owners without any legislative interference, and it is their interest to make them. Training ships, and a medical inspection (at the rate of 2s. per man), a varied, cheaper, and far more antiscorbutic scale of diet than that which at present obtains, and action in accordance with the third recommendation, would make the publication of such a report as this an event of rare occurrence, and the lime-juice clauses of the Merchant Shipping Act unnecessary.

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS AND CONJOINT BOARDS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Will you allow me space for a few remarks in my own name, illustrative of the document which you were kind enough to publish last week, as intended for the consideration of the Medical Council?

At the banquet on Friday in honour of Sir Robert Christison there were several noteworthy things said which do not appear in any of the reports of the proceedings that I have seen. I will endeavour briefly to indicate some of these in so far as they bear upon the subject in question.

Sir William Thomson, president of the British Association of Science, in replying to the toast of "Science," proposed by the Lord Justice Clerk, intimated, not obscurely, that the multiplication of examinations as tests of proficiency was becoming an obstruction to true scientific progress. With a simplicity and earnestness of manner in accordance with his character, he said that if this system goes on much longer the result will inevitably be that through examinations in science there will be no "science" left amongst us worthy of the name or of being proposed as a toast. Sir William Thomson sees clearly that the culture of science, which is the proper aim of the universities and the real interest of the country, requires, not uniformity, but variety; not a fixed minimum standard, but an indefinitely high standard, to be held in view, and worked up to, by every teacher and every learner.

Dr. Acland, of Oxford, also insisted very strongly on the evils of over-much examination in relation to professional and scientific pursuits. The object of the universities, he said, was not to cram men with knowledge, but to form character; and in proportion as they aimed at this latter object would they distrust the effect of examinations as affording a real test of efficiency. It should not be forgotten, he said, that for one or two incompetent men rejected (which was all that a pass examination could do on behalf of the public), an examination founded on a system of cram tended, by its indirect effect on the studies pursued, to dwarf the energies of a score of more or less competent men, and thus really to discourage independence, and to defeat the true object of all high education. Dr. Acland said that under a highly developed system of examination a man like Sir Robert Christison might have been wholly occupied during some of the best years of his life in getting his knowledge tested, instead of in applying his whole energies to original and independent research, and thus devoting his character and life to the service of his country.

In the case of the two eminent men now referred to, it is just possible that I may have in some point misapprehended or imperfectly indicated what was said; and if so, I beg to apologise in advance, as I am obliged to trust to my own recollection. But in the case of Sir Robert Christison there need be no doubt, as the gist of his utterances upon the subject was to approve *in toto* of what has recently been spoken and written by Dr. Lyon Playfair, which Sir Robert advised his audience to read carefully as being by far the best and most exhaustive discussion of the relations of examination to teaching with which he was acquainted.

From these varied, but at the same time similar, utterances of men in very different spheres of public duty I

gathered that among those who have had the best opportunities of judging of the effect of examinations, there is a deeply-rooted distrust of their practical working, at least upon the principle of detecting and excluding inefficiency by establishing what is presumed to be a fixed minimum of qualification. I presume that none of these great authorities would have altogether discountenanced examinations in their own proper place—i.e., as adjuncts to a good system of teaching; but when divorced from this, and especially when converted into a routine by being made simply a police regulation to get rid of incompetent men (as is now proposed), medical examinations will be sure to degenerate, and the higher education will be discouraged in proportion as the energies of our students are diverted from solid and thoughtful progress in the schools by the supposed necessity of mastering the formulæ to be propounded to them at the end of their career by the "Conjoint Boards."

I do not advocate the present system as free from certain easily-stated objections; but the objections to the supposed laxity of certain examining boards seem to be less than those which might be urged against perilling the whole scheme of the higher education by holding out to our students that a perfect qualification for all practical purposes is attainable through a sort of registered minimum of efficiency; just as herrings are crowded in barrels on the east coast of Scotland when considered just good enough for exportation, according to the samples examined by the official inspectors.

The true plan for securing, as far as may be, the efficiency of the various examining boards would appear to be, not to deprive them of responsibility, but to place them in the performance of their public functions under the eye of vigilant public officers, charged to report from time to time as to the performance of these functions. Thus the evil-doers (if such there be) would be corrected and restrained, while the liberty of efficient teachers and examiners would be respected. Variety of method and result would, under such circumstances, be a positive gain to the public, inasmuch as no absolute routine of drill for the medical practitioner of the future could then become imperative, and it would become the object of all competent examiners and teachers to raise, through such variety, the general standard of acquirement.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Glasgow, February 26th, 1872.

W. T. GAIRDNER.

THE RICHMOND HOSPITAL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In your medical annotations of this day's LANCET, you refer to a want of harmony in the Richmond Hospital. No one regrets this more than I do, still I should not have troubled you with any remarks on the subject only that I see from your article that you are not in full possession of the facts. You attribute this want of harmony "chiefly to a resolution on the part of the Committee to add to the four officers of the medical staff three others to attend to the out-patients."

The hospital has at the present time 15 beds; about 150 in-patients and 1000 out-patients attend during the year.

The medical staff numbers already seven officers, and if the proposition of the committee be sanctioned by the governors, two more will be added, to attend solely on the out-patients, making a total of nine on the staff. The rules of the hospital were most carefully compiled from the rules of other successful hospitals, by a sub-committee consisting of lay and medical members, and Rules 33 and 34 provide that four shall be the number of the staff, notwithstanding that eight were appointed in the first place. This was done because each had an equal right to the office, and it was considered best there should be no election at that time, but that this number should be allowed gradually to reduce itself to four, which was found to be amply sufficient for hospitals up to 50 beds. The number of eight was therefore distinctly declared to be exceptional and temporary, and one of the eight has lately retired. I am glad to see that you endorse this opinion when you say: "We confess that, viewed abstractedly, four medical officers seem to us sufficient for an infirmary with but 15 beds and 120 out-patients in the week, especially as there is in Richmond an excellent

dispensary doing the usual out-door work of a hospital"; and I am sure that most persons who are acquainted with hospital management will agree with you and with me upon this question.

My resignation of the honorary secretaryship arose from the determination of the committee to recommend the increase of the medical staff from seven to nine, which I knew to be a course totally opposed to the practice of other hospitals, as well as to the rules of our own, and I did not wish to have the responsibility of carrying out a plan which I felt would be detrimental to the hospital.

I believe there are many reasons why a disproportionately large staff is not an advantage to a hospital; for instance, it very much increases the difficulties of nursing, and cannot materially conduce to the advancement of professional knowledge. I need hardly say that if a hospital is to succeed medically and surgically, which is the only true measure of success, each officer should have a sufficient number of beds to keep alive an interest in his work. Again, the severance of the in- and out-patient departments in so small a hospital would be an evil; it cannot be expected that two men would be willing to undertake the whole of the out-patient work without the smallest probability of having any beds at their disposal for many years to come, besides being obliged to hand over the most serious cases amongst the out-patients to the seven men who would retain the fifteen beds. My wish has been that the services of my colleagues should be retained. I regret that five of them decline to see the out-patients, and I was in hopes that my offer to continue seeing them two days a week, with the help of the sixth, leaving the other two days to the joint efforts of the five, would have solved the difficulty and obviated the wish for an increase of the staff.

Your remarks lead me to suppose that you cannot have seen my letter of resignation addressed to the governors, as you say—"We feel persuaded that Dr. Warwick will see, on reflection, that this letter betrays more solicitude for 'the establishment' than for the charity." From what I have now stated I think you will admit your conclusion to have been somewhat premature. The more I reflect on the matter the more I am convinced that four honorary medical officers, with a resident house-surgeon to act as secretary, would efficiently supply the whole service of the Richmond Infirmary until it becomes greatly enlarged; and that the endeavour to maintain what is defined in the rules as "the establishment" will be the most direct means of maintaining the best interests of the charity.

I beg to enclose you a copy of my letter resigning the honorary secretaryship.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Richmond, S.W., February 24th, 1872. R. ARCHER WARWICK.

SUBSTITUTE FOR THE OPHTHALMOSCOPIC MIRROR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The ophthalmoscope having come into general use in medicine, it may save considerable embarrassment in choosing from among the vast variety of instruments offered to point out that we all possess one already in our watch-pockets—viz., a watch-glass.

Any transparent reflecting body is an ophthalmoscope, and, with the ordinary lamp, quite enough light is returned from the concavity of a watch-glass to display all the details of the fund of the eye. It is used in the same manner as the mirror, but possesses this advantage, that (in viewing the inverted image) it may be held at any convenient distance from the observer's eye, so long as he looks through it. Therefore, if more light be desired, the watch-glass may be approximated to the patient's eye till all its reflection is concentrated on his pupil. Atropine is not required except in special cases, as there is no glare to provoke contraction of the pupil.

Any watch-glass will do provided the glass be (as it is in almost all of them) equally thick throughout, so as not to distort the image seen through it. Improved forms will, of course, at once occur to the reader—e.g., with a central convexity to enlarge the image or concavity to correct myopia; but to discuss these would be foreign to my purpose, which is merely to point out the use of what we have

already got; the employment of which, I may add, was suggested to me by the reports of some of Mr. Carter's admirable experiments.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Heywood, Feb. 19th, 1872. J. S. TORROP, M.D.

THE NEW SANITARY BILL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Will you allow me to suggest to the local secretaries to at once call a meeting of all union medical officers in each county town, so that the Sanitary Bill may receive consideration and support. The guardians in Worcestershire are already contemplating a meeting, and there is no doubt the Bill will receive active opposition in very many quarters.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

WM. WOODWARD, M.D.,
Member of the Union Medical Officers' Association.
Worcester, Feb. 24th, 1872.

BIRMINGHAM.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

THE small-pox epidemic is abating. The returns of reported cases show that during the week ending Feb. 10th there were 66 cases, while in that ending Jan. 13th there were 96; and, owing to the mildness of the season, the deaths from other causes have been so few as to reduce the death-rate to 21. In Wolverhampton a very marked diminution of the small-pox is evident: only 6 deaths were recorded from that disease during the past week.

A memorial, signed by nearly all the leading physicians and surgeons, has been presented to the Corporation, asking for the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health. It is to be hoped that the Corporation will not oppose the prayer of so disinterested and public-spirited a body of men, but will be guided by the wise counsels of those who endeavour to prove to them that "salus populi, suprema lex."

A public park has recently been offered to the town by Miss Ryland, a generous lady, who has before on many occasions nobly supported the cause of the various charities, and to whom the "sanatorium" has up to the present time been indebted for "a local habitation." The estate, which is fifty-four acres in extent, and is situate within two miles of the centre of the borough, is valued at £30,000, and its benevolent donor has further expressed her intention of spending £5000 in laying it out as a public park.

A town's meeting has been held for the purpose of authorising the Town Council to apply to Parliament for an Act to make further provision for the improvement of the sanitary state of the borough. The scheme may briefly be said to do away with the open-midden system; to intercept faecal matters so as to dispose of them without letting them enter the sewers; to discourage the use of waterclosets by rating each one annually at 10s.; and to purify the sewage of the town by filtering it through land which the Council is to be empowered to acquire. The resolution in favour of the Bill was supported by Dr. Heslop in a powerful and argumentative speech, and carried with only three dissentients.

The recently erected out-patient department of the Children's Hospital has, owing to the deserved popularity of that institution, already proved too small for the largely increasing number of applicants, and a committee has been appointed to extend the present building in accordance with plans which have been approved by the medical committee.

The annual meeting of the governors of the Birmingham and Midland Counties Training Institution for Nurses has been held under the presidency of Lord Leigh. The report showed that the institution had been enabled to officer the Children's Hospital entirely, and the General and Queen's Hospitals in part, and also to spare some few nurses for the Midland Asylum for Idiots; 110 private families had also been supplied with nurses. The total expenditure had been £1282, and the income, £905. Large additional donations were announced, which will, we hope, relieve this useful institution from any financial embarrassment, and enable it to extend its sphere of usefulness.