from the urethra, might appear and so infect the wife with syphilis. The husband (granted that there was no freshly acquired disease on him), believing himself cured of syphilis and that his wife could not have become infected without having exposed herself to the contact of primary disease, would have no alternative but to consider that the wife had been unfaithful. "The most cruel injustice has in this way through an erroneous pathology been inflicted." In the interest, however, of the husband he goes on to state that "it sometimes, although more rarely, happens that the husband is the party who suffers from these mistakes. I have been engaged in more than one trial where the wife or her friends have sought to obtain a divorce on the ground of the husband having contracted disease after his marriage and communicated it to his wife; the whole class of cases to which I am now referring show that secondary affections of the existence of which the husband may have been unconscious at the time of his marriage may recur and be the means of imparting constitutional syphilitic disease. This may happen before impregnation, although it is much more common afterwards."¹ Pregnancy, moreover, in many cases determines syphilitic manifestations in a woman and in successive pregnancies recurring manifestations may simulate a first attack.

2. The law of libel in syphilis is remarkably strong. In all other cases of libel injury or loss to the person libelled has to be shown, but the mere fact of stating that a person has syphilis has been declared to be a libel. To quote from Dr. Blake Odgers's text-book on libel it has been decided that "he has the pox" (*simpliciter*) shall be taken to mean "he has the small-pox," but if any other words be used referring to the effect of the disease or the way in which it was caught or even the medicine taken to cure it, these may be referred to as determining which pox is meant. So that the position is that though one can mention casually the fact of anyone suffering from most diseases, if one says that he or she has syphilis an action for libel might be the result whether the statement is true or otherwise.

The legal opinion, therefore, of those who have studied the problem, and to whom I am indebted for their kind expression of views, is that publication of a wife's disease to the husband would undoubtedly be sufficient to cause an action to lie against the medical attendant at the suit of the wife. If the communication was verbal the action would be for slander, if in writing the action would be for libel. In either case the truth of what the medical men had stated—if proved by him—would be a complete defence, and even if there was an error in diagnosis it would probably be held to be "privileged" unless the plaintiff could rebut "privilege," but it would not lessen the risk to the medical attendant of an action being brought and of expense. On the one hand, therefore, an action would lie which if brought would, even if the medical man was acquitted of slander or libel, probably injure his professional prospects. On the other hand, probably no woman would face finding herself in the witness-box when a chief party in such a case. We have, however, further, the duty of the medical man "in the first place to prevent the spread of the disease" balanced by the possible accusations between husband and wife and the possibility of an action for divorce or separation in which the medical man would have to give evidence, perhaps to the injury of his professional reputation. The question naturally arises whether it would be possible so to alter the law of libel that while medical men should still be liable if they improperly divulge information obtained in the course of their practice they should yet be in a position at once to instruct any patient or wife or husband or both as to the nature of the disease with a view to prevent transmission and ensure treatment without consideration of possible consequences.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

J. A. SHAW-MACKENZIE.

Grosvenor-street, W., August 7th, 1902.

CIDER AND GOUT.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—My cyders, save in very exceptional cases, are never filtered, the process of natural fermentation is completed without any artificial means whatever being resorted to.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Whimple, August 13th, 1902.

H. WHITEWAY.

¹ Lectures on Syphilis, p. 72.

MANCHESTER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

The Infirmary Site.

AT the meeting of the Manchester city council on August 6th another step was taken as to the infirmary site. Two of the streets surrounding it are narrow and already the business traffic connected with the warehouses is more than can easily be accommodated, while the tram-lines which are to be taken through them to relieve the congestion of Piccadilly will add greatly to the inconvenience already existing, for the passenger traffic is growing rapidly. These streets will serve as a by-pass and a backwater for the trams, but they will have to be widened considerably. The plans for rebuilding the infirmary were made apparently without regarding the evident necessity for widening George-street and Parker-street, which can only be done by taking what is wanted from the infirmary area. The resolution carried at the council meeting was that the improvement and building committee be requested to lay down such building lines as they think will be adequate for the future traffic of these thoroughfares. The reduction of the infirmary area thus foreshadowed would have increased the difficulty of carrying out the rebuilding scheme. The chairman of the improvement committee said it was the duty of the corporation "to take very seriously into consideration what should be done with the site in Piccadilly now that the trustees had so clearly decided in favour of the Stanley-grove site." The value of the infirmary site has been variously estimated up to £400,000. The best use it could be put to would no doubt be to have it laid out as an open space, with grass, shrubs, and flowers, in the fervent hope that with the diminution of the pall of smoke now brooding over us (supposed to be in prospect) they would grow and impart a little cheerfulness to our begrimed and dismal city. The next best would be to clear away all the present buildings and occupy a portion of the area with an art gallery and free library, the rest of the ground being left open and suitably planted. In this case a receiving hospital would have to be provided in a sufficiently central position. It remains to be seen whether the city will act up to the value of the opportunity.

The Housing Question at Eccles.

The town council of Eccles is beginning to deal with the housing question. At the meeting on August 6th the minutes of the insanitary area sub-committee, which had passed a resolution inviting plans for laying out the land comprised in the scheme sanctioned by the Eccles (housing of the working-classes) order, 1902, were adopted. Provision is to be made for the accommodation of at least 170 persons who may be displaced from their houses in the insanitary area in houses of not less than 6s. weekly rental. One of the members thought provision ought to be made for those who would be displaced "at rentals nearer their pockets." The order, it seems, requires that 340 persons should be provided for, and the mover stated in answer that other provision would be made. It is clear that in some parts of this until lately almost solely residential suburb there are slums of a bad type, for while in the Monton ward of the borough the infantile mortality is 94 per 1000 it is 238 per 1000 in Irwell ward. This is not to be wondered at when one sees the way in which plots of ground are covered and crowded with jerry-built tenements, either in defiance of building by-laws or in accordance with very bad ones. The rapid extension of our towns in an unsystematic, higgledy-piggledy fashion is calculated to give great trouble in the future. Medical officers of health are constantly engaged in remedying conditions which ought not to have been permitted to exist and it would not be an unprofitable employment of their energies if they were allowed, with the aid, if necessary, of architect and surveyor, to prepare for such extension in the way best suited to ensure good sanitary conditions.

Workhouse Infirmary for Stockport.

After a long period of discussion the Stockport board of guardians at their meeting on August 7th approved and adopted plans for the construction of a new workhouse infirmary at Stepping Hill. The plans were originally made for a new workhouse, but that idea being given up they have been altered so as to adapt them for a new infirmary. The estimated cost is £40,000 and the plans provide for 58 beds, with an administration block. A deputation is to be