CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—My attention has just been directed to a review in the March number of your journal on my article in "Modern Operative Surgery," edited by Professor Grey Turner. I have long felt that it is unjust that reviews in many English journals, unlike those in America and some in this country, are allowed to be unsigned. Under the cloak and protection of such anonymity personal attacks are permitted without fear of reprisal. The system has not only all the evil of anonymous letters so decried by English justice, but is even more evil in that it is not directed to one person but is published abroad. The statements are accepted not upon the standing of the writer, who is unknown, but upon the authority of the journal in which they are published. In recent times many complaints by authors of such unfair reviews have been formulated in other journals.

Quite early in my article I state that the literature is enormous and therefore I shall only discuss my own methods, my reasons for using them, and the results I have obtained thereby. No mention of this is made in the review, but the claim appears to be made that my article is hopelessly out of date because I have given no recent references in the literature. Is the experience of 30 years' gastric surgery based upon nearly 3,500 gastric operations, the results of which have been meticulously and carefully watched in a follow-up department, to be regarded as of no value compared with quotations from the works of others?

In pursuit of his argument the reviewer quotes portions of my article without the qualifying sentences, and brings together remarks from different portions of the work which have no relation to one another. My advice on performing gastro-enterostomy in some cases of peptic ulcer is questioned. This is stated as being the treatment of 25 years ago and if used by an inexperienced surgeon in India the patient may quite likely lose his life, but he omits to mention my statement that the performance of this step will depend upon the experience of the surgeon, that the first duty is to save the patient's life and therefore most surgeons only advocate a simple suture. He disputes my view that in my hands posterior gastro-enterostomy increases the likelihood of a permanent cure, and quotes my own figures from another part of the work that 40 % of ulcers recur after such a step. This is from the section on non-perforated lesser curve ulcers, and the false assumption that it applies to perforated ulcers which are generally duodenal must therefore be wilful.

On the question of congenital pyloric stenosis he states that no mention is made of the importance of breast feeding, having carelessly overlooked the statement on p. 679 that wherever possible the mother's milk should be used. Warming up in his vituperation he quotes the figures I have given of 80 cases of Rammstedt's operation with 15 deaths, but fails to mention that I have shown how results have improved with experience so that in the last series of 31 cases there was only one death, a mortality of just over 3 per cent.

On these points, if he had stated that his experience was entirely opposed to my own no exception could have been taken, but he does not mention his own experience but speaks as though he were the last authority.

His later remarks are however much more serious. He says "one must ask whether Professor Grey Turner has fulfilled his duties as Editor to allow such statements as the above to be printed. . . . Is it justifiable to sacrifice the lives of the unknown patients to a sense of loyalty to a colleague?" . . . Such printed statements transcend all boundaries of fair comment and criticism. May I say that I have known Professor Grey Turner for many years and know that he is far too great a Master Surgeon to accept articles out of loyalty to a colleague but is appreciative of the value of personal experience over knowledge gained by a perusal of the literature.

My complaints are two. Firstly, that any anonymous reviewer should be allowed to write so unjust an article, and secondly, that any Editorial Board should allow such an article to be published without confirming the accuracy of the quotations. You have, of course, my full permission to publish this letter and I think that in justice it should be published.

May 18th, 1944.

(Sgd.) JAMES WALTON
(Sir James Walton, K.C.V.O., F.R.C.S.)

DEAR SIR JAMES WALTON,—In reply to your letter of the 18th of May regarding the review which was published in the March number of the *Post-Graduate Medical Journal*, I have given the matter much careful thought, and I feel that the best thing to do is to publish your letter and this one of mine.

You say that your complaints are two. The first one deals with the question of the anonymity of reviewers. This is a matter which has been much discussed with all editorial boards from time to time. My feeling is that it is much fairer to have books reviewed without publicly disclosing the name of the reviewer. Our profession is a relatively small one, and I think it is important that reviewers who, as in this case, feel justified in giving a poor criticism of any book, should be able to do so without fear of any repercussions to themselves or their career. It is the practice, I know, in some countries to publish the reviewer's name, but I cannot help feeling that such a step would be prejudicial to the best interests of the profession.

Your second complaint is that "any editorial board should allow such an article to be published without confirming the accuracy of the quotations." The reviewer has not misquoted the printed word, and you must, I think, bear in mind that he was reviewing *the whole book* and not any one chapter. As so often happens in a book made up from the pens of many authors conflicting reports and opinions are bound to arise, and it is for the editor of such a book to delete or publish as he will.

Now returning to the other points which you have raised in your letter. I cannot accept the implication that there was any personal attack made upon you. As stated above, the review embraced the whole book. Next, regarding the question of literature. While quite agreeing that the literature on the subject of gastric surgery is enormous, it undoubtedly is unfortunate that you did not quote some of the more recent references, especially as those reading your article would obviously not have had the benefit of your long and varied experience.

Yours truly,

May 31st, 1944.

F. CROXON DELLER, M.D., M.R.C.P.
Editor, *Post-Graduate Medical Journal*.