

the patients were able almost at once to return to their duties. I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Ascot, Sept. 17th, 1900. A. GORDON PATERSON, M.D. Edin.

"PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Dr. Ryley is anxious to know why I agree as to the desirability of a central representative body in the medical profession. Partly in order that questions like those between him and the other Yarmouth practitioners might be settled by what both sides should recognise as the collective voice of the profession. Dr. Ryley also presses me to explain what is the attitude of the Yarmouth District Committee towards London consultants. Our resolution, quoted by Dr. Ryley, confines itself to medical practitioners in the town and neighbourhood, and the district committee has not gone beyond this. Having answered Dr. Ryley's questions may I ask one in turn?

So far Dr. Ryley has given no indication of his present views as to the conduct of the gentlemen with whom he desires us to consult. He will, I suppose, admit that these medical men accepted their present appointments knowing that there was a dispute pending between the united local profession on the one hand and a section of the public on the other, and that their acceptance was an act of hostility to the profession; that the advertisement of the appointments appeared only in the lay press, the medical press refusing unanimously to insert them; that the appointments themselves were at a fixed salary for attendance on an unduly large number of patients, all profit from their medical work going to the lay body; that the management was entirely in the hands of a lay committee; and that there was no restriction as to the class of patients to be attended. Considering Dr. Ryley's present attitude I think it not unreasonable to ask whether he esteems the action of these gentlemen deserving of professional reprobation, and if so how he thinks that reprobation should be expressed? I trust that Dr. Ryley's many professional and other engagements will not prevent his replying to this important question, especially as his answer need not be long.

As to "common humanity," Dr. Ryley's heroics are out of place. Common humanity is not at stake in the difference between himself and his Yarmouth fellow practitioners, and therefore he is not yet called upon to brave "ostracism or boycotting" in its defence. Our correspondence with him shows that the difference is not on the point of humanity, but on quite other issues. His demands were (a) that our attitude towards the institute surgeons should be referred to some "central representative authority," and (b) that that attitude should be modified in certain ways, which might, perhaps, be more agreeable to those surgeons but would make little practical difference to their patients. (a) fell through for lack of the mutually desired "central representative authority." The General Medical Council is restricted, as it has always held, by its statutory powers to taking cognisance of offences alleged to be "infamous in a professional respect," and Dr. Ryley's contrition for his former conduct has not yet led him to ask that such censure be passed upon it. The councils of the various medical corporations are only authoritative at most as to their own diplomates and are not strikingly representative of those. Of the British Medical Association Dr. Ryley is not a member, and, we believe, declines to recognise its ethical committee as either representative or authoritative. As to (b), we are, and have always been, prepared to give immediate help if called upon to the institute surgeons (or conversely, as Dr. Ryley points out, to accept it if necessary from them) in cases of sudden and grave emergency, or to treat their patients, gratuitously if necessary, who desire our advice. So much, we consider, is required by "common humanity," and suffices to meet its demands. Dr. Ryley desires us further to consult with the surgeon, but will not consent to waive the fee; thus the issue is not one of humanity to the patient, but of degree of recognition of the surgeon and of a possible small pecuniary sacrifice.

This, of course, is an *ex parte* statement whose fairness can be tested only by reference to the correspondence now in your hands. Should you, Sirs, afford space to publish that correspondence, your readers can judge for themselves; otherwise we leave it to you to say whether we have fairly stated the points involved. And if these be the points then we appeal with confidence to our medical brethren to say

whether we or Dr. Ryley have shown a greater regard for "common humanity" and for the honour and interests of our profession. I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Great Yarmouth, Sept. 18th, 1900.

W. E. WYLLYS.

* * We hope to publish an article dealing with this matter in our issue of next week.—ED. L.

"ARE COPPER SALTS POISONOUS?"

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Under the above heading there is an annotation in THE LANCET of Sept. 15th (p. 821) in which I am glad to find that the opinion I expressed in reference to the sale of so-called "greened" vegetables in a paper on the Action of Copper on the Human Body, read before the British Association (Chemical Section), has your support. When you say, "We do not object to the plan of preserving the colour of peas by copper" you express tersely what I endeavoured to prove in a brief part of my paper. For though most of your criticism is directed to this point, it was a very minor one in my paper. Your objection to the purchaser not being notified that the purchased article is coppered I hardly thought came within the consideration of "the action of copper"—a question whose investigation was large enough to occupy me constantly since the beginning of this year. In my judgment, if so-called "greened" vegetables were poisonous or injurious notification as to their being coppered would not justify their sale—it should be prohibited. And with this, too, I have no doubt you are in agreement, because I anticipate you would not approve of the sale of poisonous or injurious food and also because you illustrate your objection by the case of meat cooked in a gas-oven being improperly represented as being roasted. When we are in agreement on the really important point it is undesirable to occupy your space by discussing minor points, where difference is mainly due to the necessary briefness of the abstract brought to your notice. But I would like to refer to an error in your remarks when you state that my paper was on the subject given in the above heading. Of course I never questioned that there are poisonous salts of copper. Some of them are referred to in the published abstract of my paper. The correct title of my paper I have given above, and but brief reference was made to the subject of coppered vegetables. My researches prove that salts of copper are being constantly absorbed into the blood and excreted by persons engaged in working copper ore and alloys of the metal, while they are unconscious of the fact and continue in perfect health, and that consequently they are not "poisoned"; further that copper salts ingested with food, or alone, lead to absorption into the blood and excretion of copper salts without the slightest ill effect.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Bradford, Sept. 15th, 1900.

THOMAS WHITESIDE HIME.

"PROFESSOR LUSTIG'S PLAGUE SERUM."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In discussing a scientific subject it is unnecessary to reply to the personal attacks made upon me by Dr. Mayr in THE LANCET of August 11th, p. 461. Such attacks in debate may be common on the continent of Europe, but Englishmen do not consider that they advance an argument. I need only remark that it seems an extraordinary thing that a correspondent cannot criticise reports and reputed results of a method of treatment without ignorance of the subject or wilful misleading being put forward to explain his opposition.

I have argued the value of the experiments referred to entirely upon their own merits and I still hold that even if alternate cases have been regularly taken with others as controls it is not satisfactory evidence when moribund and other cases have been excluded. In the later experiments we want to know how many and what proportion of moribund and convalescent cases were taken out from each series. The later results of this method of treatment may appear to the physicians concerned very satisfactory, but unless their system of experiment is above suspicion their conclusions cannot be convincing. My opponents and I are at issue upon the reading of the statistics