

## Letters, Notes, and Answers

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### QUERIES AND ANSWERS

#### Chemistry of Fehling's Reaction

Dr. J. M. MACPHAIL (Middlesbrough) writes: Can anyone suggest what is the nature of the reducing agent or agents found so often in the urine when equal quantities of urine and Fehling's solution are boiled together? It would seem that under normal conditions this mixture when boiled remains blue, and we know that as sugar gradually disappears from the urine a green reaction appears; but what is this green reaction that is present when no trace of sugar has ever been found in the urine? It is also found with urates and phosphates. Certain signs would suggest that its presence indicates severe disturbance of liver function, as it is found very often as a "pea-soupy" green with sediment twenty-four hours or more after a long anaesthesia and severe operation. In a few days this green becomes a grass green, but it may be three to four weeks before the "normal" blue of health returns. This green colour is also found when the liver is involved in chronic heart disease with dropsy and liver engorgement; in chronic alcoholism; in "chronic debility"; in cancers, etc. The only trouble seems to be that it is found too easily to be of definite distinguishing value. If it shows a defect in liver function, what are the reducing agents that get green into the urine? and is it not possible to evolve a liver test that may be put to the proof by a fairly ordinary analysis of the urine?

#### Aerophagy and Meteorism

Dr. LEONARD WILLIAMS (London, S.W.1), in reply to "Perplexed" (*Journal*, November 3rd, p. 843), wonders whether this really is a case of aerophagy, whether in fact the air has really been swallowed, or whether, as seems more probable, a portion of intestine, say, ascending and transverse colon, becomes atonically dilated owing to nervous influence or fatigue, and is promptly invaded by gas from the surrounding tissues. He writes: Surgeons have known flaccid stomachs and large intestines to balloon suddenly during an operation. And, seeing that Epsom salts and other drugs are known to withdraw fluid from the intestinal canal, there is surely nothing to prevent air from being withdrawn by the same route. If this patient's flatulence were really due to swallowed air it is unlikely that there would be a complaint of meteorism, because the gas in such cases seldom goes below the stomach; very often, indeed, it goes no further than the cardiac end of the oesophagus, and the complaint is of cardiac distress, because the wind cannot be eructated. The meteorism in this patient would probably be quickly relieved by oil of cajuput, and, as there is usually an element of spasm somewhere, belladonna ought to be useful.

#### Income Tax

##### Cessation of Employment Earnings

"E. M." was an unestablished medical officer under the L.C.C. On May 4th the earnings ceased, owing to a serious street accident. The original notice of assessment was based on the previous year's figures, but an amended statement was rendered, when the facts were explained. Now, however, a

demand for payment of tax on the original figures has been received.

\*\* It looks as if there was some lack of co-operation between the office of the inspector who amended the assessment and the collector whose duty it is to collect the tax. Probably the best thing to do is to send the collector's demand to the inspector's office, pointing out that it does not agree with the amended statement.

### LETTERS, NOTES, ETC.

#### Psychology and Religion

Dr. A. J. BROCK (North Queensferry, Fife) writes: I have read in your issue of November 24th an abbreviated report of an address given by Dr. David Forsyth on psychology and religion. It is difficult, owing to the conciseness of the report, to be quite sure of his point of view, but he appears to class religion as belonging to "pleasure-thinking," and therefore to something hardly desirable. He tells us that a large part of the human energy "available for social enterprise" is at present "running to waste in the interests of religion," and this he wants diverted for the purposes of science, otherwise of "objective truth," which "best serves in subduing the forces of nature in the interests of the individual." Personally, while I agree that the main object of our psychical powers is to forward social enterprise and to help the individual, I think at the same time that Dr. Forsyth is a little too hard on religion. Will he, for example, answer me one or two things? He suggests that a child's idea of God is derived from its experience of its own father. But what happens if the child has never seen its father, or if the father is not very awe-inspiring—is, for example, a hen-pecked individual? And another question. How does Dr. Forsyth explain the common and almost instinctive belief of all children in fairies? Do these not correspond to anything in "reality," or are they perhaps only the child's brothers and sisters? Next, about the soul. According to your report of Dr. Forsyth's address, psychology "had observed that the idea [of soul] arose from the implicit belief of savages in the reality of their dreams." Well, now, will Dr. Forsyth tell me what he makes of the expression often heard in these days of bureaucracy and of mechanism in general, and from people who are not by any means savages, that they "cannot call their souls their own." Dr. Forsyth is anxious to advance the cause of the individual. So I put it to him: What is the use of individuals who have no individuality? Does he tell me there is no such thing as individuality, and that, like the soul, it is only the figment of a savage's dream? On the contrary, I suggest that one's soul or individuality is the most important thing about one. At the same time, it is certainly not recognized or recognizable by "science," whose sphere is nothing more than "objective truth." If I am right, then Dr. Forsyth, in his zeal for social enterprise and for the welfare of the individual, will have to pay more attention to a lot of what is often classed as "religion," and which he tends too airily to dismiss with abusive terms drawn from the armamentarium of current psychology, such as "masochism" and "sadism."

#### Diaries and Calendars

We have received from Messrs. John Walker and Co. (Farringdon House, Warwick Lane, E.C.4) a selection of diaries, calendars, and appointment books for 1935, many of which would be of service to busy medical men. The diaries are attractively bound, and are obtainable at a variety of prices from 1s. 9d.

#### Special Plate: Correction

We much regret that, owing to an unfortunate error at the engravers, the three radiographs illustrating the article "Mediastinal and Apical Empyema," by Dr. S. J. Hartfall and Mr. L. N. Pyrah, were reproduced in the wrong order on the special photogravure plate which appeared on December 8th. An examination of the reproductions, with their accompanying legends, shows that the photograph labelled Fig. 2 is really Fig. 1, that labelled Fig. 3 is really Fig. 2, while the one appearing as Fig. 1 should actually be Fig. 3.

#### Vacancies

Notifications of offices vacant in universities, medical colleges, and of vacant resident and other appointments at hospitals, will be found at pages 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 49 of our advertisement columns, and advertisements as to partnerships, assistantships, and locumtenencies at pages 48 and 49.

A short summary of vacant posts notified in the advertisement columns appears in the *Supplement* at page 360.