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*The Letters After a Doctor's
Name*

As more and more degrees and diplomas become available to the medical profession the temptation to place them after our names may become irresistible. In the past the separation of surgeons from physicians by the use of the letters F.R.C.P. or F.R.C.S. had something to recommend it but it would be of greater value to know the nature of the appointment, and in many parts of the world the use of a mere diploma by a man who held a university doctorate or mastership would be considered bad form. Probably the most practical reason for abandoning the practice of placing letters after our names, or at any rate limiting them to one degree or diploma, is the fact that the existing arrangement makes an immense amount of extra work for our secretaries and recently at least one important medical body has passed a resolution instructing its secretarial staff to limit the letters typed after a member's name on a letter or envelope to one non-medical honour and one medical degree. Another reason is that the practice has become widely spread with the result that letters after a name are having less and less significance, not only within the medical profession but in all walks of life, and some even place letters after their names which have not been

earned in any way but merely bought by a subscription to a society which has hardly ever been known to refuse an application for membership.

Each country has its own customs but it is of interest that this practice is largely confined to Great Britain and some parts of the Commonwealth. In Europe a doctor does not place letters after his name, neither does he in the U.S.A., and in many of the Dominions the practice is dying out. It is possible that it arose in Great Britain as a result of the practice of calling physicians doctor and surgeons mister, the latter using their university degrees or college of surgeons diploma in letters after their names as an indication that they were in fact medically qualified.

It is becoming apparent that reform is necessary because the system is becoming unwieldy, has only merit if it indicates something of value and is now creating unnecessary work. Probably the answer is to stop using such letters on envelopes or in correspondence but to continue using the important ones on nameplates, official lists of a society's members, publications, etc., although at least one major British medical journal ceased some years ago to put the initials of any degree or diploma after a contributor's name.