THE SMALL-POX EPIDEMIC.

THE two principal features of the Registrar-General's last weekly return bearing upon the small-pox epidemic in London were of a somewhat contradictory character. While the deaths from small-pox registered in the metropolis during the week ending the 5th inst. showed a marked decline, and were lower than in any week since the beginning of December last, the number of new cases admitted to the Metropolitan Asylum Hospitals exceeded any previous weekly number since the commencement of the epidemic. During the week the number of new cases in the north of London taxed the resources of the Metropolitan Asylum Hospitals at Homerton and Hampstead. On the other hand the proportional mortality to completed cases continues to decline.

The fatal cases of small-pox in London, which had been 68 and 89 in the preceding weeks, declined to 54, of which 32 occurred in Metropolitan Asylum Hospitals, 2 in the Highgate Small-pox Hospital, and the remaining 20 in private dwellings. After distributing the fatal hospital cases, it appears that 6 of the deceased small-pox patients had resided in Bow and Poplar, 5 in Southwark, 4 in Marylebone, 4 in St. Pancras, and 4 in Hackney. The fatal cases showed a slight increase in West and Central London, whereas they had markedly declined in all other parts of the metropolis.

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

MEDICAL PROTEST AGAINST THE SALE OF INTOXICATING LIQUORS BY GROCERS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have signed, and herewith return, the protest contained in this week's LANCET.

Permit me to say that I cannot express too strongly my admiration of the wisdom and public spirit manifested in the course which you have taken. THE LANCET, on various occasions, has earned the gratitude of all thoughtful Englishmen, but I venture to assert that in nothing has it ever been so likely to do good service as in the cause which it is now taking. The evil which you are now attacking is so insidious in its growth, so malignant in its effects, so terrible in its consequences, and is so generally incurable when established, that its spread is appalling.

If medical men, who, more than any other class, witness the ravages—the frightful ravages—which alcohol is producing amongst women, are silent, permitting its causes to operate without protest, allowing the enemy to undermine the strongholds of society, without raising an alarm, then they betray their trust, they are untrue to their traditions, they are unfaithful to the principles which have hitherto guided them, and thousands and tens of thousands of miserable men, and still more miserable women and children, may rise up in judgment against them.

Of all the curses which can fall on a community, there is not one which can compare with drunkenness amongst women, because it is the prolific parent of every form of evil which can blight and destroy a people. A woman who is addicted to drink neglects her duties, loses her interest in her children, in her husband, and in herself; her home duties are neglected, and the money which should buy good food, clothes, and home comforts, is spent on drink; she becomes reckless, a curse to herself, and to all who are unfortunately connected with her.

It will be remembered that a drunken woman was held in such abhorrence by the ancient Romans, that women were prohibited from touching wine, and a husband was even held to be justified in killing a drunken wife. Much as we may revolt at the idea of such a barbarous law, it is

certain that, to many intemperate women, a violent but sudden death would be enviable, compared with the misery, loathing, and horror which time after time she experiences in consequence of the degrading habit she has acquired.

A wise people act on the principle that prevention is better than punishment, or even cure. To take every reasonable means of protecting women from the temptation of drinking is a national duty. Woman needs greater protection than man; her soft, yielding, emotional nature, on the one hand, and the monotonous routine and other depressing conditions of her daily life, on the other, give to the exhilaration which alcohol produces, a degree of enjoyment which in many cases amounts to fascination; the craving for renewal is irresistible.

Medical men have exerted themselves most disinterestedly in urging on the community extensive structural changes, inside and outside of the dwellings of the people, in order to remove, or at least diminish, the agencies producing disease. In doing this, they have entailed on the owners of property heavy burthens, and they have subjected private individuals to considerable inconvenience and loss; but it has been a recognized principle that private interests must yield to the general good. To be consistent, medical men must now be prepared to discharge their obligations by protesting most earnestly and determinedly against the system of selling liquors by grocers. Women must be defended against the temptations which beset them so powerfully and so numerous. Formerly the grocer was the greatest protection against intemperance. The tea and coffee which he chiefly dealt in were stimulants which refreshed without exhilarating, preventing the weary and depressed from having recourse to alcoholics. Moreover, women formerly were in little danger of acquiring a love of alcoholic stimulants; no decent woman would be seen going into a public-house if she could help it. However much a woman had desired to purchase liquor, unless she had become lost to shame, she shrunk from the possibility of being seen entering the liquor shop. Now there is no such safeguard; a woman can scarce go into a place where groceries are sold without being actively or passively tempted to purchase liquor. Wine is the most profitable article the grocer deals in, hence he is most anxious to induce his customers to become purchasers. Moreover, when a liking for liquor is once established, the demand for liquor is a growing one; that branch of trade develops faster than any other. Hence the disposition of the trader to connive at deception on the part of the female, entering as soap, or tea, or "goods," items which really mean liquor.

I am positively appalled by the evidences which I meet with in the course of practice of the growth of intemperance amongst women, owing to the sale of liquors by grocers. These cases are often painful in the extreme. I was therefore delighted when I read a few weeks ago the article which appeared in your pages on the subject. I was still more so, when I saw in your present week's issue that you had taken the resolution to fairly grapple it, and I trust that the appeal which you have made to the members of our noble profession will be promptly and universally responded to.

Yours truly,

Manchester, May 9th, 1877.

ROBT. MARTIN, M.D.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—At a meeting of the Committee of the Tea Dealers and Grocers Association, held to-day, it was resolved that a letter should be addressed to you, expressing regret at your leading article against the sale of wines and spirits by grocers.

The Committee desire me to point out to you a fact that appears to have escaped your notice: That in the recently published Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Intemperance, there is not a single instance of reliable evidence that the sale of wines and spirits by grocers has induced intemperance; but, on the contrary, that this mode of trading is calculated to induce temperance, by the supply of stimulants used under home influence, where the consumer is protected from taking more than he ought, and spending more than he can afford, in preference to bar-drinking, where the reverse of similar restrictions prevails.

The Committee also desire me to point out that the trade of the grocer is as openly conducted as any in the United Kingdom.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

FRED. MORRISON,

The National Chamber of Trade, 416, West Strand,
May 9th, 1877.

Secretary.