Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

MEDICAL RECORDS OF THE WAR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—It is noteworthy that we possess no complete medical history of any of the numerous wars in which the British army has been engaged during the last century. If, for example, any one of us desires to inquire into the mortality from zymotic disease during the Crimean or even during the more recent Boer war, there is no easily accessible authoritative survey of the medical proceedings of either war to which we naturally turn for the required information. After much search we might, it is true, come across it in some excellent article contributed to the *Journal of the R.A.M.C.*, but, again, we might not, or we might hunt it down in the Annual Reports of the Director-General. But despite the abundant time and efforts which they represent Blue-books and other official documents are not literature. As likely as not the library we are accustomed to use does not stack these on its shelves. This is a defect which should be remedied in the greatest and gravest war with which our country has ever been overtaken, a war in which, taking into account the relatively small size of our army, success will very largely depend upon the reduction of preventable disease to a minimum among our troops and upon the preservation of the greatest possible number of our men in a state of health and strength upon the battle line, in which, therefore, the Royal Army Medical Corps will be a foremost factor.

But if such a history is to be written it must (1) be official; and (2) it must be based upon precise data. That is to say, from the beginning it must be clearly borne in mind by the whole medical staff that the data bearing upon each case must be so collected and recorded as to be serviceable for future reference. In the matter of case reports and records the Royal Army Medical Corps has a system that is beyond reproach. It must be remembered, however, that there are many voluntary agencies at work, hospitals equipped and manned by those hitherto unconnected with the army organisation. If any one unit fails to do its duty it renders the whole record imperfect. It is essential, therefore, that a small and authoritative body be appointed that, under the control of the Director-General, shall have oversight, collection, and preservation of hospital and other medical records. The active members of the Royal Army Medical Corps are rightly occupied in meeting the vital needs of the moment; it would be unwise to demand that certain of their number be called off to take special charge of this work. It is doubtless this very devotion of a well-worked body to immediate needs that explains the non-existence of authoritative medical histories of previous wars. The work could be accomplished equally well by medical men of standing and authority outside the service, once they had familiarised themselves with the statistical methods of the Director-General and his staff. Not mere clerks are wanted, but men possessing such status that their directions would be accepted and fulfilled by the different hospital units. There can be no lack of medical men of

high standing above the military age of service who would gladly, not to say eagerly, embrace such opportunity to be of service.

Those of us who are associated with hospitals know well that there is no greater stimulus to thoroughness and efficiency on the part of the medical staff, from the highest to the lowest, than is afforded by a good system of case reporting and record. A case well reported is a case well studied; and careful diagnosis and right treatment are the natural sequence. Wholly apart from the matter of future utility, a committee charged particularly with the oversight of the medical records of the war would contribute materially to the efficiency of the medical service and the welfare of our troops.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

J. GEORGE ADAMI.

McGill University, Montreal, Oct. 20th, 1914.

THE WOUNDED IN THE WAR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—May I venture to confirm the opinion expressed elsewhere that the care of our wounded needs immediate supplementation, not by the appointment of a few consultant diagnosticians, but in notably increasing the staffs and equipment of the base hospitals in France by sending out a number of hospital surgeons of experience? The condition in which the wounded arrive here, the statements they make of the want of surgical attention during transport, especially in trains, the fact that many cases are prejudiced (some have even died) by being put on board ship when they should have been treated at a base hospital, are all clearly due to a shortage of experienced surgeons on the other side of the Channel.

There are a number of Territorial medical officers like myself who found ourselves practically unemployed by the War Department as soon as we had completed the preparation of the base hospitals. In thereupon volunteering, as I did on August 12th, to be transferred to the Active Service List, I addressed on August 16th a memorandum to the Director-General venturing to suggest that as under the circumstances of the present war sudden pressure on the bases must be expected, the appointment of consultants as in the Boer war would not be so useful as the addition of a number of us to the Expeditionary Force as supernumerary surgeons of hospital experience who could be sent by the principal medical officer to serve base hospitals wherever the pressure was greatest. This suggestion, however, has not so far been accepted, and though naturally one is in favour of one's own view, I cannot help still feeling that our wounded are not receiving all the surgical help their splendid services deserve.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Nov. 2nd, 1914.

VICTOR HORSLEY.

VOLUNTEER SURGEONS FOR FRENCH HOSPITALS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—You were kind enough to publish on Sept. 26th a letter of mine written at Crépy-en-Valois, in which, amongst other matters, I made an appeal for surgeons for the French hospitals near the front. To that letter I am glad to say I had the large number of 153 replies, many of them from men holding important positions in London and provincial hospitals as surgeons or anæsthetists.