

in the official paper to do him honour by the public presentation of some testimonial as a token of our esteem and gratitude, and feel sure that the medical service will gladly co-operate with the other members in such a pleasant object.—I am, etc.,

Kensington, Sept. 2nd.

MEREDITH TOWNSEND.

SIR,—I find that Mr. Rowland Humphreys in his letter of August 29th has anticipated me in my intention to write to you on the prejudicial effect that this Bill is likely to have on the interests of the nurses and subordinate officials that come within its scope. I am anxious not to lose the opportunity of endorsing the views so clearly expressed by him, and of emphasising his remarks on the danger threatened by the Bill to the future of nursing. Briefly, the consequence of this enactment will be to swell the pensions of the higher at the expense of the lower grades of Poor-law officials. These latter—nurses, house-porters, scrubbers, etc.—rarely remain in office until they are 60 years of age, and yet they are subjected to an appreciable and compulsory deduction from their salaries in order to create a fund from which but a small minority are likely to derive any benefit.

I am unable to face the probable results of the Bill on nursing, in which I am particularly interested, with anything but very grave concern. At present a large majority of nurses go to a workhouse infirmary in order to gain the experience that will fit them to take up private nursing, or to accept the higher appointments of their calling in institutions. Of the benefit of this training the matron of this infirmary, Miss Vincent, and I have had ample proof, which has given us very great encouragement in our efforts to raise the standard of nursing. Under the new *régime* it is to be apprehended that many, resenting the deduction of a percentage of their pay which they have earned but of which not a penny will reach their pockets, will dispense with this training so necessary to their efficiency. The result of this will be a steady deterioration in the quality of nursing, and we may find ourselves once more within measurable distance of the standard of which Mrs. Gamp is the immortal type. On the other hand, we shall find nurses as they approach the age of 60 clinging to their duties long after they have ceased to be efficient in order not to forego the reward to which they have been contributing for so many years. It is, in my experience, an uncommon thing for a nurse to retain her full powers up to threescore years.

The defect of the Bill is undoubtedly a want of elasticity. I have no fault to find with the principle of a deduction being made (if it is looked upon merely as deferred pay) to be handed over to the official on his or her leaving the service of the Poor-law guardians. The little sum accruing from this enforced thrift would in many cases be a great boon to those starting on a new career.—I am, etc.,

JOHN R. LUNN,

September 3rd. Medical Superintendent, Marylebone Infirmary, W.

#### CHEMISTS AND COUNTER PRESCRIBING.

SIR,—I have been much interested in reading the discussion on the above subject opened by Dr. Bateman in the Section of Ethics, and think he might safely have more strongly condemned the practice of doctors dispensing. May not the remark made by Mr. Carteighe, namely: "That the more highly trained the pharmacist is, the less likely he is to overstep the bounds of his legitimate work" be equally applied to medical men? For what do we find? That in most cases of doctors dispensing their training in pharmacy has been very very limited, or perhaps *nil*. On the other hand, a man who has qualified in pharmacy and passes to the further study of medicine is generally the one to leave dispensing to those whose daily duty it is to practise pharmacy. A chemist has to undergo a course of training in the compounding and dispensing of drugs, and the three months' course of pharmacy demanded by medical examining bodies cannot possibly put a medical man upon an equal basis with a pharmacist. Indeed, I often think that the chemist is more sinned against than sinning; and I certainly agree with Dr. Bateman that "if medical men would only do away with dispensing, chemists might give up the illegal branches of their trade." I have heard it said that so long as doctors dispense chemists will prescribe, and I believe it. Last

winter the Ulster Pharmaceutical Association had a discussion on this very subject, and deplored the amount of dispensing done by medical men.

With regard to the illegality committed by registered practitioners in the sale of poisons by unqualified dispensers I quite agree, and yet I expect that this same practitioner would be the first to complain if a neighbouring chemist prescribed for a simple ailment.—I am, etc.,

Belfast, Sept. 2nd.

VICTOR G. L. FIELDEN, M.B.

SIR,—In my address on Chemists and Counter Prescribing at the annual meeting at Carlisle I quoted a speech made, as I thought, by the Ex-President of the Pharmaceutical Society, Mr. Carteighe. I now find that the author was Mr. Walter Hills, the present President of the same Society. It is satisfactory to find that one who takes such an admirable view of prescribing by chemists is at the head of the Association which by its power and authority can do much to stop the unlawful trenching upon the rights and privileges of medical practitioners.—I am, etc.,

Devonshire Street, W., Sept. 8th.

A. G. BATEMAN.

#### MEDICAL DEFENCE AND THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

SIR,—In the dialogue on "Medical Defence," which was published in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of August 29th, the apprehensions which are felt by some members as to the advisability of the addition of the duties of medical defence to those which are already ably performed by the British Medical Association, have been clearly set forth, and as an alternative scheme it is proposed to subsidise the Medical Defence Union. Speaking for these members "Vetus" says that "it is feared that the name of the British Medical Association, now widely honoured and respected, will be dragged through much mire, if the Association figures in the police courts and elsewhere, as a prosecutor of quacks or the defender of possible black sheep, and that the public would be apt to regard those prosecuted as martyrs to trade unionism."

The allusion to trade unionism makes it necessary to point out that the Medical Defence Union and similar societies are in no sense of the word trade unions, which are combinations of workers for the purpose of securing advantages at the expense of the public, and which do not concern themselves with the ethics of the trade that they represent. As the real interests of the public are identical with those of the medical profession, the most important duty of a Medical Defence Union is exactly that maintenance of professional integrity with which a trade union does not concern itself, and such a body is prepared to prosecute and punish professional offenders.

The prosecution of quackery is a duty owed to the public, who are the sufferers. But this is by no means such an important duty as the one that has been mentioned. As the law stands at present, a general crusade against quackery would be futile, and it is not proposed to engage the Association in any quixotry.

All that is wanted is that the Association shall have the power to proceed when circumstances are favourable to success, and action for other reasons is desirable.

Providing that due discretion is exercised, there seems but little reason to anticipate that the name of the Association will be dragged through the mire by appearing on behalf of the medical profession in the law courts either as a prosecutor of evil doers or as a defender of individuals unjustly attacked in the discharge of their professional duties. On the contrary, the reputation of the Association will be increased. The Association is powerful enough to lead public opinion in matters medical, and should not hesitate to do what is right for fear of uneducated and ignorant criticism. The Medical Defence Union has already, by its vigorous action, favourably influenced public opinion against quackery. Is it unreasonable to anticipate that our Association will succeed in continuing what the younger body has commenced?

In both the schemes submitted to the members at Carlisle it was proposed that the carrying out of medical defence should be entrusted to a standing Committee working independently of the Association, but under the immediate con-