

Fairbairn-Thomson letters, 1904.

Fr. Dr. Fairbairn to Prof. Thomson.
(Script).

60, Wimpole Street,
London, W.

January 27, 1904.

My dear Prof. Thomson,

I have been meditating another epistle to you on the subject of the R.P. of Medicine for some time, but have not thought that I had anything definite enough to propose, especially after seeing your letter to Bosanquet. And now I only want to write and urge the same thing as Bosanquet did, viz. an appeal for Church.

Bosanquet has been in correspondence with Church, and it seems as if he might consent to go if pressure enough were brought to bear on him.

First of all, it seems from what I have heard that it is unlikely that the Reader in Path. will be appointed. There are one or two alternatives, - either Balfour will have neither party's candidate and appoint some outsider, or he may appoint some man (like Herringham) who would be undesirable to you at Oxford and who would be young to be in the Chair for years.

Next, nothing could be better after this schism in the Oxford camp than that some one could be got - if only for 2 or 3 years - to tide over this time, to give us all opportunity to thrash the matter out and come to agreement. - who could be better than the Pres. of the Coll. of Phys.? He would appeal to the Oxford graduates and to the lay people in Oxford, and I think to many of the science people, and certainly to the general public.

He would do much in Oxford for the Science of Medicine, for we must come together, and there is no doubt we have drifted apart over this question. - the result, I think, of the want of a clinical man in Oxford. I am sure you have all misinterpreted the feelings of the general run of Oxford medicals on this matter. They do not want to block the path of science, or to stop the pathology work, but they look on the school as meant to prepare clinical men and that being their first idea, they don't want to give up the R.P.M. for all time to Path. - as you practically propose. We will all do what we can to raise a Prof. of Path, - we must have both, not one.

I therefore venture to think that Church would be an excellent go-between for a few years at any rate, - to set things straight, for us to develop along the best lines as may appear to all of us.

Next, I think our memorial with the signatures, which I suppose has flooded Oxford by now, will do good in calling the attention of the non-medical section in Oxford to the strength of the school, and to the need of fostering it. Out of this evil may come a certain amount of good. And if, in addition, the Pres. of the R. Coll. of Physicians came to the Chair, this would add greatly to the prestige of the school in their eyes and in the eyes of the general public.

Then, what we thought might be possible, would be (1) a joint letter to all Oxford graduates placing before them the state of affairs in Oxford and setting out the claims for an endowment for the Prof. of Path. and asking for help and promises of subscriptions, - not necessarily to be paid at once. We might send out 200-300 of these and perhaps obtain promises nearly amounting to, say, £500-£800, - (of course I don't know, this is purely a spec). Then

(2) prepare a 2nd appeal to be scattered broadcast through Oxford and to the likely people among the wealthy who might help like Iveagh and that class, saying what is wanted and 'look what the Oxford medicals have done to start it' - i.e. of course if our promises among ourselves made a good enough show. Perhaps at this time when money is tight and so many appeals are going, - (esp. the new head Univ, Med. Instit.) we would not succeed but I think something might be done. The result of the wide publicity of this professorship question in Oxford and outside may help.

Couldn't you then see your way to do something to get Church, - I am sure if it was a matter of election by the Graduates in Med. of the Univ. he would have a ten to one majority. To put it on the lowest level, if you succeed, you will avoid someone you like less. I rather understood too from conversation with you and Gotch and what was said at meeting, that if a man like Church would go, there would be no two questions. In fact, I think you said something like it in your letter to me. I can quite understand that it is very difficult for you having taken the line you have to turn round now and in a way, take the opposite. But surely yours was taken on the supposition that Church was impossible. To suggest to him that he would be the one man who could fill the post, with the most general acceptance, and that though it was understood he was definitely out of court before, - now that this split has occurred, perhaps he would come in now as peacemaker, - so to speak. I put it this way because I don't think it means any change of position on your part, as the whole thing is in the melting-pot if Church will consider it. I hope I have put this all right to you. If it was possible I would like to have a meeting in town between the two parties and talk it out, as I feel one may not express one's self properly on paper. Would that be possible? Dinner and a smoke together, and we might get at it. There is no great hurry re Church as I think the seed sown better have time to germinate. I wrote to Gotch on this same question, but as its chances seem to improve, I felt another effort necessary. Excuse all this long

only
screed. You are about the one I could have written to in the same way. It's well meant; if it seems to strike you otherwise, excuse it, it's off my own bat. Sincerely yours,
JOHN S. FAIRBAIRN.