Re Wiener's letter to B.M.J.

22nd. May 1948.

Dear Mourant,

It is always a most difficult question how much time, trouble, page space, etc. to give to controversy.

When I first read Wiener's 16 points I wondered whether anyone was going to think it worth while to answer him at all.

I am sure that to do so effectively one must be extremely brief and make only one or two points.

One of the points I should choose is "They have priority, having been proposed by one of the discoverers." The impudence of suggesting that Taylor and Race were not equally discoverers of most of that part of the Rhesus system known to Wiener and of parts of it, R_y and R_z, unknown to or denied by him, is worth a passing thought. I should be inclined to make it clear in a short paragraph that Wiener was treated extremely generously by Taylor and Race when they adopted some of his symbols for alleles which they had discovered independently, and the identity of which with Wiener's it was they and not Wiener that had shown. The system put forward by Race in 1944, after consultation with Taylor and myself, was associated with at least two of the discoverers of the Rhesus factor. As to priority, of course, prior to this date Wiener's notation was very different from what he now uses, because what he now uses incorporates signs for the three elementary antigens first recognised in Race's note in 1944. I should, in

fact, give most of my space to making clear just what sort of priority Fisher can claim and in what sense he, rather than Taylor and Race, is a discoverer of the Rhesus antigens.

Now, of course, this is quite different from what you have drafted, which, though it is valuable itself, will, I think, give no clear impression to readers of the B.M.J. If, however, you send it in, as there is no reason why you should not, I wonder if you would be good enough to use the English usage "Fisher's", rather than "the Fisher" used attributively in the way Americans are liable to do, which is, however, very irritating to many English readers.

For your amusement I have drafted the sort of thing that might be useful.

Yours sincerely,

Those who find it inconvenient to use Dr. Wiener's notation for the antibodies and genotypes of what has come to be known as the Rhesus system are urged by him to do so in the first place on the ground that

"1. They have priority, having been proposed by one of the discoverers."

Dr. Wiener's claims, which have always been large, have been treated so generously by his English colleagues, that the implications of this sentence may be overlooked.

The discovery of the first Rhesus antibody and of its association with haemolytic disease is certainly due to Levine. The discovery and distinction of other antibodies and of the genotypes distinguished by them was investigated concurrently and independently by Dr. Wiener in the United States and by Drs. Taylor and Race at Cambridge. In 1943 the English workers knew of seven allelomorphic compound antigens, the existence of six of which was recognised by Wiener, and, as a provisional measure, to avoid unnecessary confusion of the notation, they, with the concurrence of their English colleagues, abandoned their own notation for these six, and adopted those put forward up to that time by Wiener.

These symbols, being brief, it is still convenient to use. They do not convey the important fact that each contains three

distinguishable elementary antigens, and to distinguish these Race, after consultation with Taylor, Cappell and others, put forward what has been called the CDE system. It is subsequent to this publication in the summer of 1944 that Wiener has progressively modified his own notation, so that in its latest recensions this also implies the existence of three elementary antigens.

Dr. Wiener's implication that Taylor and Race were not at least equally with himself discoverers of the Rhesus system shows little recognition of the generosity with which his own claims have been treated.