ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS EXAMINATION.

The following is the list of successful candidates for commissions in the Royal Army Medical Corps at the recent examination in London for which 78 candidates entered, of the successful 30 candidates 14 were university graduates :—

Names.	Marks.	Names.	Marks.
W. K. Beaman	612	J. H. Gurley	508
C. Cassidy	580	F. H. M. Chapman	507
A. D. Fraser	575	A. C. Elliott	503
M. P. Leahy	565	J. du P. Langrishe	503
F. T. Turner	555	W. G. Aiviss	500
A. I. Fortescue	550	W. B. Purdon	497
H. G. Gibson	548	H. M. J. Perry	495
J. L. Wood	546	J. C. Hart	493
S. Field	538	M. O. Wilson	493
R. D. O'Connor	533	T. H. Scott	491
D. F. Mackenzie	529	L. A. A. Andrews	489
J. E. M. Boyd	528	G. F. Rudkin	484
G. Carlisle	517	V. T. Carruthers	482
E. M. Middleton	516	H. W. Farebrother	481
O. R. McEwen	510	F. Casement	479

ENTERIC FEVER IN INDIA.

The following subjects were discussed at the second meeting of the standing committee on enteric fever recently held at Simla, and resolutions passed concerning them—viz., removal and disposal of sewage, washing of clothes, appointment of special sanitary officers for large cantonments, organising regimental supervision of sanitation in lines, improved means for removing infected clothing from barracks to hospitals for disinfection, disinfectors for excreta, the provision of heat-exchange water purifiers for use in camps and on service, means of conveying meals from kitchens to barrack rooms, increasing the number of clinical laboratories at divisional and brigade headquarters.

It is satisfactory to be able to record a considerable and progressive decrease in the cases of enteric fever occurring recently amongst British troops, the fresh admissions under this heading throughout the whole of India being for the last three months as follows: September, 117; October, 66; November, 31. No doubt the increased attention paid by the authorities to sanitation has already contributed to this reduction.

JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.

The January number of this journal contains many papers on a variety of subjects of more or less special interest to officers of the medical services, dealing as they do with sanitation in India, enteric fever, malaria, and diseases of hot climates, together with those incidental to life in the public services. The first article, by Major F. Smith, D.S.O., R.A.M.C., is on the Soldier's Heart and the Civilian's. The liability of the soldier to acquire an increased pulse-rate and palpitation has been often remarked upon and described under such titles as "irritable heart," the "trotting heart," &c. But as the result of an experimental comparison conducted on a limited scale Major Smith is led to conclude that the soldiers' hearts do not beat more rapidly than civilians' hearts, that the influences operating on soldiers are also operating on those of civilians, and he thinks that some valuable information might be gained by a more extended examination and inquiry into the subject. Colonel Francis J. Lambkin, R.A.M.C., has a report on "So-called Virulent Syphilis and its Treatment." This number also contains some good and discriminating reviews.

ADMINISTRATIVE MEDICAL OFFICERS.

The *Broad Arrow* states that the Army Council has decided that administrative medical officers shall in future have such administrative medical charge and authority as regards their areas as is now vested in principal medical officers. Administrative medical officers and senior medical officers of the larger stations will, before submission to higher authority, bring such questions to the notice of local commanders, in order that the latter may have an opportunity of expressing their opinions thereon.

SWANSEA GENERAL HOSPITAL.—At a meeting of the Swansea hospital board held on Jan. 22nd a resolution passed by the local branch of the British Medical Association was read. It stated that in consequence of the increasing abuse of the hospital as a charity organisation the Association urged the appointment of a special officer to investigate the circumstances of all applicants for treatment before they are seen by the medical staff. After some discussion it was decided to refer the matter to the house committee of the institution.

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE HOSPITAL FUNDS AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—All friends of the voluntary hospital system are grateful to you for the constant help and encouragement you give to the great hospital funds which promise to be saving of our voluntary hospitals. This gratitude will only be increased by your leader of Saturday last on the steps taken by the King's Fund and the Hospital Sunday Fund respectively to place their constitution on a more permanent and satisfactory basis. Such a step on their part is the more reasonable from their increasing importance and the many indications of public confidence. Such confidence is a great treasure and cannot be too jealously guarded. One of its advantages is that it permits a candid criticism of both funds and of all doubtful or exceptional proposals. I ask leave to say two or three words on your loyal and friendly criticism.

First, in regard to Section 3 of the Bill providing for the management of the King's Fund and putting all power over the general council and the committees, over the monies collected and over their distribution into the hands of the Sovereign or, through him, those of the Heir Apparent. It will be astounding news to the profession and the public that such a proposal should be made in Great Britain, in a country which boasts of its voluntary hospitals and which rejoices in a king and heir so splendidly loyal to the constitutional principles which underlie all public finance, especially monies supplied on the voluntary principle. If free and unhampered discretion is not allowed to, or is not used by, those in the management who are supposed to represent the public, it may well be feared that the delicate system of voluntary institutions will be fatally impaired and that on the King or his Heir will fall all the blame. Doubtless we are in some degree spoiled by having such a King and Heir Apparent as at present. And we cannot doubt that the Council of the King's Fund—for we could never blame His Majesty or His Royal Highness the Prince for this remarkable proposal—have been misled by the subtle influence of this fact. Nevertheless, they must be reminded of their duties and cannot be excused for sinking their responsibilities as trustees of funds the scale of which is undoubtedly largely due to the benevolent and kindly nature of the Sovereign's interest in this great charity. Neither the King nor the British public will think the less of them for modifying or withdrawing a clause which shocks every principle of hospital or public finance.

Your reference to the action of the metropolitan branch of the British Medical Association and the Hospital Sunday Fund will, I am sure, be taken in good part by this Fund. But I am not so sure that the branch is so much aggrieved as it would have the public and the profession think. Certainly it has no such grievance as to justify it in opposing before the Privy Council the grant of a charter to the Hospital Sunday Fund on the ground of non-representation of the medical profession on the Fund. It is by more genial and friendly methods than this that the branch is likely to effect its objects. The objectors write as if the medical profession had no representative on the Fund. It may surprise the profession to know that Sir William Church, Mr. Bryant, Sir Dyce Duckworth, Mr. Willett, Sir Frederick Treves, Sir Stephen Mackenzie, and Mr. Pearce Gould are on the Hospital Sunday Fund, to say nothing of general practitioners, two of whom are on the Fund. Not only so. It is within my knowledge that the offer of a seat on the council has been made at least once to another general practitioner, highly respected and of much weight in the council of the British Medical Association and of the metropolitan branch thereof. Further, let me say that Sir William Church is a member of the distribution committee, if not chairman, and that Sir William Church was chosen very lately to preside over a very special and important meeting of the British Medical Association. I should be, of course, delighted to see more general practitioners on the council and this can easily be arranged through the action of the churches of London which contribute the money.

Under these circumstances, Sirs, I think you will agree

that the British Medical Association is rather apt at the creation of grievances and that the Hospital Sunday Fund might expect a little different treatment at its hands.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Highbury-place, N., Jan. 29th, 1906. JAMES GREY GLOVER.

THE DISCOVERER OF THE ETIOLOGY OF PUERPERAL FEVER.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Will you kindly grant me space for a few remarks on the question of the discovery of the etiology of puerperal fever and the claims of priority advanced on behalf of Oliver Wendell Holmes and of Semmelweis? I only wish to state certain conclusions the truth of which I hope soon to demonstrate to all unprejudiced readers of the history of medicine. There can be no real question of priority. Holmes did good service to obstetrics and consequently to humanity, but he discovered nothing; he added nothing to the sum of the scientific knowledge of obstetrics by his essay on "The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever." Semmelweis, on the other hand, discovered the true cause of puerperal fever; he laid the scientific basis of our prophylaxis and so rendered a service to humanity comparable only with that of Jenner. Moreover, he devoted the whole of his too brief span of life to the spread of his doctrine (*Lehre*), and he lived long enough to put an end to the worst ravages of puerperal fever in the lying-in hospitals of Europe, for many, who openly jeered at his fanaticism and his eccentricities, privately applied his principles to the prevention of the disease in their own institutions. They gave their patients the benefit of the doubt.

Holmes collected evidence from the practical experience of other men, for he had comparatively little practical experience of his own, and, in some measure like a barrister, he marshalled this evidence and stated his conclusions in an essay of which the most striking feature is its extraordinary literary charm, at least in the estimation of those who are attracted by his style. Holmes entered upon his inquiry with the preconception which he held in common with most of his contemporaries that: "The disease known as puerperal fever is so far contagious as to be frequently carried from patient to patient by physicians and nurses." He gives this sentence a very prominent position in the reprint of 1855 as a quotation from the original essay of 1843; and I submit that the careful study of the essay as a whole must compel the reader to the conclusion that this quotation contains the author's whole contribution to obstetric science. The authorities quoted by him throughout, and his practical directions as to the means of preventing the spread of the disease, all go to prove that Holmes was a contagionist like his more thoughtful contemporaries, no more and no less. For example, the remarkable eulogy which he bestows upon Gordon of Aberdeen reveals the essential character of his own opinions. He quotes Gordon's "terrible evidence," and he prints in capital letters Gordon's allegation that he "could venture to foretell what women would be affected." But Gordon treated his cases exactly according to Denman's methods, except that the Aberdeen women revolted at the blistering; and these therapeutic measures prove that he had no new conceptions about the nature of the disease. As to "foretell," Walsh used the identical word with regard to exactly similar circumstances in an essay which he published ten years before Gordon's and which must have been as well known to Gordon as were Denman's works, which he quotes.

The fact is they all held the barren doctrine of contagionism, the spread of the disease by some pervading unknown agency, a miasm, a "cosmic, telluric, atmospheric influence." This doctrine is implied, almost stated, in one of the final paragraphs suggesting methods of preventing the disease from being conveyed by the medical practitioner: "He would do wisely to relinquish his obstetrical practice for at least one month, and endeavour to free himself by every available means from any noxious influence he may carry about with him." No candid interpretation of this paragraph can surely lead to any conclusion except that which I have just stated. It is rank contagionism, not so enlightened as Eisenmann's "Kindbettfieber" published in 1834. But O. W. Holmes himself laid no claim to originality or to any discovery; the distinction was thrust upon him in his later years by admirers of the distinguished man of letters who magnified out of all recognition the services of the undistinguished man of science.

"I do not expect ever to return to this subject," Holmes wrote when commenting on the amenities of controversy to which he and his essay had been subjected by some opponents. Could the discoverer of the cause of a pestilence which was year by year hurrying innumerable young mothers prematurely to the grave, and, to use his own words, bowing the strength of manhood into the dust, could such a man have ever found it possible to abandon "this subject"? Yes, if only the subject of a semi-literary task; no, if the subject of a creed and of a crusade to which a man's whole life must be devoted.

Now after considering this calm, philosophic, though eloquent, exposition of the contagious doctrine and its practical consequences, let us turn to the achievement of Semmelweis and his devotion to that which he conceived to be his duty to humanity. Can any man read without pity and admiration the tragic story of the discovery and its disastrous consequences to the discoverer in his life-long struggle to spread his doctrine and to stay the plague? We deplore while we sympathise with the sufferings of the tender-hearted man, helpless amidst the scenes of misery and death in the Vienna hospital, but we are soon filled with admiration for the steadfast will and the clear intellect which grasped the relevant constant elements amidst the apparent chaos of elusive details and conflicting circumstances, and ultimately brought certain factors into causal relationship with the phenomena of the disease. Semmelweis had solved a problem which had baffled the most observant and philosophic physicians for many generations.

The pestilence no longer depends upon some mysterious "influence"; it is reduced to the pyæmia already too well known to surgeons. It is the squalid product of filth, of actual contact with decomposing animal matter. "The carrier of the decomposed animal organic matter is the examining finger, the operating hand, the instruments anything which can be rendered unclean and then brought into contact with the genitals of the parturient or recently delivered woman." To compare this doctrine with opinions prevalent in New England or elsewhere about the same time is to compare unlike things; between them there is hardly a *tertium quid*. Semmelweis himself well expressed the consequent practical difference: "When English practitioners have the misfortune to lose several lying-in patients they are not satisfied with disinfection by means of washing with chlorine, but they set aside their midwifery practice for some weeks or take a tour of several weeks' duration in order to get completely rid of the puerperal contagion. We destroy the decomposed material by means of chloride washings and hold this disinfection for sufficient."¹

Here was the position which Semmelweis had reached after much tribulation. "I do not expect to return to this subject," exclaimed Holmes. Semmelweis was never to leave "this subject"; he was to devote his sad existence to the pathetic struggle to establish "*Meine Lehre*." "Should it so happen, which God forbid, that it is not vouchsafed to me to see with my own eyes the happy time when both inside and outside the maternity hospitals of the whole world only cases of self-infection may be occasionally found, still the conviction that such a time must come sooner or later after me will brighten my dying hours (*erheitern*)."

Fritsch, writing a quarter of a century later, declared: "In the history of obstetrics there is a dark page, and its heading is 'Semmelweis.' Who could avoid feeling the powerful impression produced by his book? Even to-day whole pages of his deductions might stand in the most modern work. And the annihilating logic of his statistics! We young men to whom antipathies were unthinkable, to whom coarse tirades against 'genius misunderstood' were only wearisome reading, we find it incomprehensible that the logical conclusions from the doctrine of infection were nowhere drawn."

But although the "*Lehre*" was at first greeted with derision or hostility by the occupant of almost every chair of obstetrics in Europe, the logical conclusions came ultimately to be drawn and applied everywhere. Much had to be done by bacteriologists and by surgeons, especially by our own Lister, before the vast service to mankind which had been rendered by Semmelweis came to be seen in its due proportions; but the era which he foresaw has arrived, and it is now generally, almost universally, recognised that to

¹ Die Aetiologie, &c., p. 198.