

only impracticable because the will is wanting, and because it is so much more convenient to avoid appeal to the profession.

The objection, plainly stated by the president of the meeting held at the College of Physicians, as reported, was, that "some of the most delicate questions which could come before any public body would come before the council, and it was felt that this society should be guided by those whose years had tempered their zeal with discretion; and he did not think that an elective council would carry out with discretion such objects as their society would have in view." One is tempted to ask what special security we have that the council as self-constituted will duly temper zeal with discretion. Some of its members would hardly be chosen for their zeal in the cause; others are not conspicuous for discretion. Upon the whole, perhaps, in a movement of this kind, of the two qualities zeal is more necessary than discretion. Discretion is apt to paralyse zeal altogether. Whilst no great cause has ever been won by discretion alone, zeal, even largely leavened by what limp, timid people would call indiscretion, has often triumphed. And what is to be said of the "discretion" of the antivivisection propagandists? They owe their temporary success to zeal alone. Discretion, they know, is not a motive power. Now, although no one interested in the new Association will trust to zeal without discretion, it may be safely assumed that, truly representative councillors acting under a sense of responsibility to their constituents, to their own characters, and to the council of which they would form part, would bring more zeal and not less discretion to the work than would a self-elected Council. And how will the Council guard against irregular action, guided by more or less zeal and discretion, outside their own body? Most assuredly, amongst the mass of the profession there will be a desire to act in this matter. If not represented, they will act independently; perhaps not with that wisdom which a well-considered organisation inspires. They cannot be expected to stand by and leave all action to an irresponsible body which distrusts them. They owe no allegiance to that body. Where there is no legitimate authority there is no loyalty. Unfortunately all these reflections come rather late. No open or general meeting has been summoned to aid in the formation of the society. The scheme has been concocted in close conclave, so great has been the terror of zeal.

So great has been their terror, and so far-seeing their discretion, that the council have debarred even themselves from the power of revising their own scheme. The last resolution, most extraordinary of all, declares "That the present rules, defining the objects and constitution of the Association, shall not be altered except by the written consent of three-fourths of the entire council, after consideration at a meeting called for the specified object, on a fortnight's notice, and with the further written sanction of the two Presidents." Thus one President has it in his power, in the improbable event of the written consent of three-fourths of the Council being obtained in writing, to bar all revision of this precious scheme!

Who is the Vulcan—what hammer did he use—and who is the Jupiter who brought forth this Minerva? Or is this absolutely wise and perfect and unimpeachable constitution the offspring of zeal and discretion?

But this last resolution betrays a lack of confidence on the part of its framers. They evidently tremble lest the sacrilegious hand of the reformer should touch it. By an ingenious anticipation of the clóture, they bar the probability of discussing their work with a view to amendment. All that is left for us to do is to shut our eyes and open our purses.

In sober seriousness, is the scheme thus concocted and thus carried, one that is worthy to be placed before a just and intelligent profession? Is it the one best calculated to achieve the great object professed of advancing Medicine by Research for the benefit of humanity?—I am, etc.,

ROBERT BARNES.

15, Harley Street, 3rd April, 1882.

SIR,—It is clear that the influence of the Association for the Advancement of Medicine by Research on the progress of medical knowledge must, to some extent, depend on the width of the basis on which the Association is founded, and that its strength must largely depend on the active support of the entire medical profession in the United Kingdom. As the successful formation of such an Association would have been impossible if the task had not been taken in hand and carried through by the eminent men under whose auspices it has appeared, I conceive that there can be no better way of showing our gratitude to them than by discussing any suggestions that deserve to be entertained, if we are still further to consider how the usefulness of the Association may be extended.

When I first heard that there was to be a meeting connected with the proposed Association, I expressed privately to one of its active pro-

moters my conviction that its power for good would be greatly increased if arrangements could be made to associate the whole profession of these countries, as directly as it is possible to do it, with the furtherance of the objects of the movement. Medical men in towns, as well as in remote country districts, who have neither time nor opportunity for engaging in research, would yet esteem it a privilege to assist such an Association, and their co-operation will be all the more active if we make them, at least to some extent, responsible for its management.

I happened to be travelling in Scotland at the time when the Bill relating to the practice of vivisection was before Parliament, the subject being at the time freely discussed in the newspapers and in the medical journals, and I was struck by the interest taken in it by medical friends whom I met in country districts. One gentleman, I remember, who had no personal interest in the matter, had simply, from a sense of duty, taken pains to submit to the country members his views regarding the proposed legislation.

The direct representation, in due proportion, of such men on the Council of the Association, would not, I am confident, in any important way, modify its composition, or render more difficult the execution of the most delicate of its duties. The men whose nomination they would feel honoured in ratifying would of necessity be those whose wide-spread reputation was the result of age and experience, as well as of genius and talent, and I am sure that the overwhelming majority of the profession in this country would be loyal to leaders like those who are now promoting the Association.

I believe these distinguished men may feel satisfied, that if some means were devised by which the great body of the medical profession should feel themselves to some extent responsible, through their representatives, for the furtherance of the objects of the Association, not only would its management remain practically in the hands of those to whom we are all grateful for having given up so much of their time to organising the movement, but the executive would have a constituency as trusting as it would be numerous and powerful.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

G. THIN, M.D.

April 3rd, 1881.

SIR,—The formation of a society to resist the opponents of scientific research will be most welcome to the members of the British Medical Association. Sir James Paget well said, at the meeting on Tuesday last week, that "the public needed instruction on a large number of scientific subjects." The public very often applies for that instruction to its family doctor, and many of us are called on, in the course of our daily practice, to defend the workers in medical science against the attacks of ignorant, but persistent, opponents. We have willingly done our best in defence of scientific research. We shall, in future, do so more effectually, with the help of a society so powerfully organised. The Presidents of the Society are to have the power of nominating twelve "representative" members. I trust it will not be asking too much, to express a hope that they will appoint some leading general practitioner to represent a body, who will be numerous and willing workers.—Very faithfully yours,

FRED. B. HALLOWES, President S. E. Branch,  
British Medical Association.

#### SUPERINTENDENTS OF IMBECILE ASYLUMS.

SIR,—It is only to-day that my attention has been directed to some strictures in your issue of 25th March on remarks made by me at the annual meeting of the Larbert Asylum for Idiots, some weeks ago.

In expressing approval of the general principle of having a doctor to do doctor's work, and a schoolmaster to do schoolmaster's work, I did not necessarily express an approval of a doctor living far from his patients, which seems the gravamen of the charge against the directors of the Larbert Institution for the change they have made. It is quite true that imbeciles are often of feeble health, but I fail to see that this necessitates the actual residence of a doctor among them. It is also quite true, as Mr. Bruce points out, that many of their diseases are best treated by attention to diet, medicine, and regimen, but I have yet to learn that this cannot be done, as in private practice, by a doctor giving the orders, without standing or sitting by to see them carried out. There seems to be a little soreness in some of the letters about the termination of Dr. Ireland's connection with the asylum. With that I have nothing to do; it was effected before I even heard of it. The contrast I attempted to draw was between an asylum for the insane, the nature of the diseases of the inmates of which requires a doctor to be always at hand, and an asylum for idiots, in which I thought, and still maintain, no such necessity exists.

Dr. Fletcher Beach seems to think the case of epileptics forms an exception. He can only refer to the management during convulsions,