

Divisions shows that this must of necessity be often impossible, and in a larger number of cases an unnecessary waste of time. May I illustrate this from the Exeter Division, of which I am Chairman, and only exemplifies the condition which obtains all over the country?

The Exeter Division comprises a score or more of towns, roughly speaking, within a radius of thirty miles of Exeter. I would ask, Is it right to require the doctors at Axminster (26½ miles from Exeter, return third-class railway fare 4s. 5d.) or Seaton (28 miles from Exeter, railway fare 4s. 8d.) to come up to Exeter merely to vote for a Representative, or worse still, simply to record their votes, Yes or No, on a Referendum? They can do either of these acts for 1d. by a letter ballot paper without the inconvenience of leaving their practices for many hours and of taking a long railway journey *at their own expense*. I value Divisional meetings and discussions as much as any one, but, after all, the members of the Association are educated gentlemen, and they have a JOURNAL; memorandums of committees and other explanatory documents are published, and I think it is hard to say that they shall have no vote in their own affairs unless they can attend Divisional meetings to be schooled by the discussions into the way in which they should vote.

In conclusion, may I say that I am in absolute agreement with Dr. Gordon, and with the course which the South-Western Branch has taken, and that I shall do everything in my power to assist the movement which it has initiated. I venture to think that in future years the Association will be deeply grateful to them for obtaining modifications in the draft Charter and Ordinances which will make it useful, permanent, and fair to every member of the Association.—I am, etc.,

Exeter, Nov. 30th.

HENRY DAVY, Past-President.

SIR,—I am instructed by my Branch Council to reply to the letter signed by Drs. Macdonald, Owen, Rayner, and Clark in your issue of November 28th, and to point out that though lengthy it requires but a short answer.

Its first line contains a grave inaccuracy. This movement was not initiated by Dr. Davy. He was not one of those who requisitioned me to call the Branch Council together for the November 9th meeting; he was purposely not consulted, and he only knew of the meeting when he received his notice in the ordinary course.

The recital of the events leading up to the production of the Charter in its present form has no bearing on the controversy of the moment, and may be put aside.

Our contention throughout has been that the general body of members have had no power of expressing their opinion, since the constitution of the Association forces them to attend meetings for this purpose.

One fact dominates all else, namely, that despite the protests of a strong body of members who have consistently urged that an effective Referendum, equally available to every member, is essential to the safe government of the Association, the Representative Meeting has drawn the Charter in such a form as virtually to render such a Referendum impossible. This course has been pursued by the Representative Meeting, although it has been admittedly elected by only the some 15 per cent. of members who can attend meetings for this purpose; whereas the so-called minority who have urged their views may indeed represent anything up to the remaining 85 per cent. of the Association. No attempt to estimate its numbers by application sent to every member has been made until the South-Western Branch took a post-card referendum amongst its own members, when the so-called minority turned out to be a majority of 160 to 1. Even should they eventually be proved to be a minority, that is no reason, since they still pay their subscriptions, for depriving them of the power of voting.

I am to ask two questions:

1. Are the vast majority of country members prepared to submit to permanent disfranchisement on a Referendum?

2. Does the above recorded action on the part of the Representative Body hold out the slightest hope that the interests of the country members are in any way likely to receive better consideration than they have previously received when once the Charter has disfranchised them?

We protest against our action being termed "uncon-

stitutional," and emphatically state that it is the only "constitutional" course left open to us.

I am to point out once more that my Council has been definitely authorized to present a petition to the Privy Council, and will in any case carry this out.

We wish every member of the Association to understand most clearly that the Branch is strongly in favour of the Charter, provided the necessary modifications are introduced to permanently give every member a real vote in the management of its affairs. We are instructed that this can easily be done by application to the Privy Council, provided the issues are not fought out in a hostile spirit.—I am, etc.,

RUSSELL COOMBE,
Honorary Secretary, South-Western Branch,
British Medical Association.

Exeter, Nov. 28th.

SIR,—May I remind Drs. Macdonald, Owen, Rayner, and Clark that more than once in the past year or two, at meetings of the Council at which both they and I have been present, it has been stated that members had the right to challenge points in the Charter before the Privy Council, and that unless great care were taken members would exercise that right? Certainly no one ever suggested in the Council that such action would be unconstitutional. Had these gentlemen suggested that such action might be most inadvisable, no one could have complained, but to speak of it as unconstitutional is, in my opinion, a misuse of words.

The Referendum taken last year proved such an absolute fiasco, when less than 2,000, out of more than 20,000 members, recorded their opinion, that some of us who had the welfare of the Association at heart determined to make every effort to ensure that in future members should have greater facilities offered them for recording their opinions, and consequently we urged the taking of the Referendum by postal vote. The wisdom of this suggestion has been recently tested by a postal vote to the members of two Branches, with the following most striking results: In the one case 343 voted for such a Referendum and 2 against; in the other case, the Oxford and Reading Branch, 180 voted for and 3 against. The Representative Body vetoed this very sensible proposal, and under the circumstances the Council were obliged to accept this veto, for no private member would have had the slightest chance of persuading the Council to submit the question to another Referendum taken on the old lines.

I can only hope that other Branches will test the question by postal vote, and if the results are in any degree similar to those already recorded, the Charter could, I suppose, be amended on petition to the Privy Council. This would surely be a more businesslike procedure than starting with a new Charter and immediately petitioning for an alteration of one of its most important ordinances.

I hold in the very highest regard the four gentlemen to whom I have referred in my letter. I know how earnestly and indefatigably they have worked for the good of the Association, and I regret to differ from them. For twenty-eight years I, too, have worked to the best of my ability for the Association, and I trust before long to find myself seeing eye to eye with them in Association matters.—I am, etc.,

Oxford, Dec. 2nd.

W. COLLIER.

SIR,—In connexion with the important subject of the draft Charter and the Referendum, may I be permitted to take up a little of your valuable space to record a word of thanks to Dr. Gordon for the admirable way in which he has drawn the attention of members to the matter?

Some of us, like myself, from force of circumstances find ourselves living near the Land's End, in "the First and Last Borough of England," and are, in fact, members of certainly one of the most scattered Divisions of perhaps the most widely extended Branch of the Association.

I do not know whether for this reason we have, in Dr. Fothergill's opinion, any prior right to the cognomen of "leaves" which, I understand from Dr. Gordon's letter in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of November 28th, Dr. Fothergill graciously bestows upon 90 per cent. of the Association. But, at any rate, we have the advantage of Dr. Fothergill in being able to focus the subject from the Land's End, and we venture to differ from him as to

the importance to us members of the Referendum by letter.

Take the meetings. Once a year or so some "big gun" comes down to Exeter or Plymouth and gives an admirable discourse on the latest surgical or medical wonder. But Exeter is well over, and Plymouth just under, 100 miles from here. Our Divisional meetings have taken place here once in the past eighteen months and, I think, three times altogether in the ten years I have lived here. They are usually held at towns varying from fifteen to forty miles from here, and necessitate more time in attending them than one's patients in these days of competition are ready to allow one to give up for that purpose.

As loyal members our difficulty is to induce new men to join the Association, and I, for one, think our hands would be materially strengthened for recruiting if the Referendum by letter were a *sine qua non* of membership.

Most of us general practitioners believe very strongly in trades unionism, but if the Association is going to disfranchise its general practitioner members, or, to use Dr. Fothergill's words, "to shed its leaves," we trust that the 90 per cent., which these "leaves" represent, will transfer their financial support from the Association to some other organization more capable of safeguarding their more particular interests.—I am, etc.,

Penzance, Dec. 1st.

E. C. EDWARDS.

SIR,—I hope—though I do not for one moment believe—that the statement of Messrs. Macdonald, Owen, Rayner, and Clark will end this controversy. It takes a long time to persuade those of whom Drs. Davy, Gordon, and Walker are among the spokesmen, that their 90 per cent. of the Association stay away from "business meetings" because they take no interest in the Charter, the Ordinances, the Referendum, or any other part of the subject. They do not read the Referendum letters in the JOURNAL. They avoid the whole business like a plague. They say, in effect, "We elect a Representative to do all this for us, to understand the subject, to represent our interests; we accept his opinion and we vote accordingly." At least that is what my Division does, I am glad to say. They come to hear my report after the Annual Meeting, and that is all they want of politics for the next twelve months.

Why should the 10 per cent. of us who do take an interest in the subject be placed by a house-to-house Referendum at the mercy of the uninformed 90 per cent. who know nothing of it and care less? Dr. Flemming is absolutely right: the 90 per cent. can find time to hunt and shoot, to play golf and bridge; and if they wished, could easily find time to attend the Association business meetings.

But, Sir, the whole subject has got out of perspective. Cannot an income of £50,000 a year, already mostly earmarked, be managed without a Parliament of two Chambers, a Deliberative and an Executive Council, Representative Meetings, Referendums, Brakes on the Wheels, and God knows what else? Do the Cassandras honestly believe that ruin, absolute ruin, awaits the Association if the blessed word Referendum is given a meaning different from what Dr. Gordon intended? Is it the 10 per cent. who over-estimate the importance to the profession of the present movement? or the 90 per cent. who underestimate it?

If we cannot have a government on the model of the Law Society, with universal compulsory membership, complete internal self-government, and a subscription large enough to cover mutual benevolence, mutual defence, mutual insurance and pensions for the stranded sick and aged, let us do the best we can with our Charter. It has been talked over *ad nauseam*: let us adopt it as it is and be done with it. It has all its claws clipped by being voluntary instead of compulsory; that probably was unavoidable. Being voluntary it must attract members by its benefits, and keep them by fear of pecuniary loss. Nothing else will keep them. What punishment is loss of membership at present? A man who has to deal with contract work and public appointments reaps all the benefit of our work, and scores by standing outside the bonds with which we tie our own hands. If a man who joins the Association becomes entitled to defence to aid himself, pension in his old age, assistance for his family in his illness, insurance for them at his death; and if he forfeits those by conduct disapproved of by the Council, we shall have

something to induce men to join, and to keep them after they have joined. We are not all consultants and men of private fortune; practical points like these are the ones that appeal to the majority.

Let our leaders stop squabbling about this Referendum, and devise means to divert to the Association the annual payments now made by the profession to accident, defence, and insurance companies. The whole squabble is unworthy and ridiculous. Some of us may be pardoned if we think of the words of M. l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard, "Les plus doctes d'entre nous diffèrent uniquement des ignorants par la faculté qu'ils acquièrent de s'amuser à des erreurs."—I am, etc.,

J. F. CARRUTHERS, M.D.,

November 30th.

Guernsey, Alderney, and Jersey Representative.

SIR,—It can hardly be doubted that the Association is in a critical condition. The lack of anything approaching unanimity with regard to some of the most important provisions of the proposed Charter must cause serious anxiety to the profession as a whole. Surely it cannot be right to adopt a method of attempting to ascertain the wishes of the Association which would practically disfranchise over 75 per cent. of its members, including in large proportion the men whose habitual non-attendance at business meetings is due mainly to the faithful and quiet way in which they attend to the everyday duties of their profession and so maintain its honour.

The letter of the four officers of the Association in last week's JOURNAL is very formal and inconclusive. What evidence is there of "prolonged and careful deliberation" on the part of either the Council or the members at large since the Representative Meeting at Sheffield so entirely altered the balance of power as to secure for themselves the nomination of one-third of the Council, and to raise to the practically unattainable proportion of two-thirds of the Council the power to take a Referendum?

One of two courses seems open to the members of the Association: Either to reconsider the position before application is made for the Charter, or to form themselves into two camps, one of which will apply for the Charter whilst the other will be driven to oppose some of its essential provisions. I appeal to the Council to avert the latter calamity.—I am, etc.,

Sheffield, Dec. 1st.

R. J. PYE-SMITH.

SIR,—The official appeal *ad misericordiam* in the JOURNAL of last week evades the point at issue, but makes three assertions, namely: (1) That our action should have been taken earlier; (2) that we can easily get all we want after the Charter is granted; (3) that our course is unconstitutional. These three assertions, which are repeated in the letters of others, do not bear investigation.

1. The Referendum as it exists in the Association was not practically tested until the end of last year. During the early part of this year Dr. Davy was exerting himself to the utmost to obtain the necessary reform, and his efforts seemed likely to be crowned with success. It was not until the Representative Meeting in July that we discovered that his work had been wasted, his compromise being then thrown aside, and bad made worse by the addition of a new and most objectionable clause—the two-thirds clause so often referred to in this correspondence. The Council was then instructed to approach the Privy Council with the Charter so amended, and this amended Charter was not available to members until a few weeks ago. Its examination at the earliest possible moment was followed by the promptest possible action. There is, therefore, no reasonable ground of complaint as to the timeliness of the present movement. Some have complained of our raising our differences before the Privy Council. There is now no other place or possibility of raising them.

2. We are told that there will be no difficulty in getting what we want, once the Charter is granted. That is a quite unjustifiable statement. In the first place, once the Charter is in force, nothing can be done without the sanction of the Representative Body. As I have pointed out, this body is unrepresentative, since it is only elected by some 15 per cent. of the Association. Its temper regarding this matter was plainly shown last July, and one at least of its leaders has indicated his irreconcilable attitude. Moreover, this body will then have no longer