

# British Medical Journal

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.



*Including an Epitome of Current Medical Literature.*  
**WITH SUPPLEMENT.**

No. 8450.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1927.

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**TYPES OF THE ROMAN MATRON; WHOSE INFLUENCE CONTRIBUTED TO THE SOCIAL GREATNESS OF THE ANCIENT LATIN WORLD.**—While legally under the tutelage of her nearest male relative and incapable of owning property, the matron of early Rome yet enjoyed considerable freedom. She carried on her occupations in the atrium and had easy communication with the outside world; she was addressed by the honourable title of *domina*. She brought up the children, superintended the work of the household, and prepared the wool for weaving. Not until late Republican and early Empire times was she permitted an interest in the world of intellect and politics. When,



however, the matron of the early ideal was allowed to widen her outlook, women like Cornelia, Octavia, Antonia, the elder Agrippina (the two last here depicted on right and left respectively), and many others, arose. During the Republic there was some weakening of the family life, until men changed their wives every few years to secure a fortune or a political alliance. The increase of wealth and the growth of Asiatic-Hellenic luxury appear to have played a large part in bringing about the moral degeneracy of Rome in the first three centuries of Empire. The devotion of the women to imported Eastern cults was a sinister feature from the time of their appearance during the Republic; but even during the worst social periods there were numberless exceptions to the lowered standard among women, and their effective pioneer work in the development of human society gave the term matron the honoured significance it has enjoyed ever since.

Date: From earliest Roman times. The portraits (Antonia, born 36 B.C., Agrippina the Elder, born before 12 B.C.)



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briefly in a note accompanying the return. Where property is concerned, the amount of the income to be included is correctly the proportion of the annual value, according to the period for which the property has been owned, in the year for which the return is made.

#### Information as to Capital.

"L. C." inquires whether the income tax authorities are entitled to information as to the source of the capital which he put into the purchase of a practice.

\* \* The authorities are concerned with the proper assessment of "L. C.'s" income either for the present or any previous year as far back as April 5th, 1920, and we cannot see any grounds on which they could claim that the source of his capital was relevant to his assessment. If not relevant they have no right to a reply, and if the inquiry is put and pressed "L. C." might write again after ascertaining the grounds for the inquiry.

#### Cash Receipts Basis.

"KLAXON" has taken over a practice as from October, 1926, and has been informed by the local authorities that for the half-year to April, 1927, he will have to pay on one-half of his predecessor's assessment and that he will be assessed in future on the basis of his book debts.

\* \* As regards the first point, the position is that he is liable to be assessed according to his predecessor's past average profits—that is, on one-half of the gross assessment so calculated, less all the personal allowances which may be due to him. If, however, "Klaxon" can show that the earnings of the practice fell short from some specific cause since or by reason of his succession, then he will be entitled to have the assessment for the six months to April, 1927, adjusted to the amount of his earnings. If such an adjustment is probably due, no doubt he can arrange with the inspector of taxes for the assessment to remain in abeyance until after March. It is assumed that "Klaxon" is not collecting his predecessor's accounts and bringing them into his own income tax returns, in which case the cash receipts would not reflect the full gross earnings of the practice and would properly be refused; but he should claim a reasonable allowance for outstanding debts likely to be wholly or partially irrecoverable.

#### Motor Car Transactions.

"E. J. B." bought an "R" car in 1921 for £273 and sold it in 1923 for £10, buying an "F" car for £160. He sold that car in 1926 for £15, buying an "M-O" car for £362.

\* \* The amounts to be claimed as expenses are as follows: (1) of the year 1923, £160-£90=£70; (2) of the year 1926, £362-£15=£347, less the excess of the gross cost (£362) over the original car outlay (£273)—that is, a net amount of £347-£89=£258. For the financial year 1926-27 he should also claim a depreciation allowance of 20 per cent. of £362=£72.

"M. H.'s" car transactions have been as follows: In 1915 he purchased a second-hand "S" car for £335 and sold it in 1927 for £30; he bought a new "St." car in 1925 for £275 and sold it in December, 1926, for £128; in July, 1926, he bought a second-hand "V" car for £320, which he is still using.

\* \* In our opinion the renewal or obsolescence claim is best made as for the year definite figures are ascertainable—that is, the year of sale. On that basis "M. H." should claim as follows: (1) "S" car, renewal cost as an expense of the year 1927, £335-£30=£305. (2) "St." car, obsolescence allowance, £275-£128=£147, deduct depreciation allowance given (that is, 20 per cent. of £275=£55), net claim £92, as an expense of the year 1926. (3) "V" car, 20 per cent. of £320=£64 as a depreciation allowance for 1927-28. The authorities may claim to restrict the above to allow for the falling value of cars generally on the ground that there was some loss of capital. If so perhaps "M. H." will send us their figures.

### LETTERS, NOTES, ETC.

#### ACQUIRED MELANISM IN MOTHS TRANSMITTED BY INHERITANCE.

SURGEON REAR-ADMIRAL CHARLES M. BEADNELL, R.N.(ret.), writes: With reference to the note in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of February 5th on acquired melanism in moths transmitted by inheritance, may I protest against the easy assumption that an "acquired melanism" had been proved by Dr. Heslop Harrison to be "transmissible by inheritance" on the basis of the alleged fact that certain moths fed in their larval stages on a lead-manganese contaminated diet begot, as descendants, melanized moths the larvae of which had been fed entirely on uncontaminated food. The expression "acquired melanism" would appear to me to beg the question. Sir Archdall Reid, who, more than any biologist past or present, has shown the confusion of thought, through faulty terminology, that has accompanied the long and heated controversy concerning the transmission of acquired characters, defines an acquired character as one developed under the stimulus of use or injury in

contrast to an inborn character which is one developed under the stimulus of *nutriment*, inheritance being, according to this authority, the reproduction, as a nutritional character, by the offspring of a parental character of any sort. Now I submit there is no evidence in the case in point of any use or injury stimulus having called forth a deposition of pigment in the hypodermal cells of the metal-fed moths. On the other hand, it is surely obvious that a nutriment stimulus was present and that it was this that produced in the moths the inborn character melanism which, happening to be a variation in a direction favourable to the industrialized environment of the insects, was fostered and furthered by natural selection and reproduced as a nutritional character by descendants. In short, it was, I submit, the germ plasm of the moths that was directly acted upon by the circulating manganese and lead salts. If, at any point in the eighty odd million year line of germ cells of the multicellular organisms, the germ-plasm be affected by nutritional or mechanical stimuli to the point of definite structural adjustments, there would be brought about in descendant germ cells the potentiality (temporary or permanent according to the survival value) to induce related structural adjustments in certain groups of cells of that ephemeral excrescence on the germ cell that we term the *body*.

#### HERPES ZOSTER AND VARICELLA.

DR. H. TAYLOR (Banbury) states that in December, 1926, he attended a man who was suffering from a severe attack of herpes zoster. Ten days later, when the herpes was drying up, he was called to the patient's wife, who was suffering from a severe acute form of chicken-pox. Neither of the two patients had been away from the village for several weeks previously, and there had been no other case of herpes or varicella in the neighbourhood. Although the baby in the family had been in contact with the father during the acute herpes eruption, it escaped entirely.

#### JUDICIAL HANGING.

"EX-COLONIAL SURGEON" writes: Early one morning a few years ago I had to witness the execution of four coloured men in a gaol. As it happened, the executioner was anxious to finish his work as soon as possible in order to catch a train, and the scaffold held two at a time, so they were divided accordingly. When the first pair were hanged it was my duty to determine the fact of death. As a general rule, on auscultation the heart may be heard beating for about ten minutes after the drop, and on this occasion, when the sounds had ceased, there was nothing to suggest any vital spark. The bodies were cut down after fifteen minutes and placed in an ante-chamber, when I was horrified to hear one of the supposed corpses give a gasp and find him making spasmodic respiratory efforts, evidently a prelude to revival. The two bodies were quickly suspended again for a quarter of an hour longer. The executioner, who was thoroughly experienced, had done his part without a hitch, and the drop given was the regulation one according to individual physique. Dislocation of the neck is the ideal aimed at, but, out of all my *post-mortem* findings, that has proved rather an exception, while in the majority of instances the cause of death was strangulation and asphyxia. One such gruesome incident seems to me enough to condemn hanging in any civilized country.

\* \* The nature of death by judicial hanging has been discussed at intervals during the last fifty years, and Dr. J. de Zouche Marshall, who took much interest in the subject, wrote in our issue of November 15th, 1913 (p. 1341), to suggest that the time had come for further inquiry, since the recommendations of the Aberdare Committee of 1886, with reference to the length of the drop, were not being followed. General opinion at present is to the effect that with an expert hangman, using the submental knot, death is due to fracture dislocation of the axis vertebra and severing of the spinal cord, as described by F. Wood-Jones in the *Lancet* in 1913. With the subaural knot death by strangulation or fracture of the base of the skull seems to be more likely.

#### JOHN LEYDEN.

PROFESSOR FRASER HARRIS writes: At the close of your most interesting account of John Leyden, medical man and orientalist (BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, February 12th, p. 300), you remark: "He is now almost forgotten." This doubtless is perfectly true, but inasmuch as his name occurs at the end of a beautiful stanza in "The Lord of the Isles," there is less excuse than otherwise for this neglect. Just before going out to India Leyden visited the Inner Hebrides, and thus Scott wrote of—

"Scenes sung by him who sings no more,  
His bright and brief career is o'er  
And mute his tuneful strains;  
Quenched is his lamp of varied lore,  
That loved the light of song to pour;  
A distant and a deadly shore  
Has Leyden's cold remains."

"Lord of the Isles," Canto IV, Stanza XI.

#### VACANCIES.

NOTIFICATIONS of offices vacant in universities, medical colleges, and of vacant resident and other appointments at hospitals, will be found at pages 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, and 47 of our advertisement columns, and advertisements as to partnerships, assistantships, and locum tenencies at pages 44 and 45.

A short summary of vacant posts notified in the advertisement columns appears in the *Supplement* at page 63.

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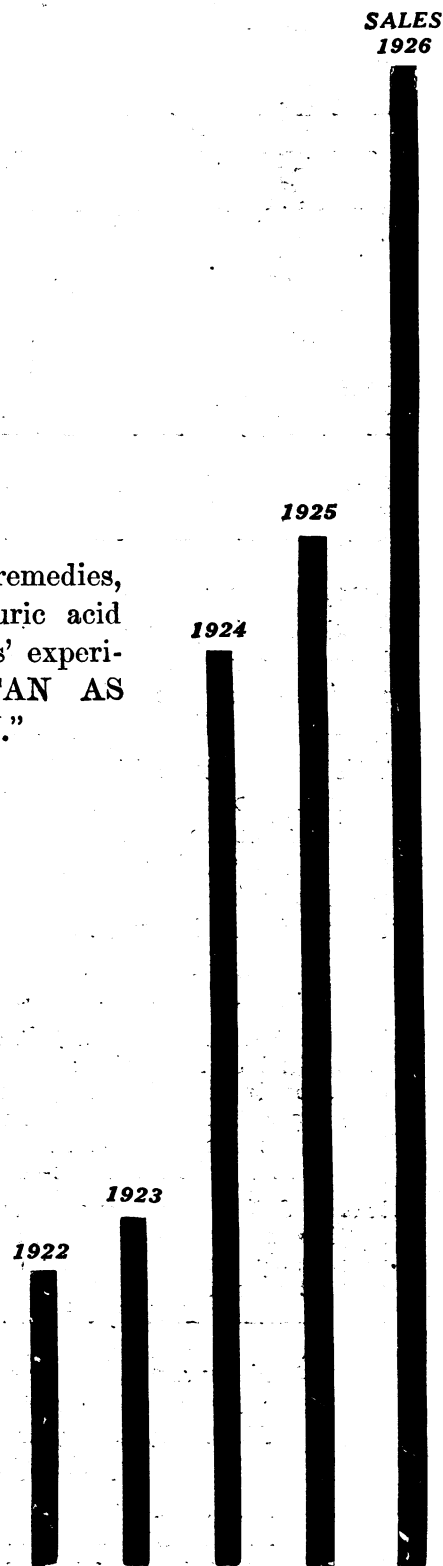
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