

saving of larger fees in important cases has not been brought to public notice. I have an idea that there may be legal difficulty in paying proper fees to expert pathologists, but the same may be said of paying any fees at all to them.

3. This brings me to my third point, which is that the position of Dr. Freyberger is anomalous. He has been appointed by the London County Council to perform post-mortem examinations in special cases. The interpretation of the word "special" is left to Mr. Troutbeck, but there can be no doubt that all inquests must resolve themselves into those where advanced and special pathological knowledge is required and those where the usual pathological equipment will suffice. In the latter cases the general practitioner is perfectly able to make the post-mortem examinations and to give the necessary evidence and Dr. Freyberger's assistance at two guineas per case is an unnecessary extravagance. In the far fewer cases where great special knowledge is required, Dr. Freyberger may be able to fill the part, but the London County Council should not have appointed, for the fulfilment of such important functions, the first gentleman who offered his services cheaply. The post should have been advertised and application publicly invited. In this way the public and the medical profession would feel that an attempt had been made to obtain the best man for an arduous appointment. The anomalousness of Dr. Freyberger's position is that in most cases he is not wanted and that in the few cases where the expert pathologist is wanted the public has not a sufficient guarantee of his skill. The Control Committee of the London County Council have recommended that the services of other experienced pathologists should be obtained and hope for the coöperation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of London and Surgeons of England and of the big London hospitals in obtaining competent men. This is a real step forward. The recommendation has been adopted by the London County Council. It now remains to be seen, firstly, if any expert pathologists will be tempted by the small fee to offer their services, and, secondly, if the coroners will be content to use their help only in *special* cases. I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

M.B.

LUNACY AND THE LAW—"SINGLE CARE."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The able articles which have recently appeared in the medical journals from the pens of Dr. E. W. White and Dr. T. Outterson Wood and the letter of Dr. H. Rayner in THE LANCET of March 7th, p. 681, are well worthy of perusal by, and the serious consideration of, every member of the medical profession, be he alienist or consultant physician or engaged in the ordinary everyday practice of his profession, for they have raised a timely and a warning note, which is not to be disregarded, on this very important subject. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that many of the communications which have appeared in the press, lay and medical, on the law as it affects single care in the certificated, the uncertificated, or the so-called border-line cases betray ignorance of the most elementary necessities and precautions which must be used in dealing with persons of unsound mind in whatever stage of the disorder, and that some of the suggestions set forth in all seriousness tend directly to the revival, or rather the establishment, speedily of all the evils which it has been the province of the various lunacy Acts, *ab initio*, to render impossible.

Amid much that is irrelevant and impracticable in the discussion hitherto there stands forward prominently and with unanimity one opinion and that is, that only fully-trained, qualified, and experienced persons are fitted for the exceedingly delicate and tactful task of properly tending and ministering to the unsound in mind, whether the manifestations of the unsoundness be of the mildest or of the most exaggerated type. To secure and to retain this trained intelligence for the care of the mentally unsound and to insure its exercise under the most favourable conditions for the patient is the problem of the hour which awaits solution. It is acknowledged on all hands that many of those who now assume responsibility for cases under single care are not persons who come up to the standard indicated here. Surely a disordered brain and nervous system are in at least as much need of the specially trained physician and nurse as is a broken limb in need of the surgeon and his specially trained surgical nurse, or some severe internal malady of the physician with similar aid to suit his requirements.

How are the desirable conditions herein set forth to be best attained and with as little disturbance as possible to the existing state of the law? At the present moment cases of mental unsoundness in any of their stages or varieties can be treated in hospitals for the insane or in private houses adapted for the purpose and licensed by the Commissioners in Lunacy or by magistrates, either during voluntary residence in one or other of them, or under order and medical certificates, whilst the poor or pauper class are cared for in the various county or borough asylums. It may be taken for granted that in any of these institutions trained medical and nursing skill will be amply provided. Why not, then, go a step further in the same direction and authorise by law that "single care" be constituted on similar lines under licence by Commissioners in Lunacy or magistrates who in granting such licences would hold themselves responsible for the suitability of the provision made for single care in every respect, as well as for skilled medical and nursing treatment? Such a provision would at least insure that none but properly qualified persons and suitable premises and exercising grounds were provided, for licences would be granted to none other. Single patients or boarders would thus also with certainty be brought under the very necessary supervision of commissioners and magistrates, evasions of the law would be more easily detected, and serious abuses of any kind would certainly be abolished or minimised. Physicians who have hitherto felt themselves debarred from the single care of their patients by fear of being brought under the operation of law while so doing would thus be placed at rest and feel in tranquil security on this point whilst engaged in their duty.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully.

West Malling, March 7th, 1903.

JAMES ADAM.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—As in your leading article under the above heading in THE LANCET of March 7th, p. 671, you were good enough to refer to myself, I shall be glad if you will allow me to write a few words in reference to the question as to school board certificates which I submitted to the Executive Committee of the General Council of Medical Education and Registration. You express some surprise that medical men, including myself, should have brought before the Council inquiries concerning the etiquette and conduct of the medical profession. Now, Sirs, I do not question for a moment the accuracy of your definition of the powers and duties of this body, but if the supreme authority on all matters pertaining to medical education and registration has no power to make regulations or to give advice concerning medical etiquette and what does or does not constitute improper or "infamous" conduct, I should like to inquire from what quarter a perplexed medical man can hope to obtain guidance in regard to the various thorny problems which members of the profession are liable to encounter. To take, for instance, the various questions referred to in your article. All these, I think, it will be admitted are matters concerning which it is desirable there should be some authoritative standard of conduct by which medical men may shape their course and it is, I think, evident from your comments that in regard to none of them is there any accepted regulation at the present time. If, therefore, the General Medical Council has no power to decide on such matters, is it not much to be desired that its sphere of work should be extended in this direction or that some other body should be vested with the required authority? I do not wish now to go into the particular question as to school board certificates which I submitted to the Council, but I may remark that I was induced to put it by the discovery that there is a wide divergence of practice and opinion among metropolitan medical men on the subject—surely a very unsatisfactory state of affairs.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

DENNIS VINRACE.

Alexander-square, South Kensington, S.W., March 9th, 1903.

*** We did not intend to indicate exactly surprise that Mr. Dennis Vinrace should have sought the views of the General Medical Council in the particular circumstances. We meant rather to express the opinion that medical men as a body do not appreciate what the General Medical