

Correspondence.

MEDICAL ETIQUETTE.

LETTER FROM WILLIAM THELWALL, ESQ.

SIR,—Will you oblige me by publishing the following in your JOURNAL? I am, etc.,

W. THELWALL.

Farndon, Cheshire, April 3, 1865.

I was called on Monday, March 13th, to visit a gentleman who was thrown from his horse. On the following day, a consultation being desired, I wrote to Dr. McEwen and Dr. Dobie; but, both being from home, the messenger brought Dr. Waters, who arrived about 5 P.M. Dr. Waters wished to see the patient again the same evening, and came about 11 P.M., bringing with him another practitioner, Mr. John Harrison. I need not say how astonished I was, as no one ever asked Dr. Waters to bring any one with him. The brother of the patient remarked to me at the time the intrusion of a stranger, and seemed much annoyed. After examining into the case, they went to the other side of the room and conversed together *sotto voce*. They came the following day, and, indeed, continued their attendance until the death of the poor fellow on the Friday following.

The same evening (Friday), Dr. Waters wrote a letter to me, wishing to obtain a *post mortem* examination. Mr. Eden, a retired practitioner and friend of the family, who had remained at the inn during the week that Mr. — was ill, forwarded the letter of Dr. Waters; and he (Mr. Eden), who remained in Chester all day on Saturday, received a telegram that the friends were agreeable.

Dr. Waters and Mr. John Harrison, forthwith proceeded to Churton, where the body lay; and, at 5 P.M., made a *post mortem* examination, without in any way communicating with me, which they could easily have done in twenty minutes.

About 10 P.M. the same evening, Mr. Eden came to my house, and informed my son that a *post mortem* examination had been made. This was the first intimation I had of the matter.

Mr. Churton, the coroner, had informed Mr. Eden that an inquest would be held; but, in spite of this, the examination was made.

I subsequently received a note from Dr. Waters, from which I extract the following remarks.

“Nicholas Street, Chester, March 23rd, 1865.

“Dear Sir,—I find that I and Mr. Harrison got into trouble with the coroner and annoyed you by the *post mortem* examination of our poor patient. I was not aware that I was doing any wrong towards the coroner; and as I would not willingly be guilty of any discourtesy towards you, I write this note to explain how it happened that the *post mortem* examination was so suddenly performed. I wrote to you, intimating my wish that it should be permitted, feeling assured of the existence of more internal mischief than met the eye or was apparent on the surface.

“As for the *post mortem* examination being performed in your absence, I wrote to you as the proper person to move in the matter. The following morning (Saturday), Mr. Eden called on me, and said that he had no doubt the request would be granted; that my letter had been sent to the father; and that they expected a telegram conveying assent. I then asked when it might be done; he replied, that the mother would object to it on Sunday. I then proposed 5 P.M. for leaving Chester, and that was arranged; for we

assumed that the consent would be given. I left all arrangements respecting you to Mr. Eden, on the supposition that you and he must have spoken together on the subject.

“On arriving at Churton, you were not there. My impression was, that you did not care to be present. Mr. Harrison and I decided on Saturday as being free to go. I am very sorry if you think I have been in any way wanting in courtesy to you. I should be truly sorry to be guilty of it.

“The *post mortem* examination was suddenly decided on in Chester. It appears that there was no way of communicating with you; for, until Mr. Eden mentioned it, I did not suppose you were waiting to be summoned. Had any of us thought so, we should not have neglected it.

“Believe me, yours truly,
“EDWARD WATERS.”

THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.

SIR,—The time has long gone by when the Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians thought that, by separating themselves from the great body of practitioners of this country, they enhanced their own status. The fact of the College having appointed a Committee to investigate the alleged grievances of their brethren in the army and navy is a sufficient proof that they consider that they have common interests with that large body of excellent, deserving, and, I regret to say, ill-used body. Carefully as that Committee has investigated the charges brought against high authorities, we have full assurance that the general rumours and allegations have not been exaggerated, and that the College has not been engaged in seeking out a mare's nest. There may possibly be among us dissentients as to the exact method to be pursued in redressing the grievances complained of; but I apprehend there can be none as to the justice of the cause we are engaged in, and the propriety of this ancient corporation seeking to ameliorate the condition of those to whom the health and strength of the British army are mainly entrusted.

The greatness of our College is secured from the moment that the entire medical profession are made to feel that the same pulse beats in all, and that an injury done to one of its members is reflected by the vigorous action at once called forth in this ancient corporation.

This, sir, is not a mere abstract question of right and wrong, which can be disposed of by an argument of debaters; it is not one merely of professional etiquette and sensitiveness. I place it on the still broader ground of national importance; and I call upon the Fellows of the College to make it their own personal question, because they are Englishmen, as well as medical men.

Far be it from me to underrate any portion of the material of which the British army is composed; but the higher my estimate of all its constituents is, the higher necessarily becomes that of the medical department, upon which, above all others, the efficiency depends. I will not weary you with statistical details as to the former and present mortality of the two services; but I may remind you of the great fact that, owing to the sanitary improvements which our professional brethren have introduced, the mortality in the army has been reduced during the last few years from an average much above that of the general population to a level with the healthier rates prevailing in the latter. If, then, so much depends, for the daily comfort and the fighting efficiency of our troops, upon the due surveillance of the medical