THE EXAMINATION OF SURGEONS-MAJOR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Pressure of business has prevented my ere this asking you the favour of a space in your valuable journal for the few following remarks, in addition to the many already expressed, upon the subject of submitting surgeons-major in the army over twenty years' service to a qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of brigade-surgeon (*vide* Army Circular, August 1st, 1884). The inadvisability of any examination for officers of such seniority appears to me apparent, having regard both to the prestige of the service and to the *amour propre* of the profession. This presumably is a military question, for which some imaginary precedent may supply the apology. Not even so much excuse or extenuation can be claimed for paragraph 9, by which I see it is intended that these elderly victims are literally, in more senses than one, to be put through their A B C, as I notice alphabetical clauses through two-thirds of the alphabet, terminating at letter O, which forms the culminating point of the whole absurdity. See paragraph 9, clause O: "Questions on operative surgery and practical medicine will also form part of this examination." But one parallel could be found for examining in such subjects professional men of a quarter of a century's seniority—viz., to subject all lieutenant-colonels in the army to an examination in the goose-step as a qualifying test of their fitness for promotion to the rank of colonel. Indeed, my allusion to the manners and customs of the feathered tribe appears suggestively applicable in tracing the present steps taken by the originators of this circular. This does not explain, however, the unaccountable deviation on the Director-General's part from the high order of intellect and capacity with which he has hitherto distinguished his present position, and if, contrary to his convictions, he has allowed himself to be influenced, the fact is only the more deplorable. The assignable object of these innovations is a desire to prove the efficiency of the department; but why delay that demonstration for twenty years? Were an examination necessary for such a purpose, its utility would be more marked at the commencement of an officer's career than towards its close. If a man has been efficient during twenty years' service, there is but scant necessity for proving the fact at the end of that term; and if he has hitherto been incompetent, it is late to remedy the evil. By all means subject officers to a rigid and most searching examination upon the widest range of professional subjects, between the ranks of surgeons and surgeons-major. From that much benefit would most probably accrue. But an officer practising for over twenty years is as unlikely to profit in the smallest degree from an examination as he is certain to be embittered against a service which could subject him to so unnecessary an indignity.

By paragraph 11 we are informed as to the nature and means of this inquisitorial revival. "It is to be in part by printed papers and in part *viva voce*. The Board will enter so far into the subject-matter of each head selected for *viva voce* examination as to show that the officer's knowledge has been fully tested." By all means. Only primarily let the Board's knowledge "be fully tested" as to its capability of pronouncing upon the practice and experience of officers who quite probably are as worthy of confidence as would be the opinion of those exalted personages forming the Board. By paragraph 12 I see this Board is "carefully to record all questions asked and answers received, and to send the record to the Director-General." But such a record must materially improve or deteriorate in merit according to the capacity and reliability of the source through which it is transmitted. To conclude: The papers will then be submitted to another Board, likewise of experienced officers, who in their turn are to pronounce upon the competence of the officer. For the second time the colouring given to that officer's proficiency would be deeply tinged by the prevailing hues of the Board's capability for transmitting the treble-distilled matter originally received from the unfortunate victim. He consequently must be largely dependent, not upon his own brains, but upon what could not obviously be a certain maximum quantity of that commodity in the possession of those relays of experienced individuals, always apparently unquestionable in their description. One naturally wonders who are to form this all-important tribunal. First, if civilians,

an inevitable slur is cast upon the proficiency of the department. Secondly, if men in the same service, how can it be ascertained that they know more about the subject than those they are pronouncing upon? Thirdly, will the presiding genii be called from amongst those fortunate mushrooms who spring suddenly to the surface and into office, having been grown in the forcing soil of an effete favouritism? Then, indeed, the whole injustice is not left without a coping-stone. But, as though there were any apprehension that the entire fiasco might not be rendered quite complete, we are informed that "the examination will be optional." Is it to be inferred from this that there is a lurking suspicion in the minds of the authorities that the veteran doctor would prefer bringing his grey hairs in sorrow, as a surgeon-major, to the grave, rather than face the alternative of being turned into a metaphorical shuttlecock, to be battledored from Board to Board, and from the A B C to the Omega of his profession? A very heartfelt sympathy with, and interest in, the department, gathered from personal experience in the services, must be my apology to you for so inconsiderately trespassing on your space.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. I. WHEELER, F.R.C.S.,
Dublin, Sept. 16th, 1884. Ex-President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland.

THE CHOLERA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The continued spread of cholera on the Continent makes it imperative on the part of medical officers to take extra precautionary measures to prevent its outbreak in this country, and especially in London. When cholera first appeared in France, the metropolitan authorities freely used disinfectants to street gullies and gratings, so that poisonous gases from putrefying matter were in a measure destroyed. It is not only gratings, gullies, dustbins, urinals, and receptacles for dust that require special attention at this time of the year, but the greatest danger exists in the branch drains leading from buildings to sewers in the streets. These are to some extent not under the control of vestries, and the inlets into sewers are often closed, and from these gases of the most poisonous nature are produced. In these branch drains disinfectants should be freely employed during the next two months. I am aware that many of the medical profession treat very lightly the theory that gases from putrefying matter are the principal agents in generating and transmitting zymotic disease; but to those who have investigated the question, it is not one of theory, but of fact. Previous to the cholera outbreak on the Continent, small-pox was very prevalent in London, but the free use of disinfectants as a preventive against cholera had the effect of stopping the small-pox epidemic.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

September, 1884.

R. H. REEVES.

LORD TENNYSON AND THE SURGEON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Even professing Christians are liable to imagine one another to be monsters of iniquity, and this is due to ignorance, for when placed on the same platform in some effort to benefit humanity, they learn to esteem one another. Probably Lord Tennyson is ignorant of doctors and their work, while Dr. Moxon may be ignorant of the incessant charitable visits of the Poet Laureate to his poor neighbours. It may be that Lord Tennyson was accustomed to distribute tracts in some village hospital, and met with a surgeon whose time did not allow him to pay sufficient, or, at least, desired, attention to the distinguished visitor. We ought never to judge hastily, and while surgeons may be doing everything in their power to relieve and cure their patients and deserve all honour for their sympathy and kindness, they must respect and honour the man who throws open his garden to the waifs of the street and at his own expense takes a crowd of little convalescents or street Arabs from the slums of London to indulge them with games and regale them with fruit on his own lawn, while he instructs them by reciting pieces of poetry and reading Gospel stories to them. I do not know anything of Lord Tennyson's deeds of charity, but no doubt his biographer will relate them. It is possible,

though improbable, that an intelligent man, full of sympathy and kindness for the poor and the afflicted, may be unable to appreciate the work done in hospitals, and may busy himself in establishing homes for the destitute and suffering that may be entirely under his own control. If both Dr. Moxon and Lord Tennyson are spending their lives in relieving the suffering and bringing joy to the mourner, a more intimate acquaintance will no doubt make them love one another.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,
Sept. 1884. S. B. G. MCKINNEY, L.R.C.P. Edin.

BRITISH MEDICAL BENEVOLENT FUND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The late Sir Erasmus Wilson has munificently left the British Medical Benevolent Fund £5000, but as Lady Wilson takes a life interest in the whole of his property, this legacy of course is not payable until after her death.

I take this opportunity of bringing before the profession our urgent need of funds, for we are totally unable at the present time to help many of the deserving cases that come before us.

Subscriptions may be paid to the Treasurer, Dr. Broadbent, 34, Seymour-street, Portman-square, or to

Your obedient servant,

GEORGE P. FIELD,

Hon. Financial Secretary,

31, Lower Seymour-street, Portman-square, Sept. 10th, 1884.

"ORGANISMS IN CHOLERA STOOLS."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Adverting to my letter and drawing of a fortnight back, I desire to add that the organism in question may flourish abundantly in dejecta possessing a distinctly acid reaction. It can hardly, therefore, represent the specific bacillus of Dr. Koch, however closely corresponding in respect to descriptions of the latter as yet published. Most observers would, I think, agree in referring my figures to those of a vibrio, admitting (what I find now doubted)¹ the validity of this particular form of bacterium.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Bombay, August 19th, 1884. H. V. CARTER.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

(From our own Correspondent.)

TYPHOID ON BOARD-SHIP FROM IMPURE WATER.

At a meeting of the Sanitary Committee of the Middlesborough Corporation last week, the medical officer, Dr. Malcomson, reported the arrival of a Norwegian vessel, named the *Tross*, with typhoid fever on board. There were two cases, and one of the men had died. This case was a very bad one, and one or two of those who attended on the patients caught the infection. The ship had been disinfected, and an analysis of the water showed that it was little better than sewage, and had occasioned the outbreak. It was resolved to forward a copy of the medical officer's report to the Board of Trade, in order that captains of ships at Stettin may be warned against taking in a supply of water at that place for drinking purposes.

CHOLERA PRECAUTIONS ON THE TYNE.

Professor de Chaumont, medical officer to Her Majesty's Privy Council, has been visiting the Tyne with a view to ascertain what precautions have been taken to guard against the introduction of cholera into the port. As well as visiting the floating hospital at Jarrow, he has inspected the small-pox hospital on our Town Moor, the convalescent hospital for fever and small-pox at Byker, the fever hospital, &c., and he was shown the plans &c., for the proposed new and extensive hospital at Heaton for infectious diseases. He was supplied with details by our city authorities of the provision made by them for combating any infectious disease that may from time to time become epidemic. Professor de Chaumont, on leaving Newcastle, made a similar inspection of the neighbouring port of Blyth.

¹ Vide Mr. W. B. Grove's useful Synopsis, recently published by Chatto and Windus.

SANITARY MATTERS AT DURHAM.

In a previous letter, last June, I mentioned that the Corporation of Durham City had, in consequence of the remonstrance of their medical officer of health, agreed to provide a hospital for infectious diseases, and went so far as to select a site. The other day one of their aldermen actually succeeded in inducing the Corporation to rescind the resolution, notwithstanding that it is admitted, and notorious, that a greater necessity exists now than when the proposition was mooted and carried. It may be explained that the Corporation sits as the Urban Sanitary Authority, and that their opposition to their own scheme was based on the "needless expense" foundation, or, in other words, "the penny-wise and pound-foolish" system of economy. One of their own newspapers speaks of the procedure on the part of the Corporation as "the by no means uncommon exploit of advancing one step backwards." As a commentary on the strange proceedings of the Corporation, Dr. Barron, their medical officer of health has notified an outbreak of small-pox in the city, the district of Framwellgate having no less than fifteen cases. The Durham guardians have determined to give liberal out-door relief to all small-pox cases requiring it, in order to isolate the disease as much as possible and to keep it away from the workhouse; but probably the Local Government Board may have something to say about the absence of proper hospital accommodation for infectious cases in the city of Durham.

DEATH OF MR. JOHN PRATT, M.R.C.S.

The death of Mr. John Pratt, M.R.C.S., is announced. He was for many years in active practice in the city of Durham, and a few years since he received a public and valuable testimonial in recognition of his labours during the severe small-pox epidemic in Durham in 1872, when he attended over 700 cases. He was distinguished by his kindness to his poorer patients. Mr. Pratt entertained peculiar views in reference to the subject of vaccination.

Newcastle-on-Tyne, Sept. 16th.

GLASGOW.

(From our own Correspondent.)

SMALL-POX AND DIARRHŒA.

IN the health officer's report for the fortnight ending 30th August two important points are noted—a sudden increase in the death-rate from diarrhœa in the very young, and the disappearance of small-pox from our midst. With regard to the first, it is ascribed to the recent sultry weather, ending in a very severe electric storm. No fresh cases of small-pox had been discovered in the city for a month; "and as the last patient had been dismissed from the small-pox hospital on 23rd August, the city is now entirely free of that disease, and when it reappears it must be by importation from without." This result, one on which the citizens of Glasgow are to be sincerely congratulated, may very justly be said to be due to the untiring efforts of Dr. J. B. Russell and his energetic staff of sanitary officers, to check the epidemic.

OUTBREAK OF TYPHOID FEVER.

Another outbreak of typhoid fever, affecting chiefly the inmates and officials of our two infirmaries and the fever hospital, is at present under investigation. In the Royal Infirmary no fewer than thirty cases have occurred, three of the officials being among the number. At the Belvidere Fever Hospital one of the Royal Infirmary nurses has died from the disease. It is believed that the epidemic is in some way connected with the milk-supply; whether this is the case will doubtless be made clear in Dr. Russell's forthcoming report on the outbreak.

THE DRAINAGE SYSTEM OF NEW BUILDINGS.

At a recent meeting of the Dean of Guild Court, in Glasgow, the Lord Dean of Guild (Mr. William McEwen) made the very sensible statement that, in his opinion, much advantage would be derived from the appointment of an officer whose duty it would be to survey the drains of new buildings and report on their sufficiency. Much good might be anticipated to flow from such an appointment. If the Court sanctioned the erection of buildings only on the under-