it is impossible for me to remain a member of the Association so long as the Brighton Division does not recognise that public officials must remain free agents if they are to serve their councils whole-heartedly, and to carry out the duties for which they are paid. It is for this reason that I have asked the secretary of the division to forward my resignation to the central office.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

DUNCAN FORBES,
Medical Officer of Health.

Health Department, Town-hall, Brighton, July 26th, 1912.

FLEMING'S (HECHT'S) MODIFICATION AND THE WASSERMANN TEST.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In view of the interesting discussion on the comparison between Fleming's modification and the Wassermann test which is going on in your columns, it would seem desirable that various workers should state their experiences so that some definite conclusion may be come to on the points at issue. Fleming's modification has been the routine method of investigation at the Seamen's Hospital, where 35 beds out of a total of 250 are devoted exclusively to the treatment of venereal diseases. In addition, an unusually large number of patients suffering from the various manifestations of syphilis present themselves for treatment in the out-patient department. The material derived from these sources is therefore considerable. Further, the clinical condition has been observed by me in practically every case, and in the wards the course of the disease and the effect of treatment have been carefully followed. Cases of leprosy, malaria, and many other tropical diseases have been examined. In no case has a positive result been obtained in any other condition than syphilis. The percentage of sera which fail to hæmolyse is found to be 5 per cent., as has been reported to you recently by Dr. Pantou and Dr. Braxton Hicks.

Various modifications of the original Fleming's technique have been adopted from time to time—e.g., the human heart extract standardised against a number of known syphilitic sera is now used in a much lower dilution than 10 per cent., usually 2–3 per cent. Thanks to the valuable observation made by Dr. d'Este Emery, the whole process is now carried on in a water-bath. Good results, in fact, may often be obtained by adding the sheep's blood to the tubes after a short delay at ordinary room temperature, thus doing away with the necessity for heating to 37° C. for five minutes in the first stage; this, however, has not been put to a sufficiently lengthy series of tests as yet to justify its use as a routine method.

A critical examination of the results obtained has convinced me that if fresh sera be used and care be taken Fleming's modification is a very accurate, reliable, and therefore valuable qualitative method of investigating complement fixation.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

ARTHUR DAVIES.

London School of Clinical Medicine (Post-Grad.), Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich, S.E., July 23rd, 1912.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—May I assure Mr. Donald that I have more than glanced at his article, and that I am very far from entertaining ungenerous suspicions of him and his work? In spite of his disclaimer I still believe the explanations I have offered for the discrepancies between his results and Mr. Fleming's may be the correct ones, as they are certainly possible theoretically. Two observers may honestly believe they are carrying out a complicated technique like the Wassermann reaction exactly similarly, but unless the process has been described in the utmost detail, small but important differences may creep in. One may centrifugalise his corpuscles to constant volume, another may not; one may accept any antigen which gives a negative result with a normal serum and a positive one with a syphilitic serum, another may test it still further, and so on. My explanation is a possible one. Can anyone suggest an alternative?

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Harley-street, W., July 28th, 1912.

W. D'ESTE EMERY.

THE OPHTHALMOLOGY OF GENERAL PRACTICE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I am very glad to obtain the assurance of Mr. M. L. Hepburn in THE LANCET of July 27th that in his opinion "those medical men who wish to supplement their incomes by undertaking refraction cases" may do so. This is the whole point, and I am now satisfied; but I submit that neither they nor I could have gathered this from Mr. Hepburn's original article. Hence I protested.

To obtain such an admission from Mr. Hepburn is no mere point of academic interest, but one of urgent and practical importance, because not only are general practitioners already, in a few districts, treating the defective eyesight of London County Council school-children, and being paid out of public funds for doing so, but are hoping in the near future for a very great extension of this principle,

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

ALEXANDER BROWN, M.B. Lond.

Bartholomew-road, N.W., July 28th, 1912.

THE MEDICAL DIRECTORY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The annual circular for the Medical Directory will be posted to the profession on August 1st. We sincerely hope that all practitioners will make their returns to us as quickly as possible, so that the issue for 1913 may be accurate and full of the latest information.

We shall as usual publish a few days before Christmas, and we seek the hearty coöperation of the profession in making this effort.—We are, Sir, yours faithfully,

J. & A. CHURCHILL.

Great Marlborough-street, London, W., July 27th, 1912.

THE RARITY OF SARCOMA OF THE RECTUM.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the Address in Surgery at the recent annual meeting of the British Medical Association, Mr. F. T. Paul, referring to the rarity of sarcoma of the rectum, reported but a single case as occurring in an experience extending over 30 years.

Two years ago, when reporting a case of sarcoma of the rectum under my care, I had occasion to search the literature for recorded cases, of which, excluding the melanotic variety, only nine undoubted cases were found. Inquiries at 50 of the principal hospitals and museums of the British Isles produced only two cases. An epitome of the above nine cases appeared in the *Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology*, vol. xv., 1911. A few reprints of this article are still in my possession, and I shall be glad to supply a copy to any medical man who is interested in this class of case.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

C. HAMILTON WHITEFORD.

5, Sussex-terrace, Plymouth, July 30th, 1912.

THE REBATE ON PETROL DUTY FOR MEDICAL MEN.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Since the introduction of the petrol duty it has been the rule for the Board of Customs and Excise to insist on doctors signing the claim for repayment of duty in the presence of the taxing officer. This has necessitated doctors attending at the nearest taxing office, generally at some extremely inconvenient hour, in order to sign a declaration which entitles them to a small sum of money. This was a tiresome and vexatious regulation, and some time ago I approached the legal committee of the Royal Automobile Club and requested them to take steps in the matter to get this altered. As the result of their negotiations a letter was received by the club on July 6th stating, among other things, that the Board of Customs and Excise "recognised that the regulation might cause inconvenience in certain cases, and for this reason no objection would be raised in future to members of the public, who so desired, being relieved of the