

at fixed rates to attend their subscribers. But the working of these societies is very lax, and their conduct is generally entrusted to a body of men who have no aim on earth beyond making them pay. Therefore, they argue that the cheaper the terms upon which they can secure the services of medical officers, the better it is for the society, and this leads to many irregularities for which they are practically irresponsible, as it may safely be assumed that the majority of their subscribers are wholly ignorant of the laws relating to the illegal practice of medicine and false assumption of titles. I know of one instance occurring within the last two months, in a case where I was concerned, in which such a society retained the services of a wholly unqualified medical practitioner, the unqualified assistant of one of their medical officers. The principal had two practices, eighteen miles apart—one attended to by himself, and the other by his unqualified assistant. The society put the names of both on their books and cards as "doctors" and "medical officers" of the districts in which they resided!

I trust, however, that this scheme—which I believe to have been set on foot from the best and purest of motives—may have this (perhaps unexpected) result: that it will induce the more eminent members of the medical profession to take up and settle once and for all the question of unqualified assistants, and that they will satisfy themselves by independent inquiry that the establishment of provident dispensaries as voluntary and irresponsible institutions is contrary to policy, contrary to law, opposed to the dignity of members of the medical profession, and prejudicial instead of beneficial to the poorer classes of suffering humanity, whose ills it is their duty to cure or alleviate.

J. H. writes: I have been somewhat surprised that there has not been a storm raised by general practitioners all over London against the scheme of universal establishment of provident dispensaries. Is it that the scheme seems so unreasonable and so cut-throat to the bulk of the profession that they cannot believe that it is really intended in seriousness to carry it out? Or is it that there is no room in the JOURNAL for discussing a question dealing with such a worldly matter as the means of making and continuing to make a living for a large number of medical men, the majority of whom are just as capable practitioners and as well qualified as the select few who, through having money and influence, have never been compelled to make a living among the working classes, and who have had time and means to wait till their influential friends were able to secure them a hospital appointment—after which they dub themselves physician or surgeon, as the case may be, and ever after think they have a right to look down on what they style the "general practitioner?"

Not content with seeing patients while still under the care of one of these poor general practitioners—and unknown to him, until he afterwards sees a prescription or hears some foolish statement which the patient assures him has been said by the physician (physicians are the greatest offenders)—it has now come to this, that a system of infinitesimal fees is to be forced on us, to be paid not in health only as a system of insurance, and after a preliminary medical examination as to the individual's comparative good health, but he may join when actually ill, and children—who require more attendance than adults—are to be accepted at a reduction "for quantity," like the famous love-spells, and we are told by Mr. Holmes that we should not enter into competition with this system, but should join it, if we do not wish to be swamped by it. And to-day you say great harm is done by sham dispensaries; but if harm is done by sham dispensaries, where the fees are greater, at any rate, than clubs pay, is it not reasonable that much more harm will be done by this universal providing of medical attendance? No wage limit can ever prevent abuse.

How many of the medical men of the district will be appointed? Or will patients be able to choose any medical man within a certain radius who is willing to attend these cases? If only a few men are appointed, the hardship will be very great to others, especially those juniors who are only working up a practice, and hope through the working classes to gradually get to a better and more remunerative class. Why cannot the hospitals close their out-patient departments altogether, except to urgent cases, or to those specially recommended by outside medical men? People who cannot pay the usual small fees have the parish medical men to attend to them.

The working classes are so degraded by charity that they have lost all self pride, and think there is no shame in accepting charity in the form of medical advice and medicine, but they would feel insulted if offered many of the other necessities of life.

MR. LEONARD B. DIPLOCK writes: You published a letter from Dr. R. H. S. Carpenter, in the JOURNAL of December 17th, in which he states that because I have only been qualified three years my "observations and estimation of the different modes of practice existing in the profession are based upon a far too limited experience to entitle them to any very weighty consideration," but I think that six months' experience in working for a sick assurance society would convince any practitioner of the advantage of such societies both to himself and the working classes, as stated in my letter in the JOURNAL of December 10th.

I have not been able to find out whether Dr. Carpenter, in his many years of practice, has had any practical experience in the working of sick assurance societies or provident dispensaries, or whether his opposition to such societies is based on imagination or from what he has heard from other practitioners, but I feel he has not had practical experience, or he would not be so much against them.

With regard to what Dr. Carpenter states in his letter about members waiting until they are ill before they apply for medical help, I think the Medical Attendance Organisation Committee have endeavoured to meet this by charging an increased contribution; but if Dr. Carpenter will refer to my letter of December 10th, he will see that I consider they have fixed their rate of contribution too low.

I think that Dr. Carpenter, when he speaks about cheap doctoring, seems to forget that dispensaries are not for patients who can pay a reasonable fee, but for those whose wages are so small that if you attend them their accounts appear in your ledger, in nine cases out of ten, as a bad debt.

COMMUNICATIONS, LETTERS, etc., have been received from:

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### BOOKS, ETC., RECEIVED.

- Braithwaite's Retrospect of Medicine. Vol. xcvi. July to December, 1887. London: Simpkin and Co.
- Norard of the Dogger. By E. J. Mather. London: James Nisbet and Co.
- Operative Surgery on the Cadaver. By Jasper Jewett Garmany. New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1887.
- Functional Nervous Diseases. By George T. Stevens, M.D., Ph.D. New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1887.
- Mechanics and Experimental Science. By E. Aveling, D.Sc. London: Chapman and Co. 1888.
- A Treatise on the Diseases of the Dog, being a Manual of Canine Pathology. By John Henry Steel, M.R.C.V.S., A.V.D. London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1888.

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