

CORRESPONDENCE.

STATE VACCINATION BY ALL REGISTERED PRACTITIONERS.

SIR,—I am requested to forward you a copy of the enclosed memorial to the President of the Local Government Board, in the hope that any other Medical Societies who agree with it will forward similar ones.—I am, etc.,

December 22nd. JAMES PEACOCK, Honorary Secretary, Leicester Medical Union.

MEMORIAL.
To the Right Honourable Walter Long, M.P., President of the Local Government Board, this Memorial of Medical Practitioners constituting the Leicester Medical Union respectfully sheweth:

That, in the opinion of your Memorialists, it would conduce to the practice of vaccination in this country if Parliament were to enact that every duly qualified medical practitioner shall be put on the same footing in regard to the practice of vaccination as that on which public vaccinators now are.

It is well known to your memorialists that many adult persons who refuse to visit the public vaccinator would have their children vaccinated, and would be themselves revaccinated, if this could be done, free of cost to themselves, by their regular medical attendant.

Signed for the Leicester Medical Union.

C. F. BRYAN, President.
JAMES PEACOCK, Hon. Secretary.

335, Humberstone Road, Leicester, Dec. 20th, 1902.

SMALL-POX AND VACCINATION.

SIR,—I have read both with pleasure and interest the account of the first meeting of the Imperial Vaccination League, and your editorial thereon in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of December 20th, 1902. Speaking as a medical officer of health, and having regard to the facts that the present Act expires next year and that small-pox has within the past few years been fairly well distributed throughout the country, I have no hesitation in saying that from a public health point of view this is much the most serious question confronting authorities at the present time. In my last annual report I made bold to say:

I have no wish to open up a great controversy (though I hold very decided views on the subject), but I am very strongly of opinion that if the Government of this country continue to deal with the question of vaccination as they have been doing, it is their bounden duty to see that every authority in the country has a proper small-pox hospital, and those authorities which are wise in time will from an economic point of view regard this an indispensable adjunct to the machinery which they may place at the disposal of their sanitary officials.

I stated this as an alternative, though from my own experience I can corroborate to the full what Dr. McVail said, that sanitary authorities are unable to procure the necessary sites for hospitals.

As to the point specially referred to by Sir Michael Foster, the transferring the administration of the Vaccination Act from the Poor-law guardians to some other authority, I agree with him that the present position of affairs is nothing less than absolutely absurd. In fact, were it not for the tragedy that is almost certain sooner or later to follow, the whole affair is comical to a degree. A great many of these Boards are antivaccinationist, and consequently are diametrically opposed to the very Act they are supposed to administer. It really does not matter very much what views the vaccination officer, generally the registrar, may hold. He for the most part is between the devil and the deep sea, and finds that the dictum "No man can serve two masters" is as true to-day as when it was first written. In my own district I have never known, in the last ten years at least, such a thing as a prosecution.

I am glad to see that the Organizing Committee of the League have formed a subcommittee of experts to study certain questions. Personally, I should answer Nos. 1 and 2 in the affirmative, but it is on No. 3 that I wish now to say a few words. To my mind there can be no question (a) that the State should be in a position to supply lymph for all vaccinations; and (b) that the preparation and sale of lymph by private persons should be under State control; and I have no doubt upon this point that these conclusions are quite in keeping with those formed by the medical inspectors of the Local Government Board. This is so absolutely the duty of the State, and so essential to the proper carrying out of any Vaccination Act, that one wonders that it should require further consideration. The fact is the question is purely one of expense—more shame to those who administer. Every year we vote millions for the destruction of human life, then why should we be niggardly in this, which aims at its preservation?

If the preventive power of vaccination against small-pox has been proved, as I submit it has, over and over again, then it behoves the Government of the day to see that all

may be brought to enjoy such protection, and that the lymph supplied is, as far as human knowledge can go, absolutely pure, and, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. At the present time, I am not absolutely satisfied that this is so—so far as the supply to private practitioners is concerned—and I have reasons for saying so which I would be glad to communicate to the proper parties.—I am, etc.,

December 23rd, 1902.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

THE "CONSCIENCE CLAUSE" OF THE VACCINATION ACT, 1898.

SIR,—The question of retaining, mending, or ending the above clause will shortly have to be settled. There are many medical men in favour of, and seriously advocating, the last alternative. They argue (1) that a "conscience clause" is altogether wrong in principle; that it is an anomaly without precedent, and opposed to the spirit of all other compulsory legislation; and that if vaccination is to be compulsory, it should be compulsory for all. (2) That the "conscience clause" is greatly abused, and that its administration is becoming a farce. (3) That it has not succeeded, in the sense of securing more vaccination. It is stated that the number of exemption certificates obtained is increasing, whilst any apparent increase in the number of vaccinations performed can be accounted for by other causes, for example, domiciliary visitation.

On the other hand, there are undoubtedly many who favour the retention of this clause. They recognize the difficulty of withdrawing a concession of this kind, once it has been granted, unless it can be shown to have been a positive failure. They realize that to close the loophole afforded by the clause to those who honestly object to vaccination would certainly arouse very violent opposition, and would act as a potent stimulant to the whole antivaccination movement.

Although there is little likelihood that the present or any future Government will ever abolish the conscience clause until very much stronger grounds exist for such a step, it seems desirable to call to mind that the Royal Commission on Vaccination, the most authoritative tribunal to which we can refer, was, after seven years' deliberations, emphatically in favour of such a loophole as the conscience clause was intended to afford. The enactment of this clause was indeed one of the important practical results of all its labours. As the conclusions of the Royal Commissioners are to a large extent buried (and possibly forgotten) in its own voluminous reports, I may be pardoned for quoting from them here.

We think that ardent advocates of vaccination have not always borne in mind the practical consequences of the attempt to enforce the law in such cases (of conscientious objection). They have maintained that no one has a right to set up his judgement against that of the community embodied in the statute law, and to refuse in consequence to render that law his obedience; they have, therefore, opposed any relaxations of the laws relating to vaccination, assuming that, because in particular instances it might lead to children remaining unvaccinated who would otherwise have been vaccinated, it must necessarily result in a diminished number of vaccinations. We believe that this assumption is not well founded..... We think these ardent advocates have not always been the wisest friends of vaccination, and that there would have been more vaccinated persons if the law had been enforced with more discretion (Final Report, Section 523).

Too blind a confidence is sometimes reposed in the power of an Act of Parliament. It is thought that if the law be only sufficiently stringent and inflexibly enforced the desired end is sure to be attained. There is, however, abundant experience to the contrary. When that which the law enjoins runs counter to the conviction or prejudices of many members of the community, it is not easy to secure obedience to it; and when it imposes a duty on parents the performance of which they honestly, however erroneously, regard as seriously prejudicial to their children, the very attempt to compel obedience may defeat the object of the legislation. (Final Report, Section 527.)

It cannot be denied that the Conscience Clause has been abused; but the abuse has not been confined to those applying for exemptions. That there is room for amendment in the wording of the clause will probably be admitted by all, and, if any modification is made, it is sincerely to be hoped that magisterial duty in the matter of granting exemptions will be more clearly defined.—I am, etc.,

Leicester, Dec. 27th, 1902.

C. KILLICK MILLARD.

OYSTERS AND SEWAGE DISPOSAL.

SIR,—The deplorable epidemic of typhoid at Winchester, etc., generally credited with taking origin by the consumption of oysters from the Emsworth beds—beds which all accounts describe as sewage-washed—opens out a very wide field for consideration and action by sanitarians. Assuming the correctness of the source of infection and the means by which infection was conveyed to the sufferers, sanitarians and the Legislature are at once brought face to face with momentous questions: (1) The protection of a food supply and the pre-