"CERTAIN ORGANISMS ISOLATED FROM CANCER AND THEIR PATHOGENIC EFFECTS UPON ANIMALS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—May I correct a few misapprehensions to which Mr. John D. Malcolm's letter in *THE LANCET* of April 1st upon my paper on the above subject¹ may give rise?

My paper, as read before the Royal Society, contained little more than the record of certain experiments connected with the isolation and pathogenic properties of certain organisms, but Mr. Malcolm objects to certain terms therein used.

He maintains that I have not proved that "malignant tumours" have been produced. What has been produced by the organisms in certain animals is this:—multiple tumours in various parts, and the death of the animal. I think that the term "malignant tumours" is an accurate one for this set of conditions.

Mr. Malcolm says that I asserted that I had obtained "pure cultures of parasites standing in causal relationship to cancer." I did not assert anything of the kind. I stated the fact that I had obtained a pure culture of an organism from a cancer, which organism was pathogenic to animals; and I also previously stated that I, in common with Metchnikoff, Ruffer, and others, regarded as parasites standing in causal relationship to the disease certain cell-inclusions which could be found in cancer.

Mr. Malcolm says that I do not state whether any tumours resulted from the experiments numbered 4 and 5 in my paper. It seems obvious in a summary of experiments on a certain subject that if there had been any results I should have recorded them, and that no mention would imply absence of results, as was the case with the two experiments in question.

In reference to Mr. Malcolm's second paragraph the growths produced in the peritoneum were certainly not carcinomatous; how could they be? They consisted principally of endothelial cells, as did also those in the lungs.

With regard to the corneal experiments referred to in his third paragraph, all I can say is that after 48 hours the epithelium had proliferated considerably and had dipped down into the subjacent tissues. I showed also at the Royal Society, a slide of a cornea five to six days after inoculation, in which the epithelium had burrowed into the deeper layers of the cornea for a considerable distance in all directions from the point of inoculation. This does not happen in the control experiments I have made in which no organisms have been used.

Mr. Malcolm begs the question when he says that I believe that the organisms are capable of inducing cancer. I have nowhere stated so; I cannot yet tell, as the matter is still in the experimental stage and my communication to the Royal Society was only a preliminary record of certain results obtained up to the present time.

With regard to the fourth paragraph in Mr. Malcolm's letter the culture used was, as stated in the third section of my paper, isolated from the case there mentioned.

The conclusions which Mr. Malcolm hints that I have too confidently adopted are quite logically deducible from the experiments which I have described. That I have used the word "tumours" is true, but it seemed to me to be the least objectionable word to adopt; and I think that new formations, occurring as swellings or lumps in places where there should be none and visible withal to the naked eye, may fairly be so called. That such tumours, or new growths, were produced is certain; that they were structurally endotheliomata in the peritoneum and lung is also certain; and that in the cornea the new growth was epithelial is also certain. Consisting as they did, then, of endothelial cells in the one case, and of epithelial cells in the other, they could hardly be called "inflammatory," unless this word is used in the sense of meaning certain specific phenomena of resistance, in which case cancer itself may, I think, be called "inflammatory."

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

H. G. PLIMMER.

St. John's Wood-road, N.W., April 4th, 1899.

¹ *THE LANCET*, March 25th, 1899.

"THE HEALTHIEST CITY IN THE WORLD."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Under the above title in *THE LANCET* of April 1st Dr. Benjafield of Hobart, Tasmania, has given some interesting particulars of the health of Hobart and has thrown down a challenge. He will find that although the health of Hobart is apparently very good many English towns can easily beat it. In Eastbourne, for instance, the population of which last year was 5000 larger than that of Hobart, the total deaths were 68 less than the deaths of Hobart, the death-rate being 10·8 per 1000 instead of the 14·0 of which Dr. Benjafield is proud. For the year 1897 the death-rate of Eastbourne was under 10 per 1000, each of the above rates being inclusive of every death—visitors, workhouse, and hospitals included. With regard to the special challenge of Dr. Benjafield as to deaths under 65 years of age it is impossible to ascertain the death-rates at various ages without knowing exactly the population at various ages as well as the number of deaths. He divides his total death-rate of 14 exactly into two unequal portions as being the death-rates above and below 65 years of age. This does not give a correct death-rate in any way. It is obvious that if, to take an extreme case, nine-tenths of his people were over 65 years of age, whereas only one-tenth of our people were over 65 years of age, his total number of deaths below 65 years of age might be very minute compared with ours, while the rates might be very much the reverse. His challenge cannot therefore be taken up on his present figures; the death-rates for persons over and under 65 years of age respectively must be calculated on the numbers living in the respective age groups and not by simply dividing the total rate.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

W. G. WILLOUGHBY, M.D. Lond.,
Medical Officer of Health.

Town Hall, Eastbourne, April 2nd, 1899.

SUDDEN DEATH: NO INQUEST.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—At 3.45 P.M. on March 30th a man stopped my carriage in the street asking me to go to a house within a quarter of a mile to see a woman who had fallen down in a supposed fit. I went straightway and found a woman dead on the floor. Apparently there was nothing to account for death. I was told that she had not complained of illness, nor had she been seen by any medical man previously. Information was at once sent to the coroner, but on the morning of March 31st I was informed that he did not consider an inquest necessary. To this moment I have no idea of the cause of death in this case.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

THOS. ALPH. BUCK, M.B. Lond.,

Surgeon to the Royal Isle of Wight Infirmary and
County Hospital.
Byde, April 3rd, 1899.

* * It must be remembered that a coroner's duty is not only to hold inquests but also to decide if they ought to be held. We must suppose, therefore, that the coroner in this case was put in possession of private information enabling him to be certain that the death followed upon natural causes. It is a little difficult to conjecture what this information could have been, while from our correspondent's statement the absence of an inquest is simply astounding.—ED.L.

THE IRISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—It has been arranged that the *annual* meeting of the Association shall be held for this year in Cork, and it appears to be in contemplation that, at least in each alternate succeeding year, the *annual* general meeting shall be similarly held in Belfast, Galway, and other provincial centres. It is known to the Association in Dublin and Cork, and probably elsewhere, that I am strongly opposed to this new departure, and, as I feel that my action in the matter may be misinterpreted by the members of the Association in a sense unfavourable to me I beg your permission to give my reasons. Before doing so I desire to say that, so far from wishing to throw cold water on any effort of my provincial brethren to organise