Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

STANDARDISATION OF DISINFECTANTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—With regard to Messrs. McDougall's letter on this subject which appeared in THE LANCET of Dec. 5th, I am desired by my board to state that they fully agree with the writers as to the desirability of a definite method of test for ascertaining the germicidal value of disinfectants, and that whilst they see no reason for questioning the sufficiency of the "Rideal-Walker" method they would be among the first to adopt any better test were it available.

But they cannot agree that because they have now secured the services of Mr. Ainslie Walker, one of the authors of that test, as their managing director and consulting chemist, the test should therefore be in any way discredited. Messrs. McDougall know perfectly well that when they or we claim a certain coefficient for our respective products that claim is not adjudicated by the authors of the test but by independent experts who fully understand the method, as it is now in very general use in this country and elsewhere. They should also know that the amplification of the test to meet the case of disinfectants that separate out into layers of different coefficients is simply a recognition of a practice which has long prevailed and which was foreseen and provided for in the recommendations of the expert committee of the Royal Sanitary Institute.

With regard to the particular questions that have arisen between Messrs. McDougall and ourselves, and which appear to have occasioned their letter to you, we think it undesirable to make any statement at present, seeing that Messrs. McDougall have indicated the possibility of their seeking the intervention of the court in the matter.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

For JEYES' SANITARY COMPOUNDS CO., LIMITED,
WM. PLANNER, Secretary.

Cannon-street, E.C., Dec. 14th, 1908.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As Messrs. McDougall Bros. and Messrs. Jeyes have both been clients of mine in the past, may I write to say that it seems unfortunate that the letter which Mr. Ainslie Walker and myself sent to you on Sept. 19th should have given rise to any dispute. Both firms should be in a position to know what has been done for the standardisation of disinfectants, so that I am surprised at the suggestions which Messrs. McDougall Bros. now make. The whole question may be resolved into a matter of dates.

1. There is already a well-known standard bacteriological test for disinfectants accepted by all workers here and in the colonies. Five years ago the Royal Sanitary Institute appointed a special committee, consisting of members whose qualifications and whose disinterestedness cannot be questioned, to decide on a definite standard. Their labours extended over two years, and their decision has been accepted and made use of by all workers both at home and abroad, and consisted in recommending for general work the test which Mr. Ainslie Walker and myself had suggested at Bradford in 1903. It should be pointed out that Mr. Walker's appointment in Messrs. Jeyes' Company was two years after the reading of this paper; but even if this had not been the case it should not detract from the value of our method.

2. The offer of a subscription to the cost of such an inquiry is also somewhat belated. When the question was submitted to the Royal Sanitary Institute, Messrs. Jeyes, through me, formally offered to bear its entire cost, but the institute preferred to meet the expenses out of their own funds and so happily averted the possibility of any suggestion of commercial influence on the result of the committee's work.

3. The last clause of that committee's report read thus: "Where special conditions exist which may interfere with the activity of the disinfectants, the consumer should be advised to call for the same conditions to be embodied in the test." Of late, medical officers of the City of London and other important towns have inserted in their tender forms a

stipulation which, whilst requiring no change in the technique of the original test, calls for a modification of the condition in which the disinfectant is presented for examination; and it was with the object of introducing some uniformity in the method of controlling this condition—too indefinite as it stands—that we put forward the suggestion which appears in our letter of Sept. 19th. In that letter we did not intend to modify in any way the value of the simple test as originally put forward and should be very sorry if other readers of the letter should put such an interpretation upon it.

In conclusion, Sir, the matter may be summed up thus: There is, and has been for some years, an authoritative standard which has met with general acceptance. The inclusion of the condition of behaviour on standing has been suggested by several medical officers of health acting in the interests of the public. Both firms tell you that they have some preparation that conforms to the Rideal-Walker test after the disinfectant has been diluted, so proving that this new condition of non-separation on standing is fulfilled. I have not yet had an opportunity of examining a sample of Messrs. McDougall's preparation in this way but do not doubt their word. In that case they will be able to compete in the open market under conditions which are open to all other manufacturers. I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Victoria-street, Westminster, Dec. 11th, 1908. SAMUEL RIDEAL.

* * In our footnote to a letter from Messrs. McDougall Bros. we said that there was a need for a standard method of conducting bacteriological tests for disinfectants. Nothing in Dr. Rideal's letter leads us to change our opinion. Dr. Rideal omits to say that the report of the special committee appointed by the Royal Sanitary Institute was not adopted by that body. It is not officially published.—ED. L.

THE VALUE OF CALMETTE'S OPHTHALMO-TUBERCULIN REACTION IN DISEASES OF CHILDREN.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—There has been recently considerable discussion as to the diagnostic value of Calmette's ophthalmo-tuberculin test in tuberculous disease. Whilst some believe it to be of great value, other observers are sceptical of its use, putting forward morbid conditions other than tubercle which give the reaction. Of its use in adult diseases not seen in a children's hospital I have had practically no experience, but venture to think that the following collection of cases clearly shows that the test, at least in children, is highly satisfactory. The solutions used (0.5 per cent. and 1 per cent.) were made from the powder, which is decidedly cheaper and as efficient as that made up ready for use in ampoules. The 1 per cent. is recommended to be used in those cases of suspected tuberculous disease where failure has occurred with the 0.5 per cent., but I found that those rare cases that failed to react with the weaker solution failed also with the stronger, or produced such an indefinite reaction as to be reckoned a query positive. The accepted reaction implies reddening of the ocular conjunctiva, the conjunctiva of lower eyelid and caruncle; but the delicate pink blush of the conjunctiva alone, by far the most frequent manifestation, is sufficient for a positive reaction. Some subjects give the reaction in both eyes when only one has been put to the test, and in one or two cases the opposite eye to that tested has actually been seen to react, the one treated remaining normal.

With regard to the time of reaction, although the whole cycle may be complete in eight hours, the reaction usually begins about the sixth hour, reaches its maximum in 12, and lasts 24 hours. In only one case out of 45 was there the least anxiety felt. Here the patient, a tuberculous child, reacted strongly, causing slight chemosis and photophobia. This, however, cleared up with frequent washings of boric acid lotion in four days.

In all Calmette's solution was used on 45 children varying in age from 3 months to 14 years. Of these 21 gave the positive reaction; 16 were verified by post-mortem examination, and 5 gave clinical evidence of tubercle. Of 17 cases of suspected tubercle, negative to Calmette's test, 9 at the necropsy were found to be free from any sign of tubercle; 5 where an examination could not be obtained gave no clinical

evidence of tubercle; and 3 were discharged in whom there was undoubted evidence of tubercle—viz., one case of phthisis advanced to cavitation and two patients suffering from tubercular peritonitis, having masses easily felt in the abdomen. Of 7 cases where tubercle was suspected one positive reaction occurred (the diagnosis resting between sarcoma and tubercle); tubercle was found at the operation. Of the remaining six, the diagnosis resting between empyema and tubercle, all failed to react, and were operated upon and found to be empyemata. Two died later and no tubercle was found at the post-mortem examination.

Two cases where the reaction was so indefinite (with 1 per cent. solution) that it was queried positive were found at the necropsy to be tubercle. These I have not included. It will be seen that in every case where a positive reaction was obtained tubercle was either found post mortem or definite clinical signs were evident. Three inaccuracies out of 45 cases occurred, but these were of the negative order. The patients submitted to the test were all under the care of the senior physicians, to whom I am indebted for the publication.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
HENLEY H. MOYLE.

East London Hospital for Children, Shadwell, E.,
Nov. 28th, 1908.

EPSOM ASYLUMS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In your issue of Dec. 5th is a short comment on the public meeting held in Epsom to protest against the walking parties from the lunatic asylums of the London County Council. As your remarks are likely, I think, to give a wrong impression as to the feeling in this locality on the question of the exercise of the lunatics in public, and also as to the object and result of the meeting, I hope you will give publication to these remarks. There were several motions before the meeting in addition to the one asking the London County Council to put a stop to "the practice of walking parties outside the asylum grounds" which you allude to, and one of the most important was the one asking the London County Council to direct attention to the escapes of lunatics. The result of the meeting was that the motions were passed and not lost by a large majority as you state. There were no direct attacks made on the medical superintendents as such, though, of course, the administration which permitted the walking parties and the escapes was adversely criticised, but the "attacks," if they can be called such, were directed against the asylums committee as a whole. As regards "the improvement in the mental state of the lunatics likely to be derived from the change of air and scene" there is some divergence of opinion amongst the medical superintendents of the asylums in this district as regards change of scene, for the medical superintendent of one of the asylums here does not permit the lunatics to exercise outside the grounds of the asylum he is in charge of, and his results are as good as the results of those who permit the walking parties outside the asylum grounds.

As was pointed out at the public meeting, the grounds of the asylums near here are extensive and give ample room for exercise, but no doubt popular opinion would be pacified if the asylums committee were only to allow small parties of selected patients with *adequate* escort to walk the public roads, and also if the asylum authorities take more active measures as regards escapes. As a result of the meeting a committee is to wait upon the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, and the Lunacy Commissioners if found necessary.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
HORTON.

Dec. 8th, 1908.

A SERUM TREATMENT OF CARCINOMA IN MICE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—You were good enough to verify by a note to my letter published in THE LANCET of Nov. 28th a quotation from a letter written to me by Dr. Borrel on Nov. 12th last, in which he said that he had done "nothing resembling" my experiments with sera upon carcinoma in mice. Dr. Blair Bell has stated that I had repeated Dr. Borrel's experiments. I have shown conclusively that I did nothing of the kind. He stated that I was self-invited to the Liverpool Medical Institution. I was not. In spite of this, in his letter to you

published on Dec. 12th Dr. Bell attempts to maintain his original position, although he uses vague words of apology.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
CHARLES WALKER.

Cancer Research Laboratory, University of Liverpool
Dec. 12th, 1908.

THE CAUSE AND PREVENTION OF DENTAL CARIES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the discussion on "The Cause and Prevention of Dental Caries," which has been published in recent numbers of THE LANCET, it has been assumed that extreme frequency in the occurrence of dental caries is a purely modern phenomenon which most writers attribute to "modern dietetics" or "the changes the food of man has undergone during the last few centuries."

I would like to call attention to the fact that 5000 years ago, in the time of the Pyramid builders, dental caries and alveolar abscesses were at least as common amongst the *adult aristocracy* of Egypt as they are in Europe to-day, although dental caries was rare among the people of lower social status and almost unknown in children. Among several thousand children found in ancient Egyptian graves I have seen only three instances of caries in deciduous teeth.

These facts, I think, support the general conclusions to which the discussion has pointed.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
G. ELLIOT SMITH.

Cairo, Dec. 7th, 1908.

THE USE AND ABUSE OF ALCOHOL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Last night I attended a meeting of the United Services Medical Society, held at the Royal Army Medical College, when a most interesting and instructive discussion took place on the use and abuse of alcohol. The question was raised as to whether the total abstaining races, such as the Hindoos, the Persians, and the Fellaheen of Egypt, showed any evidence of being more moral or progressive than the races that take alcohol, and it was also pointed out that all the progressive races, including the Japanese, take it. The total abstainers present did not attempt to answer this point, but it would be interesting if some of them could do so in your columns. Incidentally, they might also try to explain why the total abstainers have practically never produced great admirals, generals, or statesmen.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
H. N. ROBSON.

Junior Constitutional Club, Piccadilly, W., Dec. 11th, 1908.

THE STERILISATION OF POTABLE WATERS BY MEANS OF CALCIUM HYPOCHLORITE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your correspondents, referring to my brief contribution to your journal of Nov. 28th, overlooked the most essential point to which I directed attention—viz., that in waters free from suspended matter and of fair organic purity an almost infinitesimal amount of chlorine suffices for practical sterilisation. Experiments now being conducted on a larger scale indicate that the same results are obtainable as in laboratory experiments. I believe that I am in possession of all the reports which have been referred to, and hitherto the amounts of chlorine which have been used for sewages and dirty waters, whilst showing that even such waters were capable of being sterilised, gave very little ground for hoping that the process could be made a practical one.

May I also direct attention to an error in the original paper? I find that the hypochlorite can be purchased at £7 per ton, or less than half the price I first had quoted. This means that about 25,000 gallons can be sterilised for one penny. When electrical treatment can be shown to produce the same effect for less money I will give it further attention.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
JOHN C. THRESH.

London Hospital Medical College,
Dec. 15th, 1908