PSILOSIS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In your observations in THE LANCET of April 30th on Dr. Thin's paper on Psilosis, read recently at the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, you remark that his suggestion that the colouring matter of the fæces in these is destroyed low down in the intestinal canal by bacterial action, and, until some other agency has been discovered or this theory shown to be untenable, we must conclude that the views hitherto held as regards the white stools, although probably correct in the majority of cases, are not complete, and that further investigation is necessary before the matter can be satisfactorily settled. My attention was drawn to this question in Jamaica thirty years ago, when studying the character of yellow fever.¹ In that disease, on the fourth and fifth days, the stools are either nearly colourless, or contain merely a small quantity of fetid mucus with more or less biliary matter, but altogether without the appearance of the natural healthy evacuation, and at the same time there is much oppression, great irritability of stomach, and threatening of black vomit. At this stage a brown feculent evacuation of healthy appearance frequently occurs, when the unfavourable symptoms disappear as if by magic, and the convalescence is generally rapid. Here the brown evacuation is evidently a critical discharge of a most important description, and though it may contain bile that is not the cause of its colour, and the presence of such bile does not seem to explain its wonderful influence in removing the fever at its most threatening period.

The general belief of the medical profession is undoubtedly the old one, that pale stools are the result of either the non-secretion of bile, or its retention in the liver itself by obstructed ducts; but the brown colour of the fæces is not due to any modification of that of bile, but to a secretion that is not met with above the cæcum, and is to be found in it in cells impregnated with it, these cells being generally diffused through its more or less fluid contents, and, in favourable specimens, many of them may be found in tube casts, and evidently secreted by the glands in the lining membrane of the organ itself, as the gastric juice is secreted in those of the stomach. It may be asked, if non-secretion of bile or its retention in the liver be relieved by mercurials, and the proper colour of the feculent discharges return after their use, does not this prove the view here advocated to be erroneous? This is not so, however, for the Commission at Edinburgh, which examined, a good many years ago, how far mercurials increased the biliary secretion, showed that they did not do so; yet the action of calomel in moderate quantities on the cæcum and colon is to deepen the brown colour, and to increase these secretions, thereby augmenting their eliminative action, and so relieving any organ behind them from congestion or other disturbance of function which it is possible for an increase of the natural eliminatory process to afford.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

ROBERT LAWSON,

London, May 6th, 1892.

Inspector-General of Hospitals (retired).

THE COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The Association of Members of the College of Surgeons has already suffered enough for having taken Mr. Lawson Tait's advice in reference to the recent action (Steele v. Savory) without having further thrust upon it the responsibility of depriving the College of that gentleman's valuable services upon the Council. The Committee of the Association, desiring to ascertain the extent of their liability as soon as possible, passed a resolution to the effect that, the action having now terminated, the services of the solicitor would no longer be required, and requesting him to send in his account. One of the secretaries, who was brother to the solicitor, took offence at this, and resigned; the other then did likewise, on the ground that he had not for a long time undertaken any of the active duties of the office. Such is the sum total of the "behaviour" which, it

seems, is to prevent Mr. Lawson Tait's further candidature for the Council. It is probable that the reason given will appear to his supporters among the Fellows a trifle inadequate, and that his action will seem to lack that "earnestness and wisdom" whose absence in others has so seriously affected him.—I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

May 10th, 1892.

W. G. DICKINSON.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I wish, with your permission, to make a few observations upon the letter from Mr. Lawson Tait in regard to the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, published in your last issue. I happen to be a member of the Fellows' Association, and I have always understood that the objects of that Association were to advance reforms in the Council of the College solely *in the interest of the Fellows*. Entirely with that impression, therefore, I recorded my vote in Mr. Lawson Tait's favour at the last annual election to the Council, and also because Mr. Lawson Tait was one of the candidates recommended by the committee of the Association. We now, however, learn from Mr. Lawson Tait that "on the occasions when I have been a candidate in past years I have had the requirements of the Fellows as the chief part of my programme, but I have always declared that the interests of the Members have largely entered into my reasons for wishing to obtain a seat on the Council." When and where, I should like to ask, has Mr. Lawson Tait declared to the members of the Association that his main purpose of gaining a seat on the Council was that of advancing the interests of the Members.

I for one certainly knew nothing about this avowal of his political faith when I voted for him last July, and I certainly should not have voted as I did had I known the real reasons which impelled him to become a candidate. There is no other conclusion possible with regard to the Members' question at the present time than this—namely, that it is not ripe for solution. Why, then, waste time over it? Why attempt the impossible? Reforms such as the Council will be disposed to grant will be first in the interests of the Fellows, and therefore, sheltered behind its powerful charters and by-laws, the Council can now well afford to regard—truly, perhaps—with irritating equanimity the futile attempts of those who endeavour to thrust the Members' question before it. But as soon as the position of the Fellows becomes improved in the government of the institution, for which the Association is now doing its best to strive, then the lesser element of the "body corporate" would be able to help the greater, and to lend its aid to the advancement of those general reforms which are urgently called for in the interests of the College. But I have another bone to pick with Mr. Lawson Tait. He refuses to stand as a candidate of the Association at the next election, and lets us into the secret of a little family quarrel which he has had with the committee of the Members' Association, to which, I believe, he belongs. The effect of this quarrel may be given in his own words: "*I have no longer any reason sufficient to induce me to make the sacrifice of personal comfort and professional income which a seat on the Council of the College would involve. Therefore I shall not offer myself again in July.*" In short, to use a vulgar expression, Mr. Lawson Tait will see the Association of the Fellows "hanged first" before he will pose as its candidate, now that his own objects in furthering the interests of the Members cannot be attained. A curious commentary is this decision of Mr. Lawson Tait upon the fact that for three years he has been the adopted candidate of the Fellows' Association for a seat on the Council, pledged to press forward those points of reform which the Association has always consistently adopted as its programme. Now, however, that Mr. Lawson Tait has made such a plain statement of his creed in this matter, how will his connexion with the Association of Fellows stand? That is certainly a matter which calls for the consideration of the committee of the Association, and to that body it may be left. Meanwhile, I may take this opportunity of congratulating the committee in having secured so thoroughly a desirable candidate as Mr. Tweedy to represent the views of the Association at the coming election. No better choice could have been made, and all the members

¹ British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review, vol. xxviii., p. 483, and vol. xxix., p. 481.