears to be considered reasonable by the Medical Gentlemen. In my extensive district, testing the salaries fixed by the per head calculation, the price varies from 7d. to 3½d.; but at the latter sum a self-supporting dispensary relieves the Profession from much very arduous duty. At the same time I am satisfied that the surest mode of arriving at a just conclusion is by advertising for tenders, with the understanding that there is no obligation to accept the lowest. In the county of Hants, generally the *average* per head is 5½d. In Wilts. 4½d.”

Now the amount required was a fraction less per head on the population of the Union, than 4½d. the lowest of the *averages* cited in the Report. There is not therefore even the shadow of a pretence for setting up against the Medical Men, a charge of having made an extravagant demand.

Whilst the Board has refused to comply with the reasonable proposal made by the Medical Men; and to reject the offer “ *of their gratuitous services, until some permanent arrangement could be made,*” they have in private bills and in public advertisements, incurred an expense materially exceeding the sum which was asked for. The Board has been obliged to appoint four of the former Surgeons at increased

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salaries; — they have appointed two Practitioners, said to be unqualified, and one entire stranger, when there were in the district a sufficient number of well educated and well known Medical Men, who might almost be said to have a natural claim, and were willing and competent again to undertake duties which they had zealously and satisfactorily performed. The Board has ransacked the most remote parts of the Kingdom, by public advertisement, to find persons who would consent to come forward in opposition to men who were satisfactorily practising an honorable profession among their own families and friends, and among others with whom they have been familiar from childhood. Under the protection afforded by closed doors, the Medical Men have been assailed by low abuse and unfounded charges,⁶ and now the payment of their just demands is withheld, unless they will disgrace themselves by consenting to receive payment *on one principle* when it was solemnly agreed by the Board that they should be paid *on another*.

But whatever their feelings may be on the points above detailed; and however injuriously it may affect their interests to be obliged to institute expensive proceedings for the recovery of rights dishonestly withheld from them; they feel that this is a comparatively trivial part of the case submitted to the public. It is to the inevitable operation of all this persecution on the Poor, during the pangs of acute disease, and in the excruciating hour of labour, that the attention of the Public is especially invited. It is to such heart rending cases as Charlotte Allen's,⁷ & Reynold's and Cook's, where the very bed clothes of the dying are stripped off and pawned to obtain relief, where immediate death or a life of torture are the consequences of the system acted on by the Board of Guardians : it is to these and other equally horrible circumstances that the public attention is called.

In denouncing such acts, as the necessary consequence of the system pursued by the Board in its collective capacity, the Medical Men are most anxious to except many excellent and humane Guardians, who have nobly supported the cause of justice and humanity, and most ably advocated the claims of the Poor. In such honorable hands the Medical men would be most happy to leave *their own case*, but as the interests, and even the lives of

the Poor are to a certain extent involved in this question; they cannot consent to commit those interests entirely to the sentence of a secret tribunal, where the honest and humane may find themselves in a minority. Under such circumstances they do not feel that they should be performing their duty towards their poor neighbours, or to the Profession of which they are Members, unless they submitted, to the salutary influence of public opinion, some of the "*Facts connected with the administration of Medical Relief in the Bridgwater Union.*"

Published by order of the Medical Association.
Bridgwater, November 13, 1837.

Printed by James Dare, Saint Mary Street,
Bridgwater.

END NOTES

These were footnotes originally

¹ Union House is calculated to contain 300 persons: the salary offered to the Medical Officer was 30*l.* a year, or one shilling and seven pence halfpenny a day. In the miscellaneous estimates presented to the House of Commons, May 30, 1835, are the following items : — Twenty-one Assistant Commissioners 700*l.* a year each, 14,700*l.* Their travelling and incidental expences, including clerks, 800*l.* a year each : 16,800*l.* Each Assistant Commissioner therefore is charged to the Country 1,500*l.* a year, or 4*l.* 2*s.* 2*d.* a day; whilst nineteen pence halfpenny a day is considered a proper remuneration for an expensively educated Medical Man, entrusted with the lives of hundreds of his suffering fellow creatures.

² (COPY.) " To the Chairman of the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union.

SIR, — The Medical Officers of the undermentioned Districts of the Bridgwater Union respectfully acquaint the Board of Guardians that from the experience during the past year of the extent of the duties to be performed, the necessary expences of medicine, &c., they cannot, with justice to the Poor, the Guardians, and themselves continue their charge at the Salaries proposed; at the same time they are willing to resume their duties on terms consonant to the feelings of men of a liberal education.

ABRAHAM KING, Bridgwater District.

H. N. TILSLEY, North Petherton Ditto.

BARUCH TOOGOOD, Polden Hill Ditto.

FACTS CONNECTED WITH THE MEDICAL RELIEF
OF THE POOR IN THE
BRIDGWATER UNION.

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J. E. POOLE, Cannington Ditto.
R. B. RUDDOCK, Stowey Ditto.
JOHN ADDISON, Middlezoy Ditto.
W. L. CASWELL, Huntspill Ditto.

We, the undersigned Surgeons, at present practising in Bridgwater with much pleasure concur in the feeling expressed by the Medical Officers of the Bridgwater Union, and are of opinion, from our local experience, that the Poor cannot be properly attended by competent Medical Officers, at the Salaries offered, without subjecting them to considerable loss.

JONATHAN TOOGOOD,
J.C. PARKER,
HENRY AXFORD, J. GILL,
JAMES HAVILAND, T. J. POOLE,
E. A. STRADLING, ROBERT BAKER.
J. G. TOOGOOD,

³ The letter of the Poor Law Commissioners to Lord John Russel, (in the second annual report,) states that the Surgeons are the most proper persons to form an estimate of what should be considered a remuneration for their services. The words are “ *The elements upon which that calculation must be founded are in themselves obscure, and are utterly unknown to the persons who are selected for the office of Guardians. — The Medical Practitioners themselves cannot fail to be possessed individually of the knowledge necessary for making the calculation.* ”

⁴ The Board divided on this paragraph, nineteen voting for its being expunged, and twenty-four for retaining it.

⁵ The advertisements of the Board of Guardians of the 24th of May, 1836, and 27th of July, 1837, state their desire to contract with Medical Men duly qualified to practice. To constitute due qualification, or legal licence to practice, a Medical Man must have been a Member of the College of Surgeons, if he was in practice before the year 1815, but in that year an Act of Parliament passed, which, although it did not confer any authority on unqualified persons, made it imperative on every one practising as an Apothecary as well as a Surgeon, in future to become also a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, under certain penalties cited in that Act.

A difference of opinion exists between the Society of Apothecaries, and the Poor Law Commissioners, on the subject of the Qualification of the Medical Officer, appointed to the Union under the Poor Law Amendment Act; the Society contending that the Medical Officer should be both a Member of the College of Surgeons, and a Licentiate of that body, and the Commissioners holding that either Qualification is sufficient. Acting upon this principle the Board of Guardians rejected Mr. Williams, of Shapwick, in 1836, because he could not produce testimonials of being a Member of either of those Bodies, but in 1837 they appointed Mr. Phillips, of Chilton, who was precisely in the same situation, and they also appointed Mr. Young, of Pedwell, who is not a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries. Mr. Williams was therefore either unjustly treated, or Mr. Phillips improperly appointed, being “ *unqualified.* ”

⁶ The conduct of the Board has been likewise marked by an habitual neglect of official courtesy, as well as of duty. In other public departments, when Officers make written communications to the head; such communications are acknowledged and replied to; but from the first day of the formation of the Bridgwater Union, to the 9th of June last; the civility of a letter in reply was never deigned to any communication from any Medical Officer of the Union.

⁷ See page 16 and Sequel.