

of the scientific means of prophylaxis that are now and have for some years been available, and shown to be efficacious.

Although I welcome and agree with the views expressed by Mr. Hugh Elliot in his very interesting letter as to the necessity of keeping apart any moral or other question from the purely medical subject of prophylaxis, I am in accord with you, Sir, that Mr. Elliot has not made out his implied contention that in the present instance medical "trades-unionism" has played any part in putting obstacles in the way of public knowledge of the antivenereal prophylactics now in question. The real cause of opposition has been, and is still in some quarters, of lay or non-medical origin. This is called "public opinion," and the undue silence of the medical profession on the matter is the result of undue submission to lay objections and to an untested and probably quite overrated or even non-existent "public opinion," rather than of any desire to preserve a monopoly of knowledge on medical subjects which are of the first importance to the community.

These general considerations lead me to add that I do not think that the medical profession is exercising itself, or will exercise itself much on the question as to whether or not the knowledge of the means of prevention should be given by medical men only to those who consult them in special instances. It is far more probable that in view of the wide-reaching evils of these diseases, and the impossibility of establishing a general eradication or "functional paralysis" of a primary and necessary instinct, medical practitioners will now feel it to be their duty to pay less attention to sporadic, though sometimes powerful, attempts to hinder their efforts, and to spread their knowledge of scientific prophylaxis as far as possible.

One word more concerning the efforts recently made to check the evils caused by advertising and other unlicensed practitioners, especially in relation to venereal diseases. Doubtless, apart from any governmental action, an immense reduction of this plague could be effected by a general resolve on the part of newspaper proprietors to refuse admission to quack advertisements. But this can scarcely be hoped for; and if anything practical is to be done in this direction it must rest with the Local Government Board, if not with Parliament. This matter, indeed, is now apparently under consideration by the Board. An opportunity thus presents itself for the Medical Department of the Local Government Board to urge also the importance of no longer setting aside the question of prophylaxis, and of taking prompt steps to facilitate the wider knowledge of practical means for efficient prevention.—I am, etc.,

London, W., Feb. 14th.

H. BRYAN DONKIN.

SIR,—In problems involving the consideration of sexual relations—the oldest question that has puzzled mankind—to take any but the widest view is deplorable. Particularly repugnant to those who would honestly seek the best solution of these grave matters is anything in the nature of "special pleading." Unfortunately, the letter of the editor of *Downward Paths*, in reply to Mr. Hugh Elliot, is open to this objection. For example, her argument, comparing prophylactic advice regarding venereal disease to advice as to how to commit crime, is so grossly unfair and so physiologically absurd as to need no refutation, while, indeed, it damages the writer's admirable cause. Also the plea that "silence" is the best answer to the "taunt" of "preserving syphilis in the interests of morality" may mislead those unfamiliar with the ready wit and cleverness of woman in controversy. (When, by the way, does an argument become a "taunt"?) So far as recollection serves, silence has not been commonly employed by woman equipped with a passable reply.

However, I have no desire to add any further "taunt" to the one complained of, neither have I any wish to enter into what at the best is a very difficult and delicate discussion, wherein one would find it wellnigh impossible to express all that one believes without offending many of one's most respected fellow creatures. But I do feel most strongly that narrowness of view, and the import of feelings and sentiments, whether religious, sexual, ethical, or what not, must be sternly repressed in dealing with this question, affecting as it does in the highest degree the

future development and welfare of the human race. For what higher duty can we know than to work for that great end? I would therefore emphasize that the prophylaxis under discussion is *immeasurably the lesser of two evils*, and would beg that this fact may never be lost sight of.

In deciding the other ever-present and ever most serious question, as to how to minimize prostitution, do not let us forget that the physiological factor is one important issue involved. While the male can, perhaps without bodily harm, lead an absolutely celibate life, yet for the female to make the very best of her life and attributes the sexual act is a physiological necessity, a fact often unsuspected by the individual, to whom it may be most distasteful. The temptation to evade the terrible responsibility of advocating any particular means of dealing with these stupendous issues is very strong. Nevertheless the subject absolutely demands the fullest examination at the present time. Its urgency is such that we may yet see the man arise bold enough to place before the people reasons for the legalization of carefully regulated polygamy. Surely as worthy of consideration as regulated vice! At any rate, even this expedient of a lower type of civilization might be considered after the war, if only on account of the personal health of the surplus female, as well as to permit her the possibilities of happy motherhood.

Woman is so splendid in the crisis through which we are passing that one cannot imagine the man who, whatever his former views, would now deny the vote to those who want it, or, indeed, any other of the "woman's rights" she may wish to claim—even the right to lead a physiological life.—I am, etc.,

London, W., Feb. 17th.

GEORGE ROWELL.

SIR,—May I venture to trespass once again upon your space in order to reply to the question which you put to me in your issue of February 10th, and to reply also to the editor of *Downward Paths* in that of February 17th? You ask me where the obstacles lie in the way of a layman who desires to study medical science, and you point out very truly that it is open to any one to study medical writings. In reply, I would urge that in no science is mere book study of any great value. Practical work and first hand observation are essential to give reality and bottom to any scientific knowledge, and in the way of these there are great obstacles to study by laymen. In making this remark I do not for a moment suggest that these obstacles should be removed. They exist for the protection of society against unqualified bungling. I named the fact, not by way of criticism, but in support of my contention that medical knowledge is and must continue to be to a great extent a monopoly of those who have been able to devote five years or so of their lives to the exclusive study of this science.

Nor did I mean to suggest that the State has endowed the medical profession with any privileges to which they are not entitled. What I did mean was, that quite apart from any "social contract," laymen trust doctors to do all in their power for the suppression of disease, independently of any social theories as regards which doctors and laymen are on equal terms. If it is ruled permissible for a doctor to withhold important medical knowledge from a layman; on grounds not connected with medicine but with social theories from which the layman may differ, then it at once becomes a matter of urgency for laymen themselves to acquire such medical knowledge as they can, and to take into their own hands that power of self-protection which is denied to them by the official repositories of medical science. And this can only be done by upsetting to some extent the existing relation between the public and the profession—by breaking down the absolute dependence of the former upon the latter.

The editor of *Downward Paths*, by some circuitous process of logic, arrives at the conclusion that I would also require a doctor to furnish information to patients on the methods of procuring abortion. I fail to see any shadow of an analogy. Society has determined that procuring abortion is a crime; by withholding information on this subject, doctors are not giving rein to any social fancy of their own; they are not the arbiters, for it is society at large which has decided that this thing shall not be done. In fact, your correspondent fortifies my argument, instead of weakening it; for my whole contention was that it is the prerogative of society, and not of the medical profession, to