

same principle and for the very same reasons of moving gently, with the result that we are as we are. In Ireland we have tremendous leeway to make up in matters pertaining to sanitation, and the progress of tuberculosis in the three countries shows this more than anything else. It might have been different had even a minority of the sanitary authorities had the advantage of the presence and assistance and encouragement of such men as representatives of the ratepayers as Dr. McWalter, but unfortunately they had not, nor are they likely to have, so that it is absolutely hopeless to expect many boards to follow in the wake of the South Dublin board of guardians, and if we are content to adopt this method I would just like to ask the learned doctor how long does he expect it would take to reduce the mortality from tuberculosis from 2·7 to 1·35 and how many people would succumb to it in the meantime?

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

SAMUEL AGNEW, M.A., M.D. R.U.I.,
Medical Superintendent Officer of Health, Lurgan.
Lurgan, Sept. 21st, 1908.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—“For the love of heaven, gentlemen,” said Jowett to some cocksure junior Fellows one day, “conceive it possible that you may be mistaken.” With profound humility I submit the advice to Sir John Byers and to the other distinguished men who laud compulsory notification of tuberculosis as the most important step towards ridding Ireland of that plague.

But let me reply to Sir John's points. He inquires, are not the many meetings which have been held under Lady Aberdeen's campaign—in which compulsory notification was commended—a proof of the desire of the country for that step? I deny the conclusion; all the meetings were composed of three classes—those attached in one way or other to the Viceregal Court, some extremists on the medical side who had never studied the economic problem of providing for the phthisical, and a residue of well-meaning people who had never considered what compulsory notification really means. The whole business had such a philanthropic aim, and was indeed so well intended, that nobody cared to raise objections, but when as a result of these mutual admiration meetings an effort is made to pass penal legislation for a whole country it is time to protest.

Sir John Byers refers me to the experience of compulsory notification at Sheffield, New York, and elsewhere. I am not sure if Sir John was at the Sheffield meeting of the British Medical Association, but everyone could see that compulsory notification may be an excellent thing in a city where a whole population works together in crowded factories, and a doubtful experiment for a whole country where the conditions are absolutely different. If Sir John can point out any entire country where compulsory notification of phthisis prevails and causes no hardship we must be impressed by it, but the example of an odd city goes for nothing. The fact that in 1864 the Irish death-rate from tuberculosis was the lowest in the three kingdoms, although no sanitary precautions were heard of, whereas now, after a quarter of a century's sanitary legislation, it is the highest, gives one to think furiously about the net result of these measures in actual practice.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Dublin, Sept. 27th, 1908.

J. C. MCWALTER.

"SENSATIONAL JOURNALISM."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The prominence of “tragic deaths,” “murders,” and “suicides” in our daily papers is appalling. Every day when one picks up the morning newspaper and opens it at the summary and leading articles one's eye cannot fail to be attracted by the large letters on the same page stating reports as above. Such reading, to those of nervous temperament, weak-minded, and neurasthenic, is more than harmful, as it dictates to them the ways and means of acting likewise, and many, I think, have knowledge put into their minds upon which they act sooner or later.

When I was a lad in 1870–1880, or a quarter of a century ago, such reports were seldom seen or heard of. Now such statements are passed from mouth to mouth, in the motor, train, or tramcar, and appear to be the topic of the day and hour. Could not these horrors be hidden away discreetly

on another page and many details omitted altogether? Surely the medical profession ought to try to see what can be done to rectify matters, thereby helping the weak-minded and preventing atrocities being committed. It is as much the doctor's duty to prevent, when possible, sickness as it is to relieve and cure it. I write from experience, as lately patients of mine on reading the papers, and it is difficult not to let them get them, have been advanced from the subacute to acute stage of suicidal mania.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Buxton, Sept. 25th, 1908. JOHN MCOSCAR, L.R.C.P. Lond.

RUPTURE OF THE LIGAMENTUM PATELLÆ.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—On looking over the last few numbers of THE LANCET I see that in the issue dated Sept. 12th you have an annotation on two cases of rupture of the ligamentum patellæ, which is followed, in the issue of Sept. 19th, by a letter from a Leicester correspondent reporting another case. These have prompted me to send you notes of the following case which occurred on board of a mail steamer of which I was surgeon at the time.

The patient was a man aged 23 years. On June 19th, 1908, one day out from Punta Arenas, he slipped on the wet deck in a heavy seaway and fell, striking his left knee, he thought, against a steam-pipe. He said that he had a good deal of pain at the time but was able to get up and limp slowly along the deck. He did not come to me nor send for me till the next day, when he came to the dispensary and gave me the above history. His complaint was that “he could not straighten his knee.” He did not complain of pain. On examining him, I found that there was a moderate degree of swelling over the front of the knee-joint; the swelling was not tense, but was tender, though only slightly. The tubercle of the tibia was uninjured. The patella was also apparently uninjured, but was very high up. It was freely moveable and movement did not cause pain. Below it there was a gap, which was partly filled up by the swelling over the front of the joint. He was absolutely unable to extend the leg. I made a diagnosis of rupture of the ligamentum patellæ and put up the limb on a posterior splint, with downward traction on the patella and a firm bandage over the joint. On our arrival at Valparaiso on June 26th I sent him ashore to the Hospital San Juan de Dios, where he was under the care of Dr. Page. On June 30th Dr. Page operated, turning up a flap in front of the joint. The ligamentum patellæ was found to be almost completely torn across, only a few fibres remaining undivided, and these showed evidences of having been stretched. The torn ends were approximated by strong chromicised catgut sutures, and the limb was put up in the extended position on a posterior splint. Unfortunately, I am not able to give any particulars of the result of the operation, as the wound had not been dressed by the time we sailed from Valparaiso, and I have not yet heard that the patient has returned to England. If it will be of interest to your readers, however, I will be glad to communicate the result as soon as I learn what it is.

I regarded the rupture of the ligamentum patellæ as being due to the sudden, forcible contraction of the quadriceps extensor and not to a blow from the steam-pipe. This opinion was shared by Dr. Page and Dr. J. C. Atkinson, as at the operation there were no evidences of bruising of the skin.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

South Shields, Sept. 27th, 1908. A. H. MACCOLL ROBERTSON.

MEDICAL DEFENCE UNIONS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In reply to the letter of “Practitioner” published in your issue dated Sept. 26th may I be allowed to state that there is one Medical Defence Union in England, of which I am general secretary, with offices at 4, Trafalgar-square, W.C., and that I shall be pleased if he will communicate with me and I will forward him full particulars. There is also the “London and Counties Medical Protection Society,” Dr. Hugh Woods secretary, doing similar work, the office of which company is in Craven-street, Strand.

In respect to insurance offices covering similar ground I