

Correspondence

Smoking and Lung Cancer

SIR,—The suggestion is made severally by Drs. H. Stalker and P. Glees (*Journal*, September 18, p. 702) that the wasteful habits in smoking by some Americans may make the official figures of tobacco consumption misleading; this may be the case, but it would need another investigation to assess the degree. In your issue of October 2 (p. 808) Dr. Richard Doll and Professor A. Bradford Hill take exception to my logic and arithmetic. I wonder whether your readers prefer this sample of Dr. Doll's arithmetic: "One single cigarette holds the risk of lung cancer. Take two and the risk is doubled." I commented unfavourably on his statement: "Even very heavy smoking does not appear to be uniformly carcinogenic"; instead of trying to justify the statement, a diversion is made into hypothetical statistics of influenza. There were six observational points on a graph to which I took exception. An experimentalist would plot the points, join them up, and inspect them; the most casual inspection would show that these six points did not lie on a straight line. The statisticians, however, knew the "best-fitting line" through them and obtained a correlation coefficient 0.62 regarding which they say: "We are not ourselves enamoured of correlation coefficients based upon six observations, but, in fact, the figure is 0.62; for what it is worth, then, these observations are associated to quite a high degree." Four months ago I asked a statistician to give me his opinion on this particular coefficient, and I quote from his letter: "The data thus hardly warrant the assumption of any linear relation. It is clear that the two values for high cigarette consumption spoil the chances of correlation."

The matter may be looked at in another way. The lung cancer death rate for England and Wales reads 280 per million *actually*; on the best-fitting line it reads 170, a figure 39% too low. The rate for U.S.A. reads 120 per million *actually*; on the best-fitting line it reads 210, a figure 75% too high. I think that a false picture is presented by drawing a straight line through such points and then claiming that the result "is not inconsistent with the existence of a relationship between lung cancer and cigarette smoking."

—I am, etc.,

London, W.C.1.

SIDNEY RUSS.

The M'Naghten Rules

SIR,—In the matter of Dr. Eliot Slater's article on the M'Naghten Rules (*Journal*, September 25, p. 713) I would beg leave to occupy a little of your space for the purpose of making some general observations. "Now if every act which a man performs," says Dr. Slater, "is determined by his own nature on the one side and circumstances on the other, then no other way of acting was open to him." Behold, gentle reader, open your mouth wide enough to swallow this monstrous if, and you are absolved henceforth from all responsibility in the conduct of your life. And, though you have no say in your destiny, at any rate you cannot be blamed for any of the disasters which the shortcomings of your mechanism or the exigencies of your environment cause you to bring upon your fellows. Here is an end to all anxiety, for why should you worry when the inevitable is the unique solution to your problem?

The nearest that this hypothesis approaches to credence is in childhood, whereas in adolescence and maturity the individual develops an increasing sense of responsibility as he learns to exert his will. But Dr. Slater says, "Responsibility offers extraordinary difficulties," and therefore he abandons it altogether with the concept of free will, since to consider free will would introduce "an element of the unknowable." Such self-imposed tubular vision may clarify the issue over a limited field, but one must necessarily limit the application of any conclusions to the world lying at the end of the tube. Indeed, the psychiatrists seem to have

immured themselves within a secret garden to which outside sounds float only dimly and from whence we are bombarded with leaflets couched in an occult jargon. What weight should we give to pronouncements from within this pale? Should they be revered for their esoteric wisdom or reviled for their obscurity? It is difficult to tell as a rule what they mean.

But the meaning stands openly in Dr. Slater's article, and it does not incline me in his favour. He has to mutilate life overmuch before he can cram her into his scientific box, and I am reminded of the antics of Cinderella's haughty sisters in their attempts to make the shoe fit. I think Dr. Slater would do better to accept the foot which Nature has provided, put away his knife, and play a game of hunt the slipper.—I am, etc.,

Edinburgh, 12.

ALAN LYELL.

SIR,—Few of us who have ever given evidence in court will deny that the M'Naghten Rules need revision, even if only to make their language more easily intelligible. But Dr. Eliot Slater's exposition of determinism (*Journal*, September 25, p. 713) seems to lack consistency in parts. He says that a man's acts must be assumed to be due to "his make-up; his physical and mental state at the time; the circumstances and his appreciation of them." And: "Now if every act which a man performs is determined by his nature on one side and circumstances on the other, then no other way of acting was open to him." "The application of such concepts as responsibility, innocence, and guilt becomes nonsensical. In psychiatry we do very well without them." And in another place "'free will' proves a heuristically sterile idea."

To put it shortly, everyone acts that way because he is made that way and has to seem to be the view of the lecture. So in Straffen's case, he murders a child; he was made that way; he had to. The first court finds him insane; they were made that way; they had to. The warder was careless; he was made that way. The second court under Mr. Justice Cassels decides he is sane enough to be condemned; they were made that way and strictly interpreted the rules *inevitably* made by the M'Naghten judges a hundred years before; they had to. A story not less distressing for a doubt as to whether the second child's death was really inevitable. But the whole tone and purpose of the lecture implies that the M'Naghten judges and Mr. Justice Cassels ought to, and therefore could, have acted differently.

And it is stated further: "The judge is *free* to ignore the Rules if he so wishes" (my italics). "The judge can exercise a large measure of control on the jury's decision." The judges, therefore, have choice of more than one course of action under the same circumstances. See also the paragraph on Scandinavian practice. Is it fair to say, then, that the judge has free will and the criminal none? Is, then, the judge the sole exception to the rule of determinism, or does free will only occur above a certain intellectual level? (I would not be sure myself that my dog has no free will.) Or is free will treated as we used to deal with friction in elementary mechanics, and left out as too difficult?

Sir, my only excuse for this letter is that I am made that way: I had to.—I am, etc.,

King's Langley.

REGINALD FISHER.

Primidone in the Treatment of Epilepsy

SIR,—We were interested in the articles on primidone in the treatment of epilepsy by Drs. J. B. Lyons and L. A. Liversedge, and Dr. D. S. Sharpe (*Journal*, September 11, p. 625, and p. 627 respectively), particularly as we were preparing a paper concerning the use of the drug in mental deficiency practice. As our series is small, however, and as we have little to add to what has already been published, we have decided not to proceed, though we should be grateful for the opportunity to record a brief summary of our findings.

"Mysoline" was given to 17 patients whose fits had not been controlled by any other drug or combination of drugs,