almost recklessly, and certainly without duly realising the gravity of their undertaking. The wide experience of your correspondents, Mr. Foy and Mr. Nelson Hardy, would rob chloroform of some of its risks, but it must be remembered that the large majority of general practitioners receive little early instruction in anaesthetics, and are comparatively seldom called upon to practise anaesthetising. Chloroform risks cannot be foretold, and its dangers are seldom successfully combated; ether risks, however, can be usually foreseen, and its dangers are readily recognised and their effects counteracted by treatment.

I am, Sirs, your obedient servant,

DUDLEY WILMOT BUXTON,

Mortimer-st., W., Oct. 1888.

Anæsthetist to Univ. Coll. Hospital.

THE HARVEIAN ORATION.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I have perused the Harveian Oration delivered before the Royal College of Physicians by Dr. P. W. Latham with the greatest amount of interest and unmingled pleasure. Thoughts such as those therein expressed have long been present to my mind. By tracing out the paths stated, and following up a like line of speculation—mere suggestions though some of them of necessity are,—I believe that ultimately the many mysteries that at this moment enshroud medicine will disappear, the black cloud that envelops all diseases be rent in twain, and we shall be able to combat death, or at least view human ailment in a clear and unclouded light.

Let me give one or two illustrations of that lecture. In a letter to THE LANCET of July 7th of this year on "Is Eczema Contagious?" I said: "Some cases are, others are not, contagious. The direct causation of the latter kind is a germ, and this germ has not in the first place the power to produce a specific disease; but, being placed under varied and at the same time suitable surroundings, assumes a definite character, and then exerts its sway. May it not be that the epidemic of pneumonia, which is at present prevalent in the neighbouring town of Middlesbrough, had such a starting point? Given a harmless microbe planted on a favourable soil—e.g., a marsh, with cold damp east winds,—typhoid pneumonia breaks out," &c. I might and could have gone further, but suffice it to say what I actually meant was this: It is necessary for contagious pneumonia to affect a person that the system, and consequently the most vital parts of it, the lungs, become below par in their vitality, ptomaines are liberated into the lymph stream or blood; the excretory glands—e.g., the kidneys and liver—fail either to neutralise or dislodge them, the non-specific bacteria find access to the contaminated fluid, feed on the animal poisons, perhaps at the same time liberating others, and ultimately cause pneumonia.

To take another example. In THE LANCET of Sept. 22nd I advocated the administration of small doses of liquor potassæ in the treatment of eczema. I was not in a position to explain how it acted, but that it might be by preventing certain fermentative changes which I believe to take place in the blood of many eczematous patients. In other words, it acts as a direct antidote to leucomaines or alkaloids which exist in the living body independently of the action of bacteria. Were I able I should certainly examine the blood of such cases in the full anticipation of finding them, but I fear this must be left to abler hands than mine. Many years ago (in 1865) it was thought that an important discovery had been made. Indican—supposed to be due to a retardation of the process of declension of the complex to the more simple products of function and secretion, and this retardation due to accumulation of urea and other products of waste in the blood, owing to deficient renal secretion—was credited with being the cause of eczema. In nine out of ten such cases indican was detected in pathological quantities, and urea in considerable amount in the serum. This indeed was a step in the right direction, but should have gone further, and investigated, what I now wish to be done—namely, the leucomaines. In a memorandum I made some months ago, I find the following quotation: "Popular notions often have a substratum of reason in them; and, just as it was once the custom to bleed people at the spring and fall, so it is now the custom, in many parts of the country, to take opening medicine at these times. Why is this? Simply because the effete material—leucomaines—which has been

continually accumulating during the winter and summer needs expulsion. The body needs cleansing. It is this effete material which, acting on a lowered vitality, caused by the wear and tear of the seasons, lights up an acute eczema." We must discover more about ptomaines and leucomaines, and then in very truth will it be time enough to ask with regard to eczema and all other inflammatory affections: "Why do the blood-vessels dilate? How is the migration of the colourless corpuscles to be explained?"

I am, Sirs, yours truly,

Stokesby, Oct. 23rd, 1888.

J. A. WETHERELL, M.B.

QUIETENING MEDICINES.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I shall not occupy much space in replying to the letter of Dr. George Thompson, but I think it better to explain, first, that, though I used the various narcotic remedies at Bethlem from time to time, I never used any continuously with the sole object of producing quiet. In the rather heavy bill for medicines &c. at Bethlem are included consultation fees for special advice in difficult surgical and medical cases, as well as fees for operations and the cost of instruction of some of the nurses in massage. To compare the two hospitals of St. Luke's and Bethlem is absurd, for while last year at the former there were fifty-one admissions, at the latter there were 323. I may add that for hypnotics last year the whole cost was under £4.

I am, Sirs, yours truly,

Henrietta-street, W., Oct. 31st, 1888.

GEO. H. SAVAGE.

"PROTECTION OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I read "J. H. T.'s" letter with interest. I quite agree with him as to the expediency of forming an association of the profession outside and independent of the Medical Council, at the meetings of which the combined voice of the acting members of the profession could make itself heard in matters affecting our welfare. As regards limiting the number of candidates to correspond with the number of vacancies, as is the case in the services, I do not see how that could work well, for various reasons—e.g., a large number of those admitted to the profession go abroad, and so do not compete with us at home; and how would "J. H. T." compute that in order to control the number of candidates? Again, it would be a great injustice to cripple the expansion of rising schools of medicine by limiting the number of their students. No; let us admit all who duly qualify themselves. I should be glad to see some control over the minimum fees and salaries, such as "J. H. T." suggests. It would undoubtedly raise the status of the profession in the eyes of the public, because what is got cheaply is valued cheaply; and some of the salaries offered by public bodies amount to sweating the overdriven medical hack—that is, in institutions where salaries are given. With reference to giving services for nothing, I do not object to occasional services of that sort where circumstances point to it; but I hold it to be an injustice on the part of some of the well-paid practitioners to give free consultations at certain hours—an injustice to the struggling practitioners. Such practices should be disallowed, and the patients told to go elsewhere if not prepared to pay a high fee. If they will pay no fee—even the minimum—then they should be referred to the union medical officer. While gladly welcoming internal reform, I would as gladly welcome external. I think it a case of the greatest injustice for the authorities to demand an expensive training and a qualification from a man before he is legally entitled to practise, while they sit quietly aside and allow quacks to flourish everywhere. Their conduct is like that of a gardener who, after planting his seeds, goes to sleep and lets his plants become competitors with the weeds that quickly spring up, and then expects visitors, learned and ignorant alike, to admire his progeny and cull the flowers from them only, forgetting the while that the weeds may choke some of his plants, and that the visitor may be too ignorant to avoid the weeds. Human nature has a weakness for the successful quack in medicine as well as in other things, supposing him to be endowed with virtues far above