Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE WAR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As I have frequently been asked about the possibility of joining the German Army Medical Service for the time of the war, it may be of interest to your readers to learn that the North German Government is ready to admit British medical men as volunteers in their army hospitals, provided they speak German, that they have the licence to practise medicine and surgery in the United Kingdom, that they place themselves unconditionally at the disposal of the North German Government, and that they have the permission of the English Government to serve as medical volunteers in Germany and that of the North German Embassy or Consulate-General.

The English medical volunteers will, at first at all events, not be employed on the field of action, but only in the lazarettos in the rear of the armies; this, however, would probably not prevent their seeing and doing important surgical work.

The services of English medical volunteers will be regarded as probationary, during at least a fortnight, and they will receive no payment during that period, and no reimbursement for the expenses of their journey; but if their services prove satisfactory they will probably be engaged, and receive payment at the rate of from 6s. to 9s. per day.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,

Grosvenor-street, W., August 9, 1870.

HERMANN WEBER.

ASYLUM ATTENDANTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Many have been the anathemas launched lately against this unfortunate class. They have, as it were, been slapped in the face, knocked down, and when down well pounded, till one wonders that any vitality is left. One quality has stood them in good stead: they are tolerably thick-skinned; they "get down easily," to use an expression of the P.R.; thrashing after thrashing has no more effect on them than on the class dunce of a country school, to whom the little daily episode of birch and blubber is hardly less than a *sine quâ non* of his existence. They look placidly on at the conviction of a comrade; "rather you than me" is probably the height of reflection at which they arrive on the subject. To correct their conduct by the standard of the convicts is hardly a proceeding that enters into their heads.

If there is one circumstance more edifying than another in connexion with the chastisement of these objects of popular ire, it is the attitude assumed towards them by their superiors in the same line. Never was there a better example of the parable of the Good Samaritan—in its earlier parts. How beautifully, when one or more attendants lie wounded in the ditch, do these immaculate individuals, staying only, perhaps, to point the finger of scorn, pass by on the other side! "Just what we told you," "Nothing more than you have every right to expect," are the sort of reflections, explicit or implicit, to which the battered victims are treated. Have these officers grown to be fatalists? Is it suddenly discovered that in one minute section of the *genus humanum* there shall neither be retrogression to the point of utter uselessness, nor, above all, development in the direction of utmost usefulness? Is the protoplasm of the asylum attendant a peculiar protoplasm?

From the beginning of historic time, there have been instances, not rare, known and recorded of the influence of man on man. Generals loved and obeyed by their soldiers, magistrates respected and obeyed by the community, preachers revered and followed by their auditors, are instances on the vast scale of that which, penetrating everywhere, is the leaven of the human race, the bond of all social union. But here, at length, we have an exception. Take these two classes of men. The individual of the one walks immaculately his daily round through the wards, his

head above the debased life around him, benevolently dropping here and there a prescription for the walls, the windows, the floors, or for the boots, the clothes, the bodies, or the minds of his patients. To him, indeed, the shabbiness of a patient is discomfort; the bruising of a patient misery; the tying of a patient's hands or feet or trunk, acute agony. Not a button of a patient's waistcoat must be unloosed, not a speck on a patient's face must be unwashed, not a hair of a patient's head must be harmed, while he is present. And now the individual of the other class. Alas! to him the groans of the patients are food for his soul; their screams are sweetest music; the cracking of their ribs makes heavenly harmony. Truly his ways are most perverse ways; he "travels up and down on his knees over the prostrate bodies of his victims."

Surely these two classes must be separated wide as the poles asunder, else they would soon influence one another. Here, if anywhere, we must have the positive and negative of moral electricity, which, brought in contact, will rush together and produce the equable neutrality, the happy mean, which might be the salvation of asylums. But no! for they are in daily, hourly contact. On the one hand, to realise the cruelty, then the trials of inferiors—to remove the one, to advise and encourage under the other; on the other hand, to realise the felt influence of superiors, to be affected by it, to grow through it to better things,—would these not seem most natural courses? In fact, however, they never find place; the anomaly goes on. How should this be? Are our premises wrong? Are the inferiors less cruel? Are the superiors less immaculate? Or does some strong separating cause intervene? Perhaps the dignity of the superior may go for something. He has been thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of locks and keys, he knows thoroughly how an excited patient is to be put in a padded room in strong clothes, how a suicidal patient is not to be furnished with clothes by which he could hang himself, how an epileptic is not to be entrusted with window-cleaning; he knows also the best sort of stuff for the bed of a "wet and dirty"; he can expatiate learnedly on the respective merits of earth-closets and water-closets. Knowing these and many other things, has he not paid his guinea and become a *medical psychologist*? Shall he contaminate himself by mingling with vulgar attendants? Such feelings may form part of the preventive medium. Else how could it be tolerated that men selected to influence the characters of hundreds of their insane fellow-creatures should fail to influence those of tens of their sane subordinates, with whom their contact is incessant? Was such a state of things ever heard of out of an asylum? Is madness then infectious? "Pay them better and they will be better" is the shout of the day. "Make them better and we will pay them better" is as easily said. In such a need of improvement has it ever been heard of that a leader in the branch called together his underlings in order to tell them, for half-an-hour of an evening, how the insane should be treated? Has a little finger ever been stirred so to ease the burden? What good might not a little yearly course on "Practical handling of the Insane" in each asylum do, when the speaker and the hearers were every day companions in the work?

But I reach the portals of dreamland, and beg only further to subscribe myself,

Sir, your obedient servant,

July 25th, 1870.

MIRANS.

PARIS.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

THE WAR.

ON Thursday last, the first ambulance of the International Society for the care of the wounded took its departure from this city for the seat of war. There was a large crowd met to witness the departure; and really it was a stirring sight, and one of much interest, to see the *défilé* as it wound its way along the boulevards up to the Eastern Railway terminus. The *personnel* and every object belonging to the medical train wore the red cross as a distinctive mark. Upwards of 150 *infirmiers* have accompanied the first ambulance. Their dress is a sort of long and loose black frock, with a felt hat