Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

DIFFICULTIES UNDER THE INFECTIOUS DISEASES (NOTIFICATION) ACT.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—A week or so after my first attendance on a case of scarlet fever the mother told me that she had noticed a rash on a child who had been sleeping with my patient and that the rash had been followed by peeling, which was now nearly at an end. I examined the cuticle carefully and had no doubt that this had been a mild case of scarlet fever now at the end of the desquamative stage. I thought it my duty to notify it, but struck out the word "urgent" which is printed on the envelopes addressed to the medical officer of health and inserted the words "desquamative stage," thinking that this would indicate—as there was already a case under treatment—that there would be no need for fresh sanitary measures. To my surprise I received a note from the medical officer of health next day in which the following passages occur: "The inspector visited the house at once to make usual inquiries." "The father was astounded to hear that the child had scarlet fever." "The inspector thereupon examined the hands and feet without finding any trace of peeling." "In the circumstances I have thought it desirable to mention the above facts and to ask you whether there may not perchance be an error of diagnosis." In a subsequent letter he says: "I think you should withdraw the notification. I do not see how I could possibly advise the committee to pass the certificate for the payment of the fee." I have since had a letter from the vestry referring to my "neglect to notify the case forthwith" (I may have allowed twenty-four hours to elapse between seeing the case and forwarding the notification), further stating that they "will decline in the present instance to pay the usual fee for your certificate." I should like to know if it is usual for sanitary inspectors to examine cases and correct the diagnosis of medical men. Also, if the vestry are within their rights in refusing to pay for a notification.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Kensington, Oct. 26th, 1898. ALFRED E. BARRETT.

* * We recommend our correspondent to read our pamphlet entitled "Difficulties under the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act."—ED. L.

"VITALITY."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—From Dr. Beale's letters it would seem he does not believe in the correlation, equivalence and transmutation of forces, and that one force may be a mode of another, as heat (and perhaps life) is a mode of motion. He seems to exclude the vital from all other forces and to regard it as *sui generis*, neither transmuted nor transmutable. Vitality, he says, "cannot be derived from non-living matter or from force," but may it not be derived from such matter *plus* force, as locomotive power is from coals and water *plus* heat? Professor Lindley, in his "Introduction to Botany," Ed. 1839, p. 358, says he had some raspberry plants before him as he wrote which had been raised from seeds taken from the skeleton of a man 30 ft. below the surface of the earth, who had been buried with some coins of the Emperor Hadrian. The seeds therefore were 1600 or 1700 years old. All this time they had lain without motion or change of any kind and so might have remained for ever if they had not been exposed to heat, light, air, and water. Before such exposure they might be regarded as so much *quasi* dead matter, waiting for forces to produce in it chemical activity, change, movement, germination—in a word *life*, which the matter *per se* and the forces *per se* could never have generated. As Dr. Beale denies that life can be derived from non-living matter and forces and as there was a time when our earth consisted of these only, how does he explain the first appearance of life upon it? A and B being the only

things in existence, if C appears surely it must be derived from A or B or A + B?

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
D. HOOPER, B.A. Cantab., M.B. Lond.
Trinity-square, S.E., Oct. 24th, 1898.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—My thanks are due to those members of the profession who have taken part in the consideration of that which I have long regarded not only as the most important of all the questions connected with every department of medicine and surgery but a question which has to do with the first principles of natural science and philosophy.

Seeing that the bioplasts, the several particles of living matter upon which the formation, action, and preservation of all the active tissues and organs of a living being depend, are less than the one-thousandth of an inch in length and diameter, and in many cases considerably less than this, the question of the nature of vital change—of vitality—must be considered from the microscopical point of view. I doubt whether anyone who studies the facts and observations to which I have referred will very widely differ from me as regards the conclusions he arrives at.

It is to be regretted that so far no one has criticised the views I have advanced from the microscopical side, which are based upon observations possible only during the last thirty or forty years. Even recently some naturalists, physiologists, psychologists, and pathologists, as well as chemists and physicists, have not only under-estimated the constantly increasing value of microscopical investigation in our endeavour to determine the nature of vital phenomena, but have calmly ignored the important bearing of facts ascertained by microscopical inquiry upon the problem of life. Consequently free discussion, in the absence of which the advancement of every department of natural knowledge must be retarded, has scarcely been commenced.

During the last few months, however, some encouragement has been afforded to students in microscopic investigation in England by the honours conferred upon Kölliker and Virchow, whose lives have been devoted to microscopical anatomy and pathology, while Lister stands pre-eminent in the recognition by the State of his labours in an all-important department of minute investigation.

Dr. T. Glover Lyon's suggestions take us far beyond the visible minute bioplasts consisting of living matter to be found in all those parts of a living organism where vital action proceeds. Is not the state of the "tissue" of a living animal as contrasted with the "tissue" of a dead one dependent upon the never-ceasing interstitial currents of fluid through every part of it—a circulation which is set up and maintained as long as the bioplasm lives, but ceases the instant it dies? "Ethereal forces" and "ethereal waves" also go far beyond anything I can hope to study. Tissue and bioplasm I have seen and have demonstrated to others.

Dr. Harry Campbell will force upon me notions with which I am not concerned. When he has defined what he means by "evolution" it will be soon enough to discuss with him the question of the "evolution of vitality." Surely he may "take his individual *homo* and trace in imagination his evolution from, let us say, his piscian ancestry" to his heart's content, and "travel down his long ancestral lines," and even become "more and more involved," without trying to involve me and my efforts to learn a little more about living matter and the formation and action of tissue in interminable, impossible travel. From the thoughtful interest he has shown, however, I do not despair of his becoming a convert to vitality, and I feel sure if he will only consider the changes which take place, say, in the limbs of a child, as by the process of growth the distance between the peripheral extremities and the brain gradually increases, he will no longer regard growth as it occurs in all things living as a change in any way akin to a physical process such as aggregation—man as a machine constructed or built by the Sun, or man's life to be physical and chemical, and I hope he will regard all vital evolution as absolutely different from all physical evolution, as is life of every kind and of every period from any physical change at present known. But whatever may be our differences all workers and thinkers will acknowledge with Dr. Harry Campbell the absolute truth and eternal application to all our achievements of