To the Editorial Committee of

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

DEAR SIRS,—Messrs. Klein and Miller are to be congratulated on their interesting and informative paper (B. J. O. October, 1949), drawing attention to the value of urea in the treatment of dendritic keratitis. They are not quite correct, however, in saying that urea "has not been employed in ophthalmology." Urea was introduced to the Portsmouth Eye and Ear Hospital by Mr. W. Hedley Summerskill over two years ago, for the treatment not only of herpetic keratitis but of other ocular infections of an assumed virus origin. The rationale for its employment, given by him, was that the virus molecule disintegrates in the presence of urea throwing off its SH groups and becoming inactive. The urea has been used as 50 per cent. drops 3-hourly in sterile aqueous solution (i.e., a saturated solution). Such a solution is stable, compatible with atropine sulphate and has proved non-irritant to the eye. For intra-ocular infections 200 grains have been given by mouth daily.

It is gratifying to have had the value of urea treatment confirmed and published by Messrs. Klein and Miller. Results at this hospital have been encouraging and satisfactory in view of the obstinate cases in which it has been employed. As an adequately controlled comparison with other treatments had not been undertaken, one was hesitant in assessing its value.

Yours faithfully,

PORTSMOUTH, October 21, 1949.

REX PARISH.

OBITUARY

SIR HERBERT LIGHTFOOT EASON, C.B., C.M.G.

HERBERT EASON will be best remembered by Guy's men of 1920 and after as Superintendent, and by an earlier generation as Dean. Though all knew him as one of the ophthalmic surgeons to Guy's everyone realized that "eyes" played a relatively small part in his activities. Nevertheless he had the reputation of being an outstandingly good lecturer and a most skilled operator. Eason himself would have been the first to admit that his ophthalmic work, hospital and particularly private practice, took second place to his administrative responsibilities.

To the profession as a whole Eason was best known as President of the General Medical Council, while in academic circles he was remarkable as having held successively the posts of Vice-Chancellor and Principal Officer of London University. In his public life Herbert Eason was punctilious to a degree, every letter was answered
promptly, and before every committee meeting he had the agenda at his finger-tips, and was in his seat many minutes before the meeting was due to start. For years while Superintendent of Guy's it was possible to set one's watch at 9.0 a.m. by his arrival in the office.

Eason was one of the most broadminded and tolerant of administrators. He always stressed his accessibility to those, such as house-officers, who were responsible to him. When any difficulties
arose regarding either their private lives or their patients, innumerable house-officers and others at Guy's over nearly twenty years went to Eason and found a real friend and adviser.

As Superintendent he lived in a beautiful Georgian house in the front quadrangle, and many of the Guy's staff, junior staff and house-men will look back with pleasure on the hospitality of Eason, his wife and daughters. He greatly appreciated good food and wine. He had a happy gift of mixing well at parties with those far younger than himself, and no Guy's Ball or other function was complete without the "Super" and his wife. At week-ends he not infrequently used to stay at Huntercombe Golf Club, where he soon became a close friend of Lord Nuffield, a most generous benefactor to Guy's during Eason's regime as Superintendent.

Eason was a superlatively good public speaker, whatever the circumstances. As an after-dinner speaker he was delightfully witty, and seemed to speak equally well even when he was called on quite unexpectedly. At more serious gatherings, such as meetings of the School Council or the Governors, he showed a dialectic skill which completely demolished the arguments of those who held opposing views to his own. He had a biting tongue, and at times caused offence by his remarks about those whom he regarded as pompous and insincere. From the point of view of worldly advancement his quick and mordant wit undoubtedly stood in his way, but his temperament was such that he sometimes found it difficult to curb his tongue.

It is difficult to understand how anyone as methodical as Eason in his public life could have been so different in private life. Letters habitually remained unanswered, and those who came to consult him professionally sometimes found that he had forgotten their appointments, or at best he was late. He was equally careless about sending out accounts. The writer well remembers meeting a rich man who refused to see Eason again, because three written requests for an account had produced no reply.

As President of the General Medical Council, Eason was greatly interested in medical education. Only a few years before his death he went to the United States with other members of the General Medical Council to visit the Medical Schools in that country. At Guy's one of his most popular lectures to students was on the powers and functions of the General Medical Council. In this he used to warn his audience of the dangers of the three A's—Abortion, Advertisement and Adultery. In the hearings at the General Medical Council he was scrupulously fair, and as broadminded as was consistent with upholding the dignity and position of the profession.

Herbert Eason's death is a sad blow for Guy's. Until shortly before his death he attended regularly the meetings of the Board of Governors, where his wise counsel and unrivalled knowledge of the history of the Hospital were of the greatest value.

J. J. C.
O. G. M. writes:

Sir Herbert Eason would, I feel sure, have been the first to agree that ophthalmology took second place in his life’s varied activities, but, as one would expect, he was a master in certain aspects of his speciality.

He was my chief when I was an ophthalmic dresser, and later a registrar at Guy’s Hospital, and it was a real stimulus to see his keen assessment of clinical cases. He never shirked his full share of the teaching and refractions in the somewhat tedious over-crowded out-patients of those days. He was an expert operator, and being a musician he had the perfectly controlled hands for this delicate work—quick, sure, and no fussing about; attributes which I usually seem to note in those who get the best results. As a lecturer to undergraduates he was almost unequalled, and his lectures were always fully attended, as were those intensely interesting ones which he used to give more recently on the G.M.C. or other aspects of medical ethics. He spoke so clearly, and could always be relied upon to provide some humour out of the dullest subject.

He published little, but he was keenly interested in new ideas. He never had a large private practice, but was very much in demand for compensation and other Court cases. Insurance companies welcomed his help and much appreciated his distinguished presence, and his remarkable ability to marshall the facts, and put the whole problem in a nutshell. When he had done this, there never seemed very much point in continuing the discussion.

One cannot help feeling that, if he had concentrated his energy and ability on ophthalmology, he would have risen to the highest eminence, but he chose administration, which is perhaps a more uncommon gift in medical men.

---

NOTES

N.O.T.B. Association The Annual General Meeting of the N.O.T.B. Association will be held at 5 o’clock on February 10, 1950, in B.M.A. House, Tavistock Square, W.C.1.

Ophthalmological Society of Egypt The Annual Meeting of the Ophthalmological Society of Egypt will take place at the Memorial Ophthalmic Laboratory, Giza, Egypt, on Wednesday and Thursday, March 15 and 16, 1950, at 9 a.m. The symposium will be the Sympathetic Ophthalmia. Medical practitioners, oculists or otherwise, are cordially invited.