Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE CONJOINT BOARD SCHEME FOR SCOTLAND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—How the proposed Conjoint Board scheme for Scotland came to be sent to you for publication I know not. I was under the impression that it would make its first appearance at the Medical Council, where it could be accompanied by an explanation from those who disapprove of its chief feature—the proposal to make the examination clinical only. The fact that it is now published, together with your criticism on it, with which I entirely concur, renders it necessary that the explanation should be made now, that it is far from expressing the unanimous opinion of the bodies in whose name it appears. Foremost among the advocates for a mere clinical examination was the representative of the College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. The Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow take that view, St. Andrews concurring, so that the minority of three who took the view that the examination should be more comprehensive had before them to choose between the responsibility of preventing any scheme at all being forwarded from Scotland to the Medical Council, or yielding on the clinical point, in doing which we reserved our opinion and our liberty to maintain it at the Council. It is but just to this University to mention that from the beginning it has taken the view that if there is to be a general Conjoint Board at all, the examination should be co-extensive with that of the English scheme, as laid before the Medical Council last year.

The object of the Medical Council in recommending the formation of conjoint boards, as stated in the report of 1871, is "to reduce the number of examinations for licences to practise, and to make each licence a qualification in both medicine and surgery." The proposed scheme for Scotland (that of May 24th) which you publish to-day is open to the following objections:—

1. Instead of diminishing or simplifying examinations in Scotland, it adds a new examination and a new burden. The English scheme, on the contrary, is to be a substitute examination, entirely so for the corporation examinations, as the separate examinations by the uniting corporations in England are then to cease.

2. Being only a clinical examination (except in midwifery) it is not a just or a sufficient test, although, of course, a clinical test should form part of the examination. If it be said that at a clinical examination questions may be introduced in principles, in pathology, in therapeutics, no doubt they may, and in anatomy, physiology, and chemistry too, even in logic and Greek if you like. If that is meant, why not give the examination its right name, instead of hiding its light under a bushel? But let it be distinctly understood that determined objection was taken, after much discussion, to any words which implied more than a clinical examination. No doubt my friend, Dr. Andrew Wood, and others, who took that view, are ready to defend their opinion, but let the responsibility of the proposal rest with its authors.

3. The proposed scheme leaves everything else unsettled except that the candidate must have completed his curriculum of study before being admitted to this clinical examination. It is not only a skeleton, but one with so few bones in it that the anatomist could not imagine the rest. Men might come up for it who had passed nothing else, and after passing it find themselves still without a diploma, and might then well ask why, if a clinical examination was a sufficient test, they could not be registered without having still to pass and pay for a corporation diploma. Again, from a legal point of view, a man might have passed at one of the Scotch corporations and then at the Conjoint Board, and after all have only a partial qualification. This is inevitable so long as the Scotch corporations continue to hold separate examinations in addition to their already existing conjoint examination.

4. It will give occasion for invidious comparison between the Conjoint Board examinations of England and Scotland, and the non-correspondence would interfere with reciprocity between the two kingdoms.

You comment on the proposed "modest" fee of five guineas. Pray recollect that this is to be in addition to the fees at present paid for diplomas, while the fee proposed in the English scheme is simply the present diploma fees amalgamated. But having stood out for this, in so far as University candidates are concerned, let me explain that it is taken from the English scheme, under which those who have passed their examination at the Universities in the fundamental sciences are admitted to the final examination of the Conjoint Board on payment of five guineas. That was a compromise on the one hand between the recognition of the hardship in men who had passed the higher examinations being subjected to the expense, to say nothing of the indignity of having to go through another and inferior examination (for an examination that everybody has to pass must always be a minimum examination), and, on the other hand, the drill-sergeant idea that everybody must be forced through the same portal, even although it is levelling downwards. We object to our students being taxed to a greater extent than this for the benefit of somebody else. We will rather trust them to the tender mercies of a Government Board, whatever the corporations may think of it.

There have not been wanting those who have all along thought that the attempt to form general conjoint boards, in which universities and corporations are huddled together, is a mistake. My friend Professor Gairdner and others have recently come forward against this kind of scheme altogether. The mania for conjoint boards, right or wrong, has been allowed to go so far that many think that it must be appeased by some concession, on the principle of throwing a tub to amuse the whale. But why not pause and reconsider? With the strongest approval of the object of the Medical Council, it has always seemed to me that the proposal to have general conjoint boards is a mistake. It is owing partly to the serious want of a joint examination in England by the corporations, partly to the drill-sergeant notions of examination and education which have had some prominence lately, partly to there being too many licensing bodies (half of them capable of giving only partial qualifications), and partly also to a general confusion of ideas. The objection to the proposed remedy is not merely that the so-called one portal must have three doors, and each of these again a host of doorkeepers. It is complicated, it is expensive, it is unnecessary. I believe that in England and in Ireland what is really wanted is an amalgamation of the examinations of the corporations, so as to give a complete qualification on one examination, and at the same time the cessation of separate examinations by each; and that what is wanted in Scotland is the latter step only, as the corporations of Scotland are already in advance of those of England and Ireland in having formed, and successfully conducted, a joint examination, though the continuance of their separate examinations was an imperfection. Thus all the examinations conferring only partial qualifications would cease, the number of licensing boards would be greatly diminished, and the examinations would become more efficient. There is no occasion for dragging the universities into these conjoint schemes. Their examinations confer complete qualifications, and are all now a long way above the level of the licence examinations. Such a system would, I believe, soon prove satisfactory to all parties, and it would be attained without the overthrow of existing institutions.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Aberdeen University, June 8th, 1872.

JOHN STRUTHERS.

PREVENTIVE AND CURATIVE TREATMENT OF VARIOLA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your excellent periodical has given publicity to the ravages of small-pox in England. Experience has taught me that these ravages might be considerably diminished by mercurial treatment; and I beg you will draw the attention of your numerous readers to this excep