

117a, Harley Street,
W.

Wm. Cecil Bosanquet to Professor Thomson.
January 14th 1904.

Dear Professor Thomson,

Very many thanks for your trouble in writing to me at such length. Fairbairn also shewed me your letter to him. Let me say at once that the last thing in my thoughts was to complain that I personally had not been consulted over your plans for the Regius Professorship. Of course I never regarded myself as in any sense a representative person up here. As a Medical Registrar one has at least plenty of opportunity of learning humility. But I do think that we have a grievance against you (both in the plural) in that your plans seem to have been somewhat sedulously kept from the knowledge of our natural representatives upon the Board of Faculty. I do not think that any of them had the least inkling of the scheme, with the possible exception of Schorstein, whose position is to me enigmatical. He is said (rightly or wrongly) to have known of the plan: yet he made no attempt to let it be generally known, although he seems by his adhesion to our manifesto to range himself on our side. If he was told of it, and bound over to secrecy, as I gather another friend of mine was, the attempt to rush the matter through without notice or discussion becomes the more evident. I think it is this course of procedure which has been the cause of the very acute indignation which we all feel over this question.

As to the possibility of compromise, it is obviously useless to discuss the matter, if as your letter implies you insist on your scheme, the whole scheme, & nothing but the scheme. But is the matter so urgent? Could you not accept an old man (e.g. Whipham) as Professor, one who would not hold the Chair for a great length of time? If Ritchie is appointed, he will be Professor for 25 years or more, making your arrangement a permanency. Even if we were willing to try it, that is a serious position. If, say, Whipham were appointed, he would not be likely, even in the Oxford atmosphere, to go on for more than 8 or 10 years. The difference is considerable.

The suggestion has been made that it might be possible to make the R.P.M. a non-resident Professor, with say, half the salary, and to give the remaining half of the emolument to the Reader in Pathology. There are advantages and disadvantages in such a plan.

You appear to think that it is impossible to abolish the Litchfield lecturers. I quite see the difficulties, but £200 seems a large amount to hand over yearly merely as bakshees to the Staff of the Infirmary. The University of London used to hold its examinations in the London hospitals without any such palm-oil to the Staff. And the university in the shape of the separate colleges contributes a considerable amount to the Infirmary's funds already.

I daresay that none of these ideas are practicable, but that is no reason why others who know more than I about the conditions in Oxford should not find an acceptable via media. In view of the bitterness existing, it would seem that a fight to a finish, ending in a victory for one or other party in the dispute would leave behind it a condition of things which it is desirable to avoid.

As to our meeting here, I do not think we could well have invited those who were not qualified. From our point of view they are "undergraduates", and you would not in Oxford invite undergraduates

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to help in managing the affairs of the university. I do not know of any men who are engaged in teaching at the London schools who were not invited. It was their opinion that was to be elicited. They are naturally few in numbers, as the new arrangements only date from 1886, and in the time available you could not expect Oxford to have annexed any overwhelming proportion of the teaching posts going. There were present at the meeting Schorstein, Jenner, Fairbairn, Wall, Leathes, and myself. French was not there, but I have reason to believe that he is in sympathy with our view. There may be others of whom I do not know, but there was no intention of omitting any one.

I quite admit much of what I understand to be the contention of your side. As you have got a fine Pathological Laboratory and have decided definitely to teach that science in Oxford (a decision which admits of argument pro and con) I quite see the need for further endowment for the chief pathological teacher, whatever be his title. I should be pleased to see Ritchie Professor of Pathology. But I do not think it advisable to abolish the chief representative of clinical medicine for the purpose, and this is what your plan amounts to. Even if this were admissible, it is not the right way to do it, by a fiat from the Prime Minister. The matter should be duly threshed out in the open, and the question decided by the University on its merits.

I expect Fairbairn will be writing to you on the points contained in your letter to him, e.g. the composition of the Board of Faculty.

It is regrettable that all this friction has occurred just before the B.M.A. meeting. One hoped that that would have been good for the school, but of all things unity among the members of it was most to be desired. Dis aliter visum.

I had not intended to write again at such a length. I hope that all may somehow end satisfactorily.

Yours sincerely,
Wm. Cecil Bosanquet.