

THE COMING (FOURTH) REORGANISATION OF THE ARMY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The failure of three previous attempts to harmonise the interests of our department with those of the public service, so as to produce contentment among our members, renders the success of whatever measures are now under consideration a matter of great importance, not only to the medical officers of the army but to the nation, which is at length beginning to recognise the value of a scientific corps, heretofore contemptuously neglected and ill-treated under the influence of those prejudices of caste and class which exist here as well as in India. I trust, therefore, that you will not decline to allow the various views entertained of what ought to be done to place the department on a permanently satisfactory footing, to be discussed in the columns of what is really, to the public, the representative journal of the profession.

The complaints of the officers are, I think, pretty much as follows:—Slowness and *uncertainty* of promotion. Promotion given to officers distinguished on service, only by robbing others of their just due. (Military officers in like case are rewarded by advancement in army rank, never by bestowing on them the regimental vacancies justly allotted to the seniors of the next grade as the reward of their faithful service.) Exclusion of the great bulk of officers from any chance of realising a small competence by confining the administrative appointments, which alone afford any margin for saving, to a body of seniors who may, if they please, hold them till they reach the scriptural limit of life. Still further punishing the unfortunates who arrive at fifty-five years of age before gaining an administrative commission, by consigning them to the obscure poverty of a scanty half-pay, on the plea of their being too old for the sedentary duties of a hospital, while general officers seventy years of age are allowed to enjoy commands to do the duty of which requires much bodily and mental activity. The absence of all reward for, or recognition of, superior professional skill and talent, to which it is in great measure due that a body of close on one thousand specially trained and educated medical officers make no mark in the records of the profession, exercise no influence on its progress, and are, both individually and collectively, but slightly esteemed as “mere army doctors.” Otherwise handled the medical staff corps would be as distinguished a body in their line as are the Royal Engineers in their peculiar department. If the Government wishes to know how to treat our department, they have not far to seek for guidance. Treat it as the Royal Engineers are treated. Both are scientific corps; why, then, deal so differently with them? Let Government select their sanitary and Poor-law inspectors and all suchlike officials from their corps of trained doctors, let them second these officers for ten years, as they do Royal Engineers, in railway and other scientific posts, and see whether the needful talent and skill will not be abundantly forthcoming, and the whole department roused to exertion by that needful stimulus of consequent reward which procures us our body of eminent consulting surgeons and physicians. Pay, half-pay, and periods of retirement are matters of comparatively easy arrangement, and Government has not of late years acted illiberally as regards them. The sore point in such matters is the distinctions made, in an unfavourable sense, between military and medical officers of nominally equivalent rank. The same in other matters—as, for instance, good-service pensions. Eight of these are allotted to the Royal Marines, numbering 350 officers, while only eight are allowed to the medical staff of 950 officers. The Marines are notoriously not the pets of the service, but even on their scale the doctors should have twenty instead of eight pensions for their corps.

But undoubtedly the faulty organisation of the department is at the bottom of its unsatisfactory condition, and until that is remedied, by reforming it on military principles, no ventilation upwards, no opening for ability, can be established and maintained, and without that, contentment and hope will never be dwellers in its ranks. The staff of

the corps, instead of being, as in the army proper, a body of officers selected from the ranks and temporarily appointed, consists of two superior grades, with permanent substantive rank—a state of things the effect of which will be best understood by supposing that the only mode of advancement open to regimental lieutenant-colonels was by getting appointed deputy adjutant-generals, and that, failing to do so by the time they became fifty-five years old, they were compulsorily shelved on half-pay, while the deputy adjutant-generals were at liberty to retain their staff position to an advanced age. This view of the departmental ailments will, I dare say, shock officials never accustomed to let their thoughts stray from the regular office traditional grooves; but if prejudice is put aside, and calm consideration given to facts, I think it will, on reflection, be deemed well founded.

Should you deem these remarks of sufficient interest to merit insertion, I should be happy to submit for discussion the measures which seem to me best calculated to meet the grievances complained of by the department.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

June 16th, 1874.

QUADRAGINTA.

THE NAVAL MEDICAL SERVICE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—To illustrate a service which the *Army and Navy Gazette* was facetiously pleased a few weeks ago to describe as “popular,” I may mention that the staff surgeon of the *Monarch* has been very lately appointed. This officer is of high reputation, and has served Her Majesty twenty-four years. He has been placed in a cabin on the lower deck of that ship, where he may, during the next three years, attempt to study medicine, and write the innumerable service returns now required in the Navy, with the aid of some form of artificial light.

I may mention that the *Monarch* is one of the finest vessels in the navy, and you may remember that on this account this ship was especially selected to convey the remains of Mr. Peabody to America. If room for a cabin for one medical officer cannot be found on her main deck, where is the ship in which it can be found? The staff-commander, the paymaster, and the chaplain (who has been about seven years in the service) all occupy cabins on the main deck, where your non-nautical readers may be informed they enjoy the seafaring luxuries of fresh air and of daylight, while the staff-surgeon has as much of the former as may obviate asphyxia, and barely enough of the latter to “make darkness visible.”

Can you wonder that young men who observe such a position offered as a reward for sea service, providentially prolonged for nearly a quarter of a century, either decline entering the navy, or (having entered it) try so frequently and effectually to escape? No class would more readily support any hardships if really necessary.

Medical men object to a service which combines the future chance of getting drowned with the present certainty of being ill-used.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Portsmouth, June 16th, 1874.

ANOTHER STAFF SURGEON.

THE COLLEGE ELECTION.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As a provincial Fellow I have signed the requisition to Mr. Alfred Baker, of Birmingham, to become a candidate at the coming election of members of Council. The statement has been made that Mr. Baker is coming forward as the nominee of the British Medical Association, as Mr. Southam did last year, and as yet he has given no declaration of his views in College politics which can be put forward as a contradiction. If he does not give a distinct utterance on some of the questions which the party of progress have an interest in, I hope he will find himself in a minority, and he certainly will not have my vote.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

June 16th, 1874.

F.R.C.S.