

or assistant medical officers—I think it will require a stronger and more just agitation than that now going on in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* to effect any important alteration. I greatly doubt if the majority of the assistant medical officers agree with the views and statements of your few dissatisfied correspondents, and I would suggest that before framing the Committee to which you have given your support you should, by a circular letter or otherwise, endeavour to ascertain the opinion of assistant medical officers on the subject, and ask for suggestions from them. At present little is known, except from the (to my mind) groundless complaints of your few correspondents, as to what change is required, and to discuss such a question on this basis would be simply waste of time.—I am, etc.,

Shrewsbury, June 1st.

ARTHUR STRANGE, M.D.

SIR,—Four months of correspondence in the columns of the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* can but represent a tithe of the actual feeling in our service. Many are unwilling to write even under the shelter of anonymity, and many, as in every community, passively acquiesce in a destiny because it seems hopeless. My suggestion arose from two grounds: first, your well-known willingness to advocate reforms if need be, and secondly, to prevent a recurrence of failure which our first attempt met with when brought before that well-known trade union, the Medico-Psychological Association, a few years ago. To Drs. Strahan, Mercier, Philipps, and others we owe thanks for initiating the present movement.

I see that the subject is open for discussion in the Psychology Section at Bristol. Could a preliminary meeting, however, be held in London, something might be done in preparing and sending a printed circular to all our asylum medical officers, to gain a consensus of opinion prior to sending a deputation to the Parliamentary Bills Committee and General Council of the British Medical Association. I should be amongst those willing to work for such an end.—I am, etc.,

June 2nd.

HOPEFUL.

SIR,—Many asylum officials will thank you for lending your support to the proposal to form a committee to discuss the bearings of this question (see *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL*, May 26th, p. 1156). Briefly, your correspondents affirm that the position of the asylum medical superintendent is one of uncontrolled despotism with its attendant evils. Is this so? If so, the sooner it is mended or ended the better. In the departments of the State large powers have to be entrusted to individuals; the love of influence and control, so extensive in human nature, prompts to intolerance and needs to be curbed.

"Hopeful" says: "The prevailing asylum spirit is one which makes for the maximum comfort, exaltation, and glorification of the superintendent." Is not this language a little immoderate? Is it calculated to strengthen the cause which "Hopeful" and I venture to say many asylum medical superintendents have at heart?

Individuals cannot hope to advance their position or to raise themselves in character by dwelling on the defects of others; rather let them reflect that by force of persuasion, or intellectual ascendancy, anyone may have the consciousness of power without the authority of office. Such power, may, in asylum life or any other, be brought to bear on any person (whatever his position), guilty of a breach of any of the many obligations society imposes on all for the good of all. Committees of management nowadays are keen and vigilant; they constitute a court of appeal, and may be freely approached by all their officials—medical or lay.—I am, etc.,

FRANCIS H. WALMSLEY, M.D.,

May 26th. Medical Superintendent, Metropolitan Asylum, Darenth.

#### DEFECTIVE EYESIGHT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

SIR,—In reply to inquiries elicited by your note on this subject in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* of May 26th, p. 1,147, may I state that the wall-chart headed "Eyesight and School Work," adopted by the Birmingham School Board, is published by the Midland Educational Company, Birmingham, and that the directions to teachers for the

physical examination of school children, including a test for the detection of defective sight, issued by the Anthropometric Committee of the British Association, may be obtained by applying to the Honorary Secretary of this Committee, Professor Windle, Mason College, Birmingham.—I am, etc.,

Birmingham, May 28th.

PRIESTLEY SMITH.

#### THE FOREST GATE SCHOOLS SCANDAL.

SIR,—Your articles of late *re* barrack life of pauper children, together with Miss Davenport Hill's letter recently published in the *Daily Chronicle*, are not only too true, but do not go far enough into the question, and convey but a poor idea even to the initiated or the managers of these large schools, who either don't know or won't know. Now I venture to say when I tell the managers of the Forest Gate Schools, through your kind favour, that they have about 12,000 wet beds, independent of soiled beds, year after year, they will exclaim, "Never heard of such a thing."

Well, the following is taken from a rough book—not in my handwriting, but that of another officer. After the fire of January 1st, 1890, many children were taken out of the schools by their parents, and we had not 600 for the years 1890-91. I have not the exact number in the boys' department—say 270; this, I believe, is above the number. Here is a return showing but one of the many difficulties of child life in these large institutions:

	1890.					1891.		
	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March
No. of beds wetted ...	436	437	541	589	594	492	333	288
" beds soiled ...	48	14	24	33	61	49	34	36
" boys wetted beds	44	52	43	55	52	57	33	26

In round numbers this would give 5,000 wet beds for twelve months in the boys' department—is not this most astonishing and appalling? Now this could not happen in cottage homes, or the boarding-out system. All the children on admission to the schools are placed under our care. Mrs. Elliott, myself and one maid, in a detached block of buildings, and the number of children with us vary from 40 to 15. These children remain in our block (or cottage home, and if I may say so to those who know the department) for fourteen days, when they pass to the main block; we are then ready to receive others, and I say in very emphatic terms that the above table is a great disgrace, and ought not to be; not one in a hundred of the children on admission wet the bed—boys, girls, or infants; but if so it is invariably wetted by a re-admission. My reason for selecting the above table at that particular date is to show that by the same individual attention to the children in the main block better results may be obtained, if not nearly as good as are obtained in our own department—receiving wards. By looking at the table before you, February and March, 1891, shows a marked decrease. Those two months I was doing duty temporarily on the boys' side, and by March 3rd I had reduced this matter to a cipher; one boy only wetted the bed; 5 boys on the 5th, and 5 boys on the 6th. There is not another record like this in the school; the children require more individual attention, you have a very large staff, indeed more than the average of cottage homes. Then there is the great sickness; quite forty on the average are in the sick wards, and here again not one in a hundred passes from us to these sick wards. I could fill volumes of matter in reference to the great disadvantages of pauper children.

The industrial training is worse than useless, and it is the cause of unfitting many for their life after leaving school. I can speak upon this matter with some authority.—I am, etc.,

Wandsworth Road, S.W., June 4th.

HENRY ELLIOTT.

#### THE LATE DR. CHARLES CLAY, OF MANCHESTER.

SIR,—The representatives of this distinguished surgeon have placed at my disposal a mass of material for the preparation of a suitable memorial of him, including an autobiographical sketch of much interest. Unfortunately the material is deficient in that period of his life which is of greatest interest, between 1842 and 1850. A still greater misfortune is that the great age to which Dr. Clay lived has left few who can tell much about him at that time. My own efforts by private inquiry have failed so far, and I am therefore compelled to trespass on your courtesy for permission to

ask through your widely-read columns that anyone who may be in possession of documents or recollections of Charles Clay would be good enough to put me in possession of them.—I am, etc.,

Birmingham, May 29th.

LAWSON TAIT.

#### SIR F. SEYMOUR HADEN.

SIR,—For the sake of accuracy, allow me to state that in 1862, when the accompanying report was written, I had been for some years what is called—and to my mind absurdly called—a pure surgeon, and that at no time was I, in the sense I think you intend, the possessor of “an important medical practice in the West End of London.”—I am, etc.,

Alresford, Hants, June 3rd.

F. SEYMOUR HADEN.

\* \* The report enclosed is Mr. Seymour Haden's very able and still valuable report on the surgical instruments shown at the great Exhibition of 1862.

#### CHEAP DOCTORS: THEIR DEFENCE.

SIR,—Your comments on “Experiences of the Provident Dispensary System” and a letter headed “The Cheap Doctor: A Word in Defence,” which appear in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* of May 19th, afford material for serious reflection. I am not an advocate of “cheap physicking;” still we have these facts staring us in the face: Overcrowding of the profession, small fees per visit paid by provident dispensaries, and the inability of the poorer class to pay, for any length of time, the smallest fee usually asked for for each visit or consultation. The poor do not particularly value the services of those members of our profession who charge very small fees, but consult them, compelled by their poverty. This should not be. We have provident dispensaries and the out-patient departments of hospitals in competition with the profession. How can such competition be equitably dealt with? Only by honest, conscientious, and reliable members of our profession establishing themselves in poor neighbourhoods, charging small fees (cash payments), and taking the same care of their patients as if they were able to pay much higher fees. I know that I am treading on dangerous ground. I would not accept a small fee myself, but still I cannot help feeling that the only way of meeting successfully the competition of the provident dispensaries and hospital out-patient departments is for good men in the profession to charge small fees to poor people and deal honestly by them.—I am, etc.,

Cardiff, May 19th.

A. SHEEN, M.D.

#### THE LEAVESDEN SCHOOLS.

SIR,—Referring to the paragraphs appearing in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* of April 28th and May 5th, with reference to the late outbreak of diphtheria at the St. Pancras Schools at Leavesden, and the report thereon, prepared at the request of the guardians, by Dr. J. F. J. Sykes, the Medical Officer of Health of St. Pancras, I am desired to intimate that the comments upon the attitude of the guardians in relation to the precautions necessary to preserve the health of the children may lead to a mistaken judgment.

The guardians wish to correct a possible inference, that they have not only crowded the schools regardless of consequences, but have persistently refused to give attention to their medical officer's advice on that point.

The guardians have always well recognised the abilities and services of Dr. Adams Clarke, the medical officer of the schools. It is the custom for him to attend every meeting of the Schools Visiting Committee, and he, on his part, must be willing to admit that the Committee have taken the keenest interest in his reports and suggestion, to which they have constantly attached paramount importance; and the Committee have in many instances taken the initiative in steps for the better classification of the children and in improved arrangements for the treatment of the sick; and Dr. Clarke is invariably consulted on all matters in which is responsibilities are concerned.

The guardians regret very much that the observations made upon this unprecedented visitation by diphtheria at their schools, in your much-quoted *JOURNAL*, for the guidance of the medical profession, might also convey a mislead-

ing impression as to the management and general condition of the schools. It is true that during a few weeks last winter the total number of children exceeded the certificate (678), but it was quite an exceptional occurrence, and at that time there was no available accommodation at other schools.

In dealing with the large number of children then chargeable, choice therefore lay only between the contracted and otherwise imperfect accommodation for children at the workhouse of the parish (the reconstruction of which is still incomplete) and the schools at Leavesden, situated in the open country, with facilities for isolation. It should also not be forgotten that at the time diphtheria appeared at the schools it was epidemic in the metropolis.

The cause of the outbreak at the Leavesden Schools could not be traced, even by experts, with absolute certainty. In the report by Dr. Sykes, he pointed with reserve to various possible sources of infection, but apparently emphasised his opinion that in one or two sections of the school the ventilation had become curtailed by the additional means of heating the dormitories and class rooms.

The better heating of those rooms had been adopted upon suggestions made to the guardians for the benefit of the children of low vitality, and with beneficial results to children of that class. This points to one of the oft-recurring puzzles of ventilation, so difficult to solve where the health conditions of the occupants of the rooms are so varied. Several valuable suggestions, arising out of the report by Dr. Sykes, have since been promptly adopted.

The guardians have many reasons to be proud of their splendid establishment at Leavesden, as the annual reports upon the results of their management will show.

I enclose copies of the last three years' reports, containing, *inter alia*, tabular statements by which it will be seen that with a general population of upwards of 600 children, the average number of deaths has been less than 6 per annum, and in nearly every instance the cause of death has been unconnected with the influence of the school.—I am, etc.,

ALFRED A. MILLWARD,  
Clerk to the Guardians.

Vestry Hall, Pancras Road, N.W.,  
May 28th.

\* \* We publish this letter with some satisfaction because we regard it as definite evidence that the guardians of St. Pancras appreciate the fact that the overcrowding of their schools is inconsistent with good management. The question is, however, whether there has been overcrowding of the Leavesden schools. The letter of the guardians states that “It is true that during a few weeks last winter the total number of children exceeded the certificate (678), but it was quite an exceptional occurrence, and at that time there was no available accommodation at other schools.” Our contention is therefore admitted, and we refer to our previous statement: “The class rooms exhibited difficulties of change of air only in a less degree than the dormitories, one room being, moreover, so packed with boys that Dr. Sykes had trouble in getting at the inmates to examine their throats.” The statement that “the Committee have taken the keenest interest in his (Dr. Adams Clarke's) suggestions” is not, we presume, to be taken as implying that Dr. Adams Clarke approved the condition of overcrowding, and has not called the attention of the Committee to it. We cannot accept the plea that the absence of available accommodation at other schools is justification for overcrowding the Leavesden schools. If the school accommodation of the guardians is insufficient, more should be provided. The remedy is in their own hands.

PHARMACOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND THE SALTERS' COMPANY.—In connection with the recent foundation of a Research Fellowship in Chemical Pharmacology by the Court of the Salters' Company, the Research Committee of the Pharmaceutical Society announces that the selection of the Salters' Company Research Fellow will take place on July 3rd next. Written applications for the Fellowship must be received by the Director of the Research Laboratory, 17, Bloomsbury Square, before June 30th.

MR. VICTOR HORSLEY, the President, and Dr. Bateman, one of the Honorary Secretaries, of the Medical Defence Union, intend to address members residing in South Wales and Monmouthshire at Cardiff on June 28th.