

## *The Scribe's Column*

### *Who is Ezra, What is She?*

Since I started to work for the *College Bulletin* the fan mail I have received about this column has been a pleasant bonus. It is heartening to receive letters of support, and I am glad to have them all. There is no higher reward than the approbation of one's colleagues expressed in monetary terms, so I would like to very warmly thank those of you who send me their admonitions written on the back of a postal order.

My correspondents fall into three categories: those who encourage me to carry on the good work; those who correct my grammar, unsplit my infinitives, help me with hanging participles and so forth; the third, and by far the largest group, ask me who I am, and if my name is my own or a pseudonym. Many of these ask whether I am a qualified doctor, and if so whether from the UK or Overseas. Letters in this category often come from a fan who uses the non-deplume Peter Brook. His queries consist of long columns to be filled in 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know' (not unlike the Multiple Choice Sections of the Examination).

#### **Methods**

I only recently discovered how much interest was taken in my identity when I was in London to visit the Research Committee, who were endeavouring to identify me by using the College computer to make a multivariate discriminate function analysis of the numbers of adverbs in my column. They were making comparisons with the Bible, Shakespeare, the books of Ronnie Laing, assorted suicide notes (collected by Brian Barraclough), memoranda produced by the Public Policy Committee and (greatly daring) such unlikely scraps as the Minutes of the Collegiate Trainees' Committee. But all to no avail. Their sole conclusion was that I was probably alive, possibly well and definitely not a pillar of the establishment (which eliminated Tony Clare, more at home in *Mind Out*, *Mind Matters*, *Mine's a pint*, *What's Yours?*).

#### **Results**

The Library Committee, who had been making a literature search, had found that a Scribe in Hebrew was Sopher, and in Greek Grammateus, and that the word referred to: (1) a clerk, writer or secretary; (2) a Commissary or Muster-Master of an army; (3) an able and skilful man, a Doctor of Law, a man of learning. Their general opinion was that I must come in to this last category. They have confirmed that Ezra was a ready scribe in the Law (Ezra, 7:6) and stood on a pulpit (Nehemiah, 8:4). He was the son of Seraiah (Ezra, 7:1). An earlier Seraiah was scribe to King David (2 Samuel, 8:17). They finally discovered that the pen of the scribes is in vain (Jeremiah, 8:8), so they referred the problem to the Mental Handicap Section; however, as this Section could not be found, it was passed to other parts of the College.

The Psychotherapy Section had naturally used a different approach, and by a process of group introspection had nearly settled the matter to their own satisfaction. Having concluded that the column was the work of the Associate Editors they had only to decide whether it was a manifestation of the Super Ego of Alex Walk, or alternatively the Id of Martin Roth. The disputation about this continues in the Section, the new neo-Kleinians having a slight current advantage over the Church of the Latter-Day Behavioural Scientists.

I was not surprised to find the Women's Working Group, a Sub-Committee of the Education Committee, [located in the Ezra Nashim—see *Journal*, (1977) 130, 544—Ed.] which in its turn is a Standing Committee of Council, or so the newly published second edition of the *Handbook for Inceptors and Trainees* tells me [This sounds suspiciously like a commercial—Ed.] have concluded that I must be a doctor with domestic commitments. Since my column appears at erratic intervals, rather than regularly, I could hardly be a whole-time woman doctor.

#### **Discussion**

A further theory (which has had some support from the cognoscenti on the College staff) was that Mr and Mrs Brooks, the College's excellent caretakers (who are renowned for their ability to cater for College Committees) had been using the jottings left over from 'President's Press'. By slowly simmering these (with a bouquet garni) into a rehash or spiritual goulash, all the finest gleanings from the Presidential mind could have been usefully re-cycled in the Ezra column. Although this seemed a plausible theory, it was proved to be incorrect when the rebuilding of the basement commenced, and it was temporarily impossible for the Brooks' to cook for the College. The column continued to appear which confirmed it was not emanating from the College kitchens.

#### **Further discussions**

The Journal Committee has another view. They believed that this was a further example of the Editor's entrepreneurial zeal and that he had followed the example of *The Times* newspaper (which was noted in the past for taking defrocked clergymen on to their staff as proof readers). They assumed that I was one of those unfortunates who because of some indiscretion (possibly having a deep meaningful psychotherapy with an unresolved transference situation), had incurred the wrath of the Disciplinary Committee of the General Medical Council and that the Editor had then taken me on (late of the medical profession) as a proof reader. This was a kinder theory than that of the Forensic Section, who suspected that I was probably a defrocked psychoanalyst,

but assumed I wrote my column from Broadmoor, having been indefinitely detained for Grievous Bodily Humour and Murder of the English Language. Wilder suggestions have been made, including one that I am not a doctor at all, but some hack from Grub Street (possibly Bernard Levin or Auberon Waugh) and the President has secretly created me an Honorary Fellow 'in pectore'. The Collegiate Trainees have even doubted that I am human, and have suggested that I might be a great grandson of Archie, that poetical cockroach who wrote of Mehitabel for Don Marquis by leaping alternately on separate keys of the typewriter.

#### Conclusions

Today all will be made known and the last veil removed revealing the great secret which is that there is no secret. My life history is humdrum, since I do not exist. I am a crowd [We are a crowd, surely—Ed.]. At one stage I consisted of a bevy of Psychiatric Wits detained in a compound at the back of the College. This drastic attempt by the Editor to improve the quality of the *Bulletin* failed, since many of us absconded, and having stayed away for 28 days were released. Today, alas, I am only a ghost. At times the minds

of College members become overheated as they contemplate the follies and absurdities of modern psychiatric practice. The steam that rises from these minds forms a miasma of pale ectoplasm, which can be found drifting (like the mist that does be coming over the bog on the Celtic fringes of these islands) and may be confused with the dust from the rebuilding operations at the College. From the frail ghostly presence flows the steady stream of lucid abuse which irregularly sullies the pages of the *Bulletin*. I have in the past, and will again in the future, sign myself 'Ezra the Scribe', but today we will sign ourselves.

EZRA (the Collective Scribes)

#### Editorial Note

It is quite correct that there are many shades of Ezra. Today's contribution was compiled (like many College documents) by various separate sections and committees. If at times there are inconsistencies and the joins show, it is no worse in this respect than some other College documents. Further contributions from all parts of the globe will be welcome for the column of Ezra the Scribe.

### *Tea and Sympathy (a Psychiatrist's Lament).*

'It must be marvellous  
To be married  
To a psychiatrist,  
I bet,  
He listens to all  
Your problems.'

People like to talk  
About themselves.  
It feeds the soul  
With tasty morsels  
Of satisfaction.

I can't listen  
To all this,  
Just soaking up  
Emotional garbage  
Ad infinitum.  
I must breathe.

So don't tell me  
About mum  
Or dad and  
Aunt Ada.  
I'll only  
Look bored.

You seem to think  
I should  
Be able to  
Produce a remedy  
For your ills  
And moans.

But Tea and Sympathy  
Is no good  
If you basically  
Can't stand  
Being told  
To shut up.

MICHAEL LAUNER