

accidents. If pressure were exercised by the medical profession I believe that a clause insisting upon the use of these new scientific methods might still be inserted in the Bill before it becomes an Act, and it is with the object of arousing the profession to apply such pressure that I write this letter.—I am, etc.,

E. GRAHAM-LITTLE,

Joint Chairman with Viscount Cecil of the
Road Accidents Parliamentary Group.

House of Commons, April 11th.

Hypochondriasis

SIR,—Dr. T. A. Ross (April 7th, p. 643) need not be alarmed. Having survived encounters with several naval commanders, I do not intend to reach your obituary column through an infuriated army colonel (retired). So if I have such a patient I shall certainly not tell him that he has failed in his career; but I shall hope that he will be drawn to tell me that his ambitions have been frustrated, and if he does so, I think it will help him. He may even recollect that, as a small boy, his not too sympathetic parents paid him special attention when he had a bilious attack, and possibly see the persistence of his life-style in the similar situation as regards his wife and his abdominal discomfort. I agree that it is probably very difficult to help retired colonels by "radical cure"; but does this mean, as both Dr. Hutchison and Dr. Ross insist, that we must not try? Dr. Ross believes in "giving the patient the feeling that he is being taken care of" (what would the colonel's reactions be if he overheard that remark?); but, surely, what the patient needs is sympathetic understanding.

I agree with Dr. Ross that "if there were no compensation for accidents there would be no traumatic neuroses," but there are many forms of compensation: the little lady I was called to see last night, howling tremendously over a very slight graze, had found hers in the fuss she was getting from her grandfather. Is it unreasonable to suggest that she, too, finds parental understanding somewhat lacking?

As for the vicarious hypochondriacs, does not a feeling of guilt *ipso facto* connote a feeling of inferiority to those who are not guilty? Whatever the unconscious factor, however, this class certainly presents a very difficult problem, which every one of us comes up against—notably in Dr. Hutchison's apt example of the over-anxious parent. I venture to suggest that the person who is in the best position to tackle this problem—if he cares to try—is the family doctor, not only because it is easier to get these patients to his consulting room than to Harley Street or to hospital, but also because he is likely to see them in an earlier stage than Dr. Hutchison or Dr. Ross. Most mothers who are anxious about their children will respond to a tactful inquiry about their own health; and it is obvious that the mother who has only one child both lacks the confidence that comes from rearing six and is extremely likely to be suffering from some unsatisfactory and uncertain method of birth control. Let us do what we can by re-education on the conscious level; but is that sufficient?—I am, etc.,

Wandsworth, April 9th.

F. GRAY.

The Medical Witness

SIR,—I observe with interest not unmixed with sadness that your medico-legal authority, in warning the doctor to avoid technical phraseology when giving evidence in court, is unable to refrain from repeating that time-honoured monstrosity of pathological hyperbole which the learned judge translates as "a black eye."

Whenever a book on forensic medicine or an article on the subject of medical evidence is published, one looks with confidence for this venerable example of our traditional inability to avoid unnecessarily long technical terms. I confess I have always regarded the doctor who was originally responsible as a lineal descendant of Mrs. Harris: the choice perfection of the composition smells too much of the lamp. It is, however, possible that it really issued from the lips of a colleague whose desire for accuracy and whose fluency were indeed to be envied, even if his lamentable lack of a sense of proportion was to be deplored; and in all sincerity I asked in your hospitable columns nine years ago if one of your readers as inquisitive and as sceptical as I, but more enterprising, could supply chapter and verse. Now, nine years later, I would again humbly suggest to learned writers on medico-legal topics that it really is time that we were entitled to receive, during the course of instruction when we are to be flagellated for our inability to express ourselves in plain non-technical (yet unpatronizing) language, another example of what ought not to be said: one which is quite as convincing and, if I may say so, much more probable.—I am, etc.,

London, W.1, April 14th.

ADOLPHE ABRAHAMS.

The Election to the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons

SIR,—The excellent effect which followed the letter from Mr. Ivor Back which you published in April, 1928, seems to have lasted for about five years; for, with the exception of the curious incident to which he refers in his letter appearing in your issue of April 14th (p. 689), peace has reigned since. But now the canvassers show signs of stirring again. If his present campaign, as I hope it will, proves equally effective for another five years, may I suggest that you will allow Mr. Back the courtesy of your columns to issue, at the proper intervals, a quinquennial appeal to Fellows of the College to abstain from the tiresome and undignified practices which he describes so well. He would earn the gratitude of many besides myself.—I am, etc.,

London, W.1, April 13th.

LIONEL COLLEDGE.

SIR,—Mr. Ivor Back's letter has much impressed me. That a Fellow of the College should be obliged, in the interest of medical ethics, to state his case on the unholy method of wire-pulling in the election of the Council is indeed distressing to learn and sad to contemplate. It was as if one of the immortals had made his way into the very presence of the gods with a genuine grievance to be laid at the feet of Zeus, who, as was his wont, sits on his throne saying nothing, but enigmatically "nodding assent." We members of the College are, of course, mere mortals, but our existence, we are told, is sometimes felt. *Our* grievance has been issued annually for over forty years. Is it not appalling that so important a reform as representation of members on the Council of the College should not be acceded? But the gods on Olympus, who are omnipotent and superior in every respect to the "man-in-the-street" member, can exercise their autocracy. This is an age of dictators.

If examination is considered the only test of special knowledge in any given subject, the exacting requirements in anatomy, physiology, and surgery for the Fellowship speak for themselves. But, Sir, I should be interested to learn whether members of the Council are required to pass any examination in the history of medicine, ethics, or the