Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE
GREAT TOBACCO QUESTION:
IS SMOKING INJURIOUS TO HEALTH?

EFFECTS OF TOBACCO ON EUROPEANS IN INDIA.

[LETTER FROM JAMES RANALD MARTIN, ESQ., F.R.S.]

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—My friend, Mr. Solly, having referred to what I have stated in the work on "The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions," respecting the effects of the abuse of tobacco, and believing this subject to be one seriously affecting the public health, I beg leave to state, more particularly and more in detail, some of the results of my observation on this question.

It is matter of constant observation amongst army surgeons, ever since the peace of 1815, that the habit of cigar-smoking, introduced into this country from Portugal, Spain, and France, by the officers of the British army, has produced a greater amount of pale, sallow complexions, amongst young officers more especially, than had ever before been observed as resulting from any other course. Had the morbid complexion been all, the matter would have been of little importance; but here it generally means—loss of appetite, defective nutrition, anaemia, and disordered nervous and vascular functions, all in the same individual. My observations lead me altogether to the conclusions of Van Praag: that the operation of tobacco is at first stimulant, and at last depressing, not only on the circulation and respiration, but also on the nervous system; accelerated circulation, increase of respiratory movements, and excessive irritation of the muscular system, being the phenomena first observed. The concluding symptoms are those of general depression, both of animal and organic life, with occasional instances of moral and physical impotency, accompanied by the most mournful results. I am here speaking of what I have witnessed.

The most ordinary results of excessive use of tobacco are—the most severe forms of irritable dyspepsia, giddiness, disturbed action of the heart, nervous tremors, and cachexia, all amounting occasionally to palsy. Young gentlemen who are in the habit of putting "an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains" do not become aware of these facts until it sometimes becomes too late. A highly scientific and distinguished captain of engineers of the Indian army told me: "All the young fellows of my term who went out to India, having bad habits, are dead, excepting two." And what has become of them? "They were cashiered!" Here the question of tobacco was not immediately in contemplation; but I have no doubt whatever, from the results of my observations in India and at home, that, of the habits which led to this sad end, the abuse of tobacco was, amongst these young officers, the most banefully influential.

I dispute the alleged benefits of even moderate tobacco-smoking as a preventive of damp or of malaria; and seriously anomalous symptoms I have seen to arise, in the progress of malarious fevers, from the abuse of it—such symptoms as may lead to the most grave mistakes in the treatment of fevers, if the medical officer be not careful to inquire into the habits of his patient. Of this also I have seen the most emphatic examples. Those who urge the prophylactic benefits of tobacco carry the habit from the swamps of Burmah into the arid plains of Hindustan, in defiance of geographical differences.

The late Dr. A. T. Thomson declared the active principle of tobacco, nicotina, to be a direct sedative, and that even medi-

cinally this drug must, under all circumstances, be employed with the utmost caution. He adds, that the empyreumatic oil of tobacco, which is produced in minute quantities in the ordinary process of smoking, if dropped into a wound, "causes instant death." I can state of my own observation, that the miseries, mental and bodily, which I have witnessed from the abuse of cigar-smoking, and chiefly in young men, far exceeded anything detailed in the "Confessions of an Opium-eater;" and I feel assured that the abuse of tobacco, however employed, may be classified amongst those habits which produce chronic poisoning.

The late Dr. Prout found some analogous and equally poisonous principle as oxalic acid, probably of an acid nature, generated in certain individuals by the abuse of tobacco, and their cachectic appearance gave evidence of some great injury to health. The blood of such persons was found "dark, and often of a greenish-yellow tint."

The physiological effects here presented, as the results of the abuse of tobacco, have not been noted for the present occasion, but have been educed by long practical observation of large bodies of men, in military as well as in civil life.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

Grosvenor-street, February 23rd, 1857.

J. R. MARTIN.

SMOKING NOT A CAUSE OF INSANITY.

[LETTER FROM DR. BUCKNILL.]

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your excellent journal has recently done good service by calling the attention of the public to the injurious effects of excessive smoking upon the bodily health. There can be no doubt of the fact, that the excessive use of tobacco, in any of its forms, is highly pernicious. The excessive use of snuff is liable to occasion unmanageable forms of indigestion; that of chewing and smoking weakens the energy of the nervous system, impairs the digesting force of the stomach, and the secreting force of the liver; and, in extreme cases, produces an affection of the muscular system not unlike paralysis agitans. It is probable that this affection has sometimes been mistaken for delirium tremens. The injurious effects of the abuse of this narcotic have been so fully dwelt upon that it is needless to reiterate them, except in general terms, and for the purpose of expressing my own conviction, that they are legitimately laid to the charge of the "noxious weed," and that the writers who have held up these evils to the public notice, have written for a good purpose, the promotion of the public health.

But when the evils which result from the abuse of tobacco are made the pretext for denouncing its employment, in any degree or form, it does appear that the argument is over-ridden, and that common observation and common sense will make the world turn a deaf ear to the sanitary theorists who would thus tyrannize over one of its most cherished habits. The smoker may say, "It is needful for me to smoke, but it is not needful for me to live—at all events, not to live to that period which is 'but labour and sorrow,' although some per centage of insurance profits may depend thereupon." In all seriousness, is not the legitimate influence of the medical profession upon the public mind likely to be weakened, if its members not only advocate extreme theories on sanitary matters, but if they attempt to terrify and coerce men into giving up their dearest habits by threats and consequences which the commonest observation proves to be futile! If the cry of wolf is raised too often the flock will disregard the alarm when the spoiler is really in the fold. If the cry runs that there is death in the pot, and death in the pipe, when common observation proves there is no such thing, men will be apt to disregard their sanitary shepherds when they cry aloud that there is death in the gin-shop, and death in the stinking drain. Sanitary arguments are like moral arguments in this, that they may be abstractedly true, but if over-strained, or applied without the drag of common sense upon them, they become worthless under the actual conditions in which men find themselves.

Now it is undoubtedly true that under circumstances favourable to a perfect state of bodily health, with enough and not too much of stimulation to the employment of mind and body, with enough and not too much of such employment, and of nutrition and repose following it, even the moderate use of tobacco cannot promote the bodily health, whatever influence