

# British Medical Journal.

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## THE MEDICAL COUNCIL: ITS CONSTITUTION, ACTION, AND CHARACTER.

WHETHER, and to what extent, the admission of public reporters to the meetings of the Medical Council will be productive of good, is a question which time and experience alone can solve. At present, the experiment is a new one; and one of its first and most prominent results has been to increase the number and length of the speeches delivered by members, and, consequently, the duration of the session. Subjects that would, under other circumstances, have been referred to committees in order that something definite might be laid before the Council, have been discussed by the whole body, because the members felt themselves bound to carry out their engagement of allowing the public to become acquainted with their deliberations; and thus theoretical eloquence has, for this year at least, prevailed to the detriment of action.

On the other hand, there is one advantage which has come out of the adoption of publicity by the Medical Council. Hitherto, little or nothing has been known of its proceedings beyond the information contained in the printed minutes of each day's work. Now, however, persons outside are enabled to observe more closely the *modus operandi* of the Council, to take stock of its collective mind, and, perhaps, to form a prognosis as to the probability of its bringing about those reforms which are so much needed in the medical profession.

Taking, then, the rendering public of the proceedings of the Medical Council simply as a *fait accompli*, we will offer a few observations which have suggested themselves to us.

First, it must be apparent to all who have had an opportunity of noticing the attendance at the meetings of the Council, that no exception can be taken to the manner in which its members perform their duty, so far at least as presence is concerned. On one or two occasions only during the recent session—except on the last day—was a member absent when the roll was called at the commencement of the meeting; and it was apparently only the pressure of professional duties that occasionally caused some to leave the room during the sittings.

As to the order of business, this is placed under the direction of a special Committee, which had, during the recent session, a very efficient chairman in Dr. Andrew Wood. Printed programmes, containing the notices of motion, and a list of all other

business matters of which the Council has to take cognisance, are daily laid before the members; so that, *primâ facie*, every facility is given for knowing what is to be brought forward.

But, among these and other favourable circumstances in things external—that is to say, not necessarily connected with the constitution of the Council and its mental characteristics, of which we shall presently have something to say—there are certain occurrences which, as we think, somewhat materially impede the progress of business, and occupy time to the exclusion of valuable work.

One of these impeding causes is an inordinate propensity on the part of some members to make themselves prominent in debate. We do not allude to the speeches on medical education, medical reform, and other important matters, although much of what was said might have been condensed, and theoretical eloquence might have been advantageously replaced by practical decision; but to the manner in which some members impede the business, not only by frequent speaking and by repetition of things already said, but by raising objections in the course of the business, and thereby often necessitating replies and personal or general explanations, which must occupy minutes that might be more profitably spent. Among these must be specially mentioned Dr. Corrigan, a man evidently possessing much sound sense, and capable of giving excellent counsel; but who mars his worth and his influence in the Council by adopting the course—we do not say always intentionally—of impeding business in the manner to which we have referred. We would venture to suggest to Dr. Corrigan, and any other members who may have similar propensities, that, while it would of course be wrong to pass without notice any inopportune deviation from the proper line of proceeding, it is unadvisable to make any objections which are not necessary; and that the conduct of business may in general be safely left to the judgment of so able a president as Dr. Burrows. To arrive soon at a sound result is an object of more importance than a rigid attention to forms.

Another impediment is one which must be laid to the account of our Irish friends. Year after year the Medical Council is made, or attempted to be made, the arena of dispute on such matters as the privileges of the Apothecaries' Hall of Ireland; and each year the representative of that body and the representatives of the King and Queen's College of Physicians—for Dr. Corrigan decidedly acts in this capacity, equally with Dr. Aquilla Smith—are prepared to occupy the time of the Council—and, indeed, do occupy it—with questions which have been debated over and over again, and on which, we believe, the Council has at different times arrived at different decisions, none of which have apparently given satisfaction. We have the greatest respect for

the representatives of the Irish corporate bodies, as well as for all the other members of the Council; and of course we recognise the principle, that the Council ought to take cognisance of any dereliction of duty or grave offence on the part of the licensing bodies; but we cannot see why matters evidently arising out of a state of chronic disagreement should be constantly inflicted on the Council by the Irish, any more than by the English or Scottish representatives. If such matters must be laid before the Council, cannot they be referred for consideration to a Committee, with instruction to obtain sound legal opinion, if necessary?

We have now to look a little more closely into the Council, and its fitness for its duties. It consists of a President and twenty-three members, of whom seventeen are appointed by the various licensing bodies, and six by the Queen, with the advice of the Privy Council. The following is the present constitution of the Medical Council.

Dr. Burrows .....	President.
Dr. Alderson .....	Royal College of Physicians of London.
J. M. Arnott, Esq. ....	Royal College of Surgeons of England.
G. Cooper, Esq. ....	Society of Apothecaries, London.
Dr. Acland .....	University of Oxford.
Dr. Paget .....	University of Cambridge.
Dr. Embleton .....	University of Durham.
Dr. Storrar .....	University of London.
Dr. Alexander Wood ..	Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh.
Dr. Andrew Wood .....	Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.
Dr. Fleming .....	Faculty of Pays. and Surg., Glasgow.
J. Syme, Esq. ....	Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen.
Dr. Allen Thomson .....	Universities of Glasgow and St. Andrews.
Dr. Aquilla Smith .....	King and Queen's Coll. of Phys., Ireland.
W. Hargrave, Esq. ....	Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland.
Dr. Leet .....	Apothecaries' Hall, Dublin.
Dr. Apjohn .....	University of Dublin.
Dr. Corrigan .....	Queen's University in Ireland.
Dr. Sharpey .....	Appointed by the Queen, with the advice of the Privy Council; viz., four for England; one (Dr. Christison) for Scotland; and one (Dr. Stokes) for Ireland.
Dr. Parkes .....	
Dr. Quain .....	
H. W. Rumsey, Esq. ....	
Dr. Christison .....	
Dr. Stokes .....	

The Medical Council is thus constituted of men regarding whom it might be, at first sight, supposed that none could be brought together better fitted for the duties which they have to perform. Many of them have been long distinguished, not only as members of the Universities and Colleges to which they severally belong, but also as teachers of medicine and the medical sciences; and several at least are known to have made medical education and medical legislation subjects of careful study. In a conclave of such men, one would think, something practical might have been arrived at.

Yet, as has been seen, the case is otherwise. Why is this? Why is this chosen body of the medico-legal wisdom of the United Kingdom to sit year after year for ten or twelve days in the College of Physicians as a mere *talking* body, uttering words of eloquence and delivering arguments, sound and unsound, by the hour together, and in the end *doing* little or nothing? Why have the members so great a propensity for moving round important questions in a sort of Indian file, and seldom or never concentrating their action on any point where amendment

is demanded? How is it, in a word, that the Medical Council has placed itself in danger of being considered the Circumlocution Office of the profession, where the great object to be arrived at is "how not to do it"?

Perhaps one cause of this lies in the fact to which we have adverted: that the majority of the Council are men who have deeply studied the subject brought under notice, and have formed more or less independent ideas thereon. With a natural tenacity, each man holds to his own opinions; so that, while there is a certain amount of agreement as to some points, each member (perhaps too often) feels it incumbent on him to endeavour to bring his colleagues to his own way of thinking. In this way, members of the Council seem, at times at least, to lose sight of that consideration for the common good, in which individual opinions and shades of opinion ought to be merged.

It is apparent, also, that action is impeded by the reluctance which members of the Council have to dealing harshly with the corporate bodies, of which the most of them are representatives; and, consequently, to laying down plans, the non-adoption of which must either bring the Council and some of the licensing boards into unpleasant collision, or must render manifest an absence of power on the part of the Council to enforce their regulations. We know quite well, as was expressed in the Council by more than one member, that the duty imposed on that body by the Medical Act, in regard to refractory corporations, is a delicate one; and one which men of such character as those who form the present Council would naturally be slow to perform. But we would remind them, that the medical profession and the public have the first claim on them; and that, while undue interference with personal feelings or corporate interests is to be deprecated, these must be postponed to the higher considerations to which we have referred.

Again, it seems to us that there is too great a tendency, on the part of some members of the Council, to regard as formidable obstacles the difficulties that stand in their way. Thus, one member imagines that the Privy Council would not be ready to attend to any complaints against corporate bodies, unless the Council were unanimous in such complaints—a condition, for obvious reasons, very unlikely to be arrived at. Another fears that, if the Council apply for an amended Medical Act, the powers which the Council already possesses may be curtailed, instead of being increased and rendered definite. The English Branch Council regards the differences of opinion existing in the profession as a ground for not engaging in fresh legislation; and Dr. Storrar, who is generally noted as one of the most valuable business-men in the Council, actually brings forward a resolution embodying this idea. In discussing medical educa-

tion, too, difficulties in carrying out this or that plan, whatever it may be, arise at every turn. And, what is worse, the counsels of these over-cautious members have evident weight, and too often decide the turn which a debate is about to take. But the members of the Council should remember—and they must know well—that to stand still or retreat at the sight of danger (which after all may be but problematical), is not the way to carry out great undertakings. If there be doubts as to the power of the Council to do certain things, their duty is plainly not to stand on such doubts; but, having decided on doing that which seems to them just and right, to challenge opponents to contest their powers. The profession, we are sure, would stand by the Council if it adopted such a course; and, if the Council, in an honest desire to do that which was good and just and expedient for the profession and the public, sometimes committed errors of judgment, these would be far more readily pardoned than want of action arising out of an inordinate appreciation of difficulties and dangers.

We have thus openly, and we trust fairly, pointed out what appear to us to be the principal impediments which prevent the Medical Council from doing more than it has done. A mere display of eloquence, and a resultless exhibition of the *suaviter in modo* towards each other and to the corporate bodies, without making any advance, is not altogether what is wanted. The Council has just risen, after a twelve days' sitting, of which the expense may be moderately estimated at £1500; and at what result has it arrived in regard to Medical Education—the subject on which, beyond all others, it was expected at least to bring forth something definite? Simply this; that it has done this year just what it did last year. It has drawn up a series of recommendations, and ordered them to be referred to the licensing boards for their considerations; and this it has done, notwithstanding the fact, that the representatives in Council of the licensing bodies must have already been well acquainted with the views of their constituents on the very matters regarding which questions are asked. If the Council proceed in this way year after year, men will naturally ask whether it is not a mere farce that is enacted, and whether a Council is of any worth that goes on—as Mr. Syme is reported to have expressed it—“doing actually nothing, except deceiving the public by publishing year after year a list of persons supposed to be qualified, many of whom are not so qualified.” Those outside will, too, think there is reality in the insinuation that the Council, made up mainly of men connected with and delegated by corporate bodies, has more regard to the interests of these bodies than of the profession and of the public: and that the members are fettered in action by this consideration, and by the dread of

doing any thing which those who sent them to the Council may not fully approve. That such feelings may arise, is no exaggerated idea. Members of the Council themselves—as we have already seen—have in their places said things very much to the same purpose.

MUCH credit is due to the Edinburgh College of Physicians for the spirit which it has of late shown in protecting the interests of the profession at large. We wish the Medical Council were worthy of similar praise. The Edinburgh College has now taken in hand the affairs of the army medical service; and, in a memorial to Lord Palmerston, defines the grievances of the army surgeons, points out the causes of the present disgraceful state of the army medical service, and suggests the remedy. After detailing the history of the affair, the memorial winds up as follows.

“Your memorialists, viewing with great anxiety this very unsatisfactory state of an important branch of Her Majesty's service, would beg respectfully to urge upon your lordship the necessity for a reform of the following grievances, to which military medical officers are subject:

“1. In consequence of vacancies not having been filled up, promotion has become so slow that no assistant-surgeon now entering the service can expect to become a surgeon in less than fifteen years.

“2. In consequence of the deficient number of medical officers in the army, it is with great difficulty that leave of absence can be obtained.

“3. In consequence of the appointment for home service of acting assistant-surgeons, the commissioned assistant-surgeons will be almost exclusively employed on foreign service, and will be deprived of their proper turn of serving in this country.

“4. The system of confidential reports, of an inquisitorial character, is felt as a degradation, both by those who are required to draw them up, and by those to whose conduct they refer.

“5. Medical officers are required to superintend the branding of deserters, and are thereby placed in a position which no professional gentleman should be called upon to occupy.”

Memorials of this kind cannot fail to have an indirectly beneficial influence at the Horse Guards. It is evident that our profession has no medical representative at head-quarters who is able to appreciate the interests of his medical brethren, or who has the courage to defend them. The Edinburgh College of Physicians, therefore, does well in thus taking into its own hands the direction of the army medical service.

IN the form of declaration to be signed by candidates for the newly invented army appointment of acting assistant-surgeon, we see that, amongst other things, the candidate enters into an agreement to “discharge all the duties of assistant-surgeon in Her Majesty's Army to the entire satisfaction of the Director-General of the Army Medical Department, and for so long a period as my services are required.” We beg the numerous gentlemen who, as we understand, are seeking the honour of these appointments,

to reflect twice and consult their lawyer once before they sign an agreement containing the words above italicised by us. They may be signing themselves into perpetual bondage to the Director-General. The bargain appears of a most one-sided kind. The Director-General kicks out his servant at a moment's notice. He treats his professional brethren very differently from his household servants—in fact, much worse; for to his menials he must give a month's wages or a month's warning. His professional brother he keeps just as long as he wants him. There is no reciprocity. We will give the agreement in full; and we must venture to ask, Can any gentleman, who properly respects himself, sign such an unjust and (coming from a Medical Army Director) so insolent an agreement as the following, which, moreover, is curious as a specimen of a Director-General's composition?

"I hereby declare that I am ready and willing to serve Her Majesty in the capacity of acting assistant-surgeon in the Medical Department of Her Majesty's Forces, and to discharge all the duties of assistant-surgeon in Her Majesty's Army to the entire satisfaction of the Director-General of the Army Medical Department, and for so long a period as my services are required, under the following conditions.

"1st. To receive the pay of ten shillings *per diem*, and allowances equal to those of a staff assistant-surgeon.

"2nd. Upon a notification from the Director-General, to proceed immediately for duty to any station in any part of the United Kingdom, and from time to time to proceed to and serve at any other station therein.

"3rd. I understand that my employment is of a temporary nature, and that my services may (without previous notice or compensation) be dispensed with at any time; but if the Director-General shall certify to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the War Department, that my services as acting assistant-surgeon have hitherto been rendered to his entire satisfaction, then two months' pay without allowances shall be issued to me as a gratuity from the Secretary of State.

Signature at full length.  
Place of residence.  
Date."

In the Department of the Seine there are 582 duly diplomatised *pharmaciens*. In Paris alone there are 523.

M. Flourens has presented to his Academy of Medicine a series of photographs of well-known engravings of celebrated medical men.

A Medical Congress is announced to come off in Lyons during the month of next September.

*L'Union Médicale* persists in calling the republican Yankee Hammond *Sir William Hammond*.

Dr. Chierici has started a Temperance Society at Turin.

The French journals announce the appearance of a new journal, to be called *Les Archives de Médecine Navale*, and published under the auspices of the Minister of the Marine.

M. Ollier says that he removed the carious coccyx of a woman, leaving the periosteum and adjacent fibrinous structures; and that he subsequently observed the formation of a distinctly osseous plate occupying the situation of the removed bone.

An Austrian army doctor, writing from Fredericia, says: "The inhabitants of Denmark are, as a rule, well to do, and accustomed to pay their doctors liberally. Here medical men meet with a golden practice, such as with most physicians in Austria is merely matter of tradition."

Professor Esmarch has received the order of the Iron Crown from the Austrian Emperor, for his great services in the hospitals in Schleswig-Holstein.

Professor Tommasi of Pavia has been raised to the dignity of Senator.

Professor Skoda calls the attention of the Vienna Medical Society to the fact that the City Park is covered with white sand, which is injurious to the eyes. He cannot understand how any gardener can have selected white sand for a park. He proposed to call the attention of the city officials to the fact.

Statistics show that there are 1706 doctors, 1600 of whom are practising their art, in the Department of La Seine. Besides these, there are 270 *officiers de santé*. Hence there is one medical man to every 875 inhabitants.

M. Corvisart has shown that in animals the pancreatic juice has the power of dissolving albuminous foods without the assistance of the gastric juice or the bile; and now he has demonstrated the same thing in man. A hospital patient, in perfect health, having suddenly died from chloroform administered for the reduction of the femur, M. Corvisart removed the pancreas; and, with the prepared juice and ferment of it, operated on albuminous matters. He found that a large quantity of albumen and fibrine was rapidly digested with its assistance.

M. Depaul lately reminded the Academy of Medicine, that M. Gamgee, an English surgeon, had communicated a case of removal of an ovarian cyst, and presented the cyst. He added, that neither the operation nor the cyst presented anything remarkable. What would have been of interest was the cure of the patient; and on this score he had made inquiry, and found that the patient had died. M. Velpeau supported the views of M. Depaul, and expressed a hope that an end might be put to the system of announcing operations before the final result of them was known. Most people will agree with the wish of M. Velpeau; but it will probably occur to some of us, that it would have been more polite if he had made the remark *à propos* of one of his own countrymen, rather than of a stranger.

The patients of the Hôpital St. Louis have petitioned the French Senate, praying that contagious diseases, and especially small-pox, may be confined to a special hospital.