

THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT AND DR. THOMPSON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I was somewhat surprised to see it stated in your issue of the 16th instant, that “the Madras Government has reversed the decision of the Home Government in the case of Dr. Thompson.” This statement, Sir, is calculated to mislead those kind friends in England who took an interest in his case into the belief that justice has at last been done to a most unfortunate and very ill-used member of our profession.

As I am personally interested in this matter, having been myself rejected, on account of my birth, from competing for an army medical appointment, you must allow me to notice this misstatement in your journal, and at the same time to inform your readers of the true nature of this fresh act of injustice which has been done to Dr. Thompson.

In the Indian medical colleges there is a certain class of students intended for civil appointments. These gentlemen, after undergoing a most absurdly severe examination, are appointed as assistants to army surgeons in the various civil dispensaries. These appointments are very inferior ones in a pecuniary sense (the *Friend of India*, in a recent article on the subject, contemptuously termed the remuneration “a most beggarly salary”), and the duties are not such as to require the display of talents of a high order. In a social point of view the position is very galling to men of refinement and education, as most of these gentlemen are; subjecting them to the whims and caprices of every army surgeon who chooses to give himself airs. Many of these gentlemen have, since the organization of the competitive system, successfully competed for appointments in the Indian medical service, and have proved as efficient surgeons as their European brethren. If in future they be debarred—not from any *proved* unfitness, either physical or mental, on their part, but from the mere accident of birth—from entering the army medical service, have they not a just right to expect that suitable provision be made for them in India? How cruelly they are destined to be disappointed they will now learn from the recent treatment of Dr. Thompson. After having vainly endeavoured to obtain redress in England, even by an appeal to both Houses of Parliament, he returned to Madras, poor in purse, weary, and almost broken-hearted. Failing to obtain some honourable means of livelihood, as a last resource he reluctantly accepted the illiberal terms of the Madras Government. By the last mail from India I learn that he has been gazetted as a sub-assistant surgeon of the third class, on a salary of 150 Rs. a month (!), and directed to do duty in the vaccination department.

In order fully to realize his position, it must be contrasted with that of an assistant-surgeon in the army. On arrival in India, the army surgeon receives 225 rupees a month during his probationary term, and after a period varying from six months to two years he enters on the general duties of the army on a salary ranging from 300 to 500 rupees. His prospects are good, the highest professional offices in the army being within his reach. Such being the position and prospects of which Dr. Thompson has been deprived, I ask is it not most unjust to offer him this paltry appointment as a sufficient compensation for the grievous wrongs done him?

Whether the Inspector-General of the Madras Medical Department acted in this matter “as the spirit moved him,” or under the special orders of the “Secretary of State for India,” I am not in a position to state. At any rate, such conduct is of a piece and in keeping with the general proceedings of the Madras Government—that “benighted” Presidency, so aptly termed by *The Times* “the last stronghold of the Circumlocution Office.”

Sincerely trusting that this subject may attract the attention of the profession at large in England, and may also receive the powerful advocacy of your pen,

I have the honour to be, Sir, yours obediently,
London, Aug. 1862. MADRASSEE.

LICENTIATES NOT MEMBERS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Not content with the creation of a new class of licentiates, the London College of Physicians have, I learn, thought proper to grant diplomas to these gentlemen as qualified in Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery. How is it that, whilst thus certified as competent in all branches of the healing art, they are not to be allowed to call themselves members of this potent institution? Many of the *Members* were admitted without any

examination, because they *then* happened to be University graduates—a fact which would lead to the supposition that such qualification ranked in the eyes of the authorities as superior to any they could themselves confer, and the remainder unproven, as such, to be possessed of any surgical knowledge whatever.

Are, then, these gentlemen, the Licentiates—proved by examination qualified in Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery—to be considered as inferior to the Members, who are qualified in Medicine only? Surely there are but few who will covet such distinction.

The recently-concocted bye-law which prohibits the use of the title of Doctor to the whole College who are not graduates, is itself the best proof that all physicians have the “right by custom” to that designation. The University degree formerly gave the right to teach, the College diploma the right to practise. These things are altered, but the truth of the adage still remains: “it is better to practise than to preach.”

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Aug. 1862.

LOOKER-ON.

SARRACENIA PURPUREA—A REMEDY FOR SMALL-POX.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In THE LANCET of the 23rd inst. I find a paragraph attributing the introduction of the *Sarracenia Purpurea* as a remedy for small-pox to Mr. F. W. Morris, of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Allow me to call your attention to the fact that my brother, Assistant-Surgeon H. Chalmers Miles, R.A., first attracted notice to this plant in a paper addressed to Dr. Babington, and read by the late Dr. M'William at a meeting of the Epidemiological Society on Nov. 4th of last year.

While stationed at Halifax, N.S. during the last two years, Mr. Miles found that preparations of the above plant were depended on by the Indians as a *cure* of and a *preventive* to small pox. He also sent to the Society specimens of the plant, which were given to Mr. Marson at the Small pox Hospital, with a request that he would use them on the first opportunity.

I beg to remain, Sir, your obedient servant.

CHARLES MILES, M.R.C.S.

13, Conduit-street, Westbourne-terrace, Aug. 1862.

ACCIDENTAL POISONING.

THE records of coroners' inquests add another to the long list of those who have been sent to their last home by error in the dispensing of drugs. An inquest was held by Dr. Lankester this week touching the death of Patrick Ferrall, aged fifty-eight. It appeared that on Saturday afternoon last the deceased returned from the country, where he had been at work, and accompanied his wife to market. He requested her to get some salts and senna for him to take that night, and she went into Bainbridge and Pound's (druggist) shop in Leather-lane, where she received two packets supposed by her to be salts and senna. On opening the packets she found both were salts, and took them back, but the shop was closed. On her return she put boiling water on the smaller packet of crystals, and when they were dissolved she handed a large breakfast cup containing the solution to her husband. He hurriedly drank the liquid, but immediately ejected some portion of it. Vomiting and violent purging set in directly, insensibility followed, and in less than an hour after taking the draught death ensued. Mr. Cuff, a medical gentleman, having made an examination after death, stated that the appearances of the stomach indicated the presence of some irritant poison. He found eight or ten ounces of dark fluid in the stomach, which he tested for oxalic acid with nitrate of silver and the lime test, and both gave the characteristic precipitants. He had no doubt that death was from oxalic acid. Mr. Matthew Pound made a statement respecting the conduct of his shop. He said four assistants and himself were serving as hard as they could on Saturday night last for five or six hours. They had about six hundred customers. The only way he could account for such an accident was that the woman had taken up a parcel that was not intended for her. He remembered having served two pennyworths of oxalic acid on that night—one to a shoemaker's boy to be used in the preparation of leather, and the other to a young woman for bleaching bonnets. He had had