

Correspondence.

THE CONTRACT SYSTEM.

To the Editor of the CANADA LANCET.

SIR:—I beg to call the attention of the profession to the dangerous position into which it is being drawn by the degrading and unprofessional practice of many of its members, in accepting the appointment of physician to certain "orders or societies" for a small yearly fee from each member, (generally \$1.00 per annum,) for medical attendance including medicine.

Doubtless, this duty is undertaken, relying mainly on making up the loss between \$1.00 and the usual charges by being employed to attend the families of the members of such societies; and upon the well-known fact, that the medical man of the "order," has a kind of lien upon the families of its members; and upon the further well-known fact, that in order to secure the success of this modern scheme for securing the services of medical men at labourer's wages, there is a continual canvass going on in the community by the members of these "orders," in behalf of the "society's doctor," to the great detriment of his brother practitioners. This whole proceeding, so unjust and injurious to the whole profession, except the few who descend to join in the scheme, is leading inevitably to a state of things equally detrimental to the profession and the general public.

No one can fail to be struck with the difference between the proceedings of these modern philanthropists, the Odd Fellows, the Foresters and many others, to which we shall doubtless soon have to add the Grangers, and the time-honoured order of Free-Masons. They all profess to be charitable associations. But the honest old mason contributes his charity from his own money. He is not content to give of "that which doth cost him nothing," whereas the vaunted charity of these modern organizations, is in great part a charity at other people's expense, and notably, at the expense of the medical practitioner. But what I desire particularly is, to ask my brethren to reflect, and endeavour to see before it is too late, what this modern movement is leading to. I do not refer to the evil effects to the community of a multiplicity of secret societies, whose sectarian zeal and private scheming for their own advancement, (like

that of all secret combinations,) places the rest of the public at an unfair disadvantage, and renders equal justice and fair play to all in the struggle for life impossible. These evils are not only patent to all who give the subject the smallest consideration, but they very far outweigh in my humble judgment, all the good that can fairly be claimed for them. Society does not exist exclusively for the benefit of secret societies, and what chance has the uninitiated and unsuspecting public against the secret cabaling and scheming of men, banded together for their own exclusive benefit. There can be no doubt that these evils have been the real cause of many of the modern organizations. Men came to feel, that the only way to counteract or defend themselves against the secret influences of existing organizations, was to get up other organizations. It has been a kind of mining and countermining. There is a secret society in this neighbourhood, formidable in numbers, and therefore formidable in influence. Of all the resident medical practitioners, only one would accept the appointment of "society doctor." The consequence of his appointment is, that there is a continual canvass going on, in favour of that gentleman, not only by the members of the society, but by many of their immediate friends and neighbours.

Respectable mechanics complain that they cannot get employment from members of a certain secret society, if any mechanic of that society can be got. They go past the neighbouring shop to buy their goods of a member of the society. A man sees that his neighbour is provided with medical attendance including medicine for \$1.00 a year. The inevitable result of all this must be the continual increase of secret organizations, as a matter of self-defence against existing ones—until the country is filled with rival cliques and combinations, more or less hostile, from one end to the other.

Supposing medical men can be found to take the appointments on the terms demanded by these societies, how, it may be asked, will that affect the medical profession and the general public? I do not pretend to be able to answer these questions fully; but I think it is easy to foresee the following results: (1) At least nineteen-twentieths of the professional men must betake themselves to some other occupation—for the large portion of the entire community that would be absorbed in these