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CORRESPONDENCE

"AN INTENSIVE COURSE OF TREATMENT FOR SYPHILIS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ITS TOXIC EFFECTS"

DEAR SIR,

May I offer a criticism of one section of the paper bearing the above title by Dr. E. E. Prebble, published in the April number of this JOURNAL. In this paper Dr. Prebble compared the results obtained with patients treated at the Seamen's Dispensary, Liverpool, with some published by myself in M.R.C. Special Report Series No. 132. The two sets of results are not comparable to the advantage of either course for the following reasons. The results shown on page 120 were presumably obtained in cases which received the prescribed course of injections with perfect regularity and in the case of those shown on page 124 under the heading "Regular," the author specifically emphasises, on page 123, the factor of "absolute regularity." In the case of my results a certain amount of latitude was allowed so that the table in my original report and that on page 125 included a number of cases in which the treatment had not been perfectly regular. This must be obvious from a study of my report, in which it is shown (page 9) that the cases in my table had received not less than 5 gm. "914" and not less than 5 gr. Hg. or 2.0 gm. Bi. over a period of not more than four months. If I had restricted my cases to those which had been treated with absolute regularity, the qualification for admission to the table would have been treatment with 6.3 gm. "914," with 9 gr. Hg. or 3.6 gm. Bi., in neither more nor less than ninety-two days. On page 124 Dr. Prebble showed the results in cases which had not received perfectly regular treatment, and the difference between the two sets of results supports my criticism.

Apart from this, I must again point out that a strict comparison between two methods of treatment is possible only when the sera are tested by the same worker, or at least by one who has learnt the technique in the same laboratory. It is true that Dr. Prebble states that the method of the serum test employed in his cases was that associated with my name, but I know from experience that in different hands the sensitiveness of this method can vary sufficiently to make results of treatment bear very different aspects when evaluated by different workers employing apparently (on paper) the same technique.

In making this criticism I do not wish to imply that the course advocated by Dr. Prebble is not better than that on which I reported results in the M.R.C. Report. Indeed, I sincerely hope that it may eventually prove so because it would go far towards solving the difficult problem of the syphilitic seaman.

I am, sir,

Yours faithfully,

L. W. HARRISON.