

honest and manly evidence given respecting the medical officers of the navy by Sir William before the late Naval and Military Commission, appointed by her Majesty. No small portion of the success which has attended the prolonged struggle of the naval assistant-surgeons for their proper position has been owing to the continued support of their claims by Sir William Burnett.

Numerous and extensive as are the official duties of the director-general, his active mind has not been confined to them alone. One of his scientific discoveries (for which he has a patent) is of so much importance, that it will no doubt effect a vast and beneficial influence, not only as regards the preservation of her Majesty's ships, and their material of rope and canvas;—the timber used in railways, buildings, fences, &c., but also in purifying and destroying the influence of foul atmosphere, which, by the use of the article, is instantly rendered inodorous. We allude to his solution of the chloride of zinc, now in use in the preparation of timber &c. in her Majesty's dockyards, the qualities of which solution are proved by the numerous and flattering testimonials, forming a complete volume in its praise, from officers of different ranks in the naval service, as well as from private individuals, by whom the solution has been tried; indeed, nothing can be more convincing of its value than the testimonials received from so many quarters; and we trust the day is not far distant, when its extensive and general use will return an equivalent reward for so valuable a discovery.

After the preceding statements, it is needless to expatiate upon the advantages the naval service has derived from the numerous regulations formed and adopted by the director-general; but, to a man who has, with intellect and energy, devoted so much of a long life to the good of the public service, it is not too much to say that the country owes him a large debt of gratitude and recompence, especially when it is considered, that in taking office he greatly sacrificed, in a pecuniary point of view, the interests of his family, and the fair expectation of an independence, far superior to what could be obtained by the confined remuneration of official service, which is necessarily accompanied by great expense.

Sir William, soon after coming to London, became a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and, some years afterwards, a fellow of the College. He is also a fellow of the Royal Society, the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of Edinburgh and Dublin, and of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of St. Petersburg. He is the author of several papers, on different medical subjects, in the periodical medical journals of the day;—of a work on the Mediterranean Fever;—the Official Report of Fever in the *Bann* sloop of war, on the African station;—and an account of a contagious fever prevailing amongst the prisoners of war at Chatham.

TEA AND COFFEE *v.* ALCOHOL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Having noticed the discussion (if I may so term it), the review in the *Medical Gazette* of Dr. Carpenter's "Prize Essay on Alcoholic Liquors," as also Dr. Carpenter's paper in the *Gazette* of Sept. 20th last, on the "Supposed Value of Alcoholic Drinks," &c., I take leave to offer an opinion on so important a subject—an opinion founded on facts and personal experience.

With all deference to Professor Liebig's ideas as to the actions of alcoholic potations on the human system, I cannot regard them otherwise than as being much too theoretical when placed in juxtaposition with positive experience based on facts, and borne out by sound physiological reasoning.

That alcoholic drinks, in a moderate quantity, exert a stimulating influence on the circulation through the nervous system, every day's experience shows—both in health and when treating disease of the typhoid or adynamic stamp. Great care, however, being necessary so to apportion the dose as to keep the great pump—the heart's action, up to a particular mark, for beyond that (by an overdose); mischief is done by prostrating and not supporting the vitality—which should be the aim—it being pretty well known that every exaltation, by over-excitation, stimulation is followed by proportionate debility or depression. Now, if in administering alcoholic drinks to sailors and others, to enable them to resist cold, due moderation could be observed, I admit that for a time a certain amount of support for the purposes of resistance to the effects of cold might be obtained. But query? would not the moderate or judicious administration of alcoholic drinks involve a greater amount of trouble and scientific knowledge in the administrator than the making of tea or coffee, which has

been objected to by some on the plea of its being more difficult to get ready in case of emergency than alcoholic drinks?

Again, with reference to the use of alcoholic drinks for the purpose of enabling one to resist cold, the general opinion is pretty much the same as it is with drugging—viz., that if a certain quantum of a drug will do so much, twice the quantity will do double. Hence the custom, when exposed to cold, of taking what is termed a "corker," or a "nipper," which is soon followed by prostration of energies, the very reverse of what was desired.

In illustration of my opinion as to the ill effects of alcoholic drinks when exposed to cold, I will state one or two facts:—

Some years ago, when passenger in a vessel off the coast of Newfoundland, and surrounded by icebergs, we were overtaken by a heavy snowstorm. We took on board from a small skiff five Irishmen. The crew of the vessel consisted of three Europeans, and seven Bermudians. The Europeans partook freely of stiff grog, almost neat, and were totally useless in working the ship; in fact, one old man who got drunk, was severely frost-bitten, while the Bermudian sailors, (amongst whom were two blacks,) who drank tea and coffee, worked the ship with little or no inconvenience from the intense cold. Another remarkable and striking fact should be mentioned: of the five pilots we took on board to save their lives from the storm, the head pilot had been keg'd, as it was termed; he was under a pledge to his priest not to take spirits for a certain period. He was able to attend to his duty, partaking freely of tea, whilst the other four of his men were as useless from drink as were the three Europeans of the ship's crew.

Further, it has been often remarked by competent persons, that some years ago, when the carrying trade of dried fish between Newfoundland and the West Indies was confined principally to Bermudian vessels, manned by Bermudian sailors (black! and white), who are an exceedingly abstemious people, (drinking tea or coffee instead of spirits,) more hardships were endured and difficulties surmounted during the wretchedly severe weather on the inclement coast of Newfoundland than by the generality of European sailors who were supplied with alcoholic drinks.

In conclusion, in my own person, I have noted the effects of alcoholic drink. Many years ago, when in the United States of America, I noticed that when out of a cold night with friends I seldom experienced any suffering from the cold weather, which was remarked by my friends when contrasting their condition with mine; but if I were induced to take anything in the shape of alcoholic drink, even beer, I was soon compelled to get within doors, so much did I suffer from cold. I have noticed precisely the same feeling every winter since I have been in this country, now six years.

Apologizing, Mr. Editor, for trespassing so largely on the pages of your widely circulated journal,

I am, your obedient, humble servant,

Wyke-house, Nov. 5, 1850.

E. BASCOMBE, M.D.

AN ALLEGED BREACH OF MEDICAL ETIQUETTE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Permit me briefly to observe, in reference to Dr. Helsham's answer, that, according to his own admission, the progress of the case in question under my treatment was perfectly favourable up to, and at, the time of his second visit. This, however, was not sufficient; for, as he says, "Finding he was still taking the saline medicine, I gave a prescription for a tonic mixture," &c.

I cannot tell what Dr. Helsham may consider the limit of his "duty to a friend or a patient," but most certainly it does not demand for its due performance unnecessary interference with the practice of another medical man during his absence.

With regard to want of confidence in my treatment, I have, by perusing Dr. Helsham's letter, been apprized of it for the first time, as the existence of such a feeling was not manifested to me. He may reap the benefit of it for the future.

Apologizing for again intruding on your space,

I am, Sir, yours obediently,

C. T. MACKIN, M.D., M.R.C.S.

P.S.—Dr. Helsham errs in stating that "the son of the patient was present during the whole of the interview with Mr. Mackin." He was not.

November, 1850.

OBITUARY.—Died, at Falmouth, in May, 1850, Dr. Thomas Young, late Surgeon 16th Regiment, after thirty-eight years' service in Peninsula, up to Waterloo, West Indies, and North America.