Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

TIN IN CANNED FOODS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to a letter in THE LANCET of April 3rd, in which Dr. H. W. Wiley expresses his opinion that the results of certain experiments made by Dr. Schryver on this subject (taking known doses of non-irritant salts of tin with a view to determining the degree to which tin was absorbed from the alimentary tract) had better not have been stated because the statement may give encouragement to canners to continue improper practices.

Criticisms from Dr. Wiley on a matter of this sort deserve very careful consideration. He is chief of the Bureau of Chemical Industry in the United States, his efforts to secure the greater purity of foods are well known and appreciated in this country, while in the case of canned foods he has been endeavouring to secure the use of better grades of tin plate by American canners. Dr. Schryver and I have recently made reports to the Local Government Board—"On the Presence of Tin in Certain Canned Foods"—which include an account of the experiments referred to. The statement to which Dr. Wiley takes exception was—

They (these experiments) do not indicate much probability of serious risk of chronic poisoning by the absorption of non-irritant compounds of tin as a result of a diet which consists largely of canned foods and is continued over considerable periods of time.

If this is objected to, I can only say that it is not the practice in this country to withhold the results of experiments which have been carefully carried out even for such laudable objects as those indicated in Dr. Wiley's letter. I should not, however, have troubled you with any comment on this matter were it not for the consideration that, coupled with your own note on our reports in THE LANCET of Feb. 6th, Dr. Wiley's letter may convey the impression that the general effect of these reports is to suggest that no attention is required in the interests of public health to contamination of foods by tin.

To avoid any such misconception by your readers who have not seen the reports themselves, I would point out that they cover a considerably wider field than the individual experiments which Dr. Wiley discusses. The latter are contained in a section of Dr. Schryver's report which deals with the evidence available as to the accumulation of tin in the body as a result of continued ingestion of small quantities of tin such as are frequently present in properly canned foods of ordinary age. But Dr. Schryver's report also includes a collection of cases in which canned foods containing unusually large amounts of tin have been associated with definite irritant poisoning, and has further indicated the extent to which the degree of contamination of canned foods by tin is governed by the character of the food canned and the time which has elapsed since canning.

The need for discouraging the use by canners of unsatisfactory tin plate, together with the importance of avoiding contamination by tin through improper methods of soldering, is given prominence in my report, which also contains suggestions as to the control which sanitary authorities in this country may be able to exercise in the matter. It appears to be established that practically all canned foods contain some tin, and that at present no positive evidence can be ascertained of harm resulting from the small quantities of tin which may frequently be taken in this way. No suggestion has been made, however, that precautions should not be taken to prevent the introduction of exceptional or excessive amounts of tin into these foods. The basis of such precautions is the employment of satisfactory tin plate and methods of soldering, and also recognition of the fact that contamination by tin increases with the age of the can—a matter of practical importance where acid foods such as canned fruits and meat extractives are concerned. I cannot, however, admit that because this is the end to be attained we should be justified in suppressing the results of experiments because these results may possibly be misused by unscrupulous people.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

London, April 14th, 1909.

G. S. BUCHANAN.

SPONTANEOUS CURE OF THORACIC ANEURYSM.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In THE LANCET of April 3rd and 10th accounts have appeared of the spontaneous cure of thoracic aneurysm. The following case bears upon these, not so much as a case of complete spontaneous cure, but one of nature's attempts at the same, where visible changes could be watched with the naked eye. About Michaelmas, 1906, a man, about 46 years of age, complained of pain in the chest and lower ribs. The pain in the chest extended through to the shoulder blades and the muscles of the back of the neck. This latter symptom had, he told me, led to a diagnosis of muscular rheumatism. When I saw him about 12 months later, he then told me that he had left off work just previously and was suffering from rheumatism in his neck. On placing the hand over the front of the chest a distinct heaving impulse was felt, and upon auscultation a double murmur. In due course a very troublesome cough set in with dyspnoea. There was no cedema or loss of voice, nor any hæmoptysis. About six weeks after I first saw him the heaving impulse distinctly pointed at the side of the sternum about the level of the third rib cartilage, and a pulsating swelling of about the size of a hen's egg made its appearance, occupying quite half of the breadth of the sternum. The man was now bad, and it seemed a question whether the aneurysm would burst through the skin or into the bronchus, and as the skin remained intact I fully expected the latter at any moment. I had him watched night and day and kept him absolutely quiet in bed and administered morphia regularly. After some weeks of expectation the man began to improve; the pulsating swelling which probably perforated the sternum without any spontaneous fracture lessened and finally disappeared, and at the present time, with the exception of a little tenderness in the third interspace to the left of the sternum, nothing remains to tell the tale. In the absence of any definite pressure symptoms or any alteration in either pulses or carotids or subclavians I considered the case to be one of aneurysm of the first part of the arch with a considerable sacculus giving the outward and visible signs. The man felt so much better that he wished to resume his ordinary occupation, but to this I would not consent.

In his present condition the patient presents a chest distinctly generally bulged and heaving on the left side, dull on percussion from the left clavicle to the right edge of the sternum. There is a soft systolic murmur all over both sides of the chest. There is a thrill over the left subclavian artery and a systolic murmur over the right subclavian and right carotid arteries. A systolic murmur is heard over the back. The right chest also heaves, but there is no tumour or thrill, and over the left side the breath-sounds are almost inaudible.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN J. WADDELOW, F.R.C.S. Eng.

Whittlesey, April 12th, 1909.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—About 30 years ago a chaplain to the forces who had been under treatment by the late Mr. Tufnell for aortic aneurysm was waiting for his train at the King's Bridge station, Dublin, on his way to the Curragh to resume duty. He suddenly leaped over the wall of the platform on to the foreshore of the Liffey, falling perhaps 20 feet. Although he fractured no bones he died from shock. He had been brought to Dr. Steevens' Hospital, and at the post-mortem examination it was seen that the solid clot which filled the aneurysm was in no way disturbed by the fall, and I very distinctly remember its smooth surface where it filled the entrance from the lumen of the artery.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

T. C. D.

April 12th, 1909.

THE CLINICAL VALUE OF HÆMOMANOMETER OBSERVATIONS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I regret to find that I have drawn an inaccurate inference from Professor Starling's experiment referred to in my letter in THE LANCET of April 3rd—the result of a hurried glance through his Mercers' Company lectures which had just come into my hands, and of not allowing enough for