Correspondence

"The Important Factor in Dealing with Tuberculosis" —A Protest

To the Editor:—I wish to commend the article with this title by Dr. George Thomas Palmer (THE JOURNAL, Oct. 28, 1916, p. 1321), and also to protest against the crime, as I choose to designate it, of certain members of the medical profession in sending tuberculous patients into this western country with such instructions as these:

"Avoid sanatoriums, as contact with other tuberculous persons is depressing and furthermore dangerous because you may get a further infection from other patients.

"Do not go around a doctor's office, as there is not a specific cure for tuberculosis and you will only be wasting your money.

"Report to me occasionally, and I can advise you from here.

"Get out into the open and 'rough it' on a horse, in a wagon, in camp, or get you a job on a stock ranch herding cattle on a bronk, etc."

I know some will smile and think this is a joke, but too many victims of the "white plague" with whom I have come in contact while "chasing the cure" myself have corroborated what I have written. With the well known fact staring us in the face that rest is the most essential thing in the treatment of tuberculosis, why do they do it?

When the tuberculous person gets off the train in the West he has some part of the following equipment, according to his taste in the sports: a shotgun; an express rifle for big game; bag of golf sticks; tennis racket and shoes; fishing outfit; khaki clothing, etc., to match; riding habits, etc. This is not an exaggeration, as I have seen such outfits many times, often after the owner had crossed over the "great divide."

They try out this equipment and find it does not lead to a restoration of health except in a few instances. They then go to the cities; rent a room down town; go out to restaurants for meals when they feel like it; hang around saloons and drink beer and whisky to "build them up," and loaf around the parks, pool rooms, tobacco stands, etc., until, in about 75 per cent. of cases, they fall by the wayside unable to go further. A physician is called to make the last moments comfortable, and a minister to administer the last rites, followed by the undertaker, who gently breaks the news to the folks back home by wire.

Since the physician advised the patient to report progress to him, to be consistent the body should be shipped back to the physician for further advice. It must be admitted, however, that the treatment prescribed by some western physicians outside of the sanatoriums is in no wise an improvement on the advice given by his eastern colleague.

J. A. VAN HORN, M.D., Roswell, N. M.

Queries and Minor Notes

ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATIONS and queries on postal cards will not be noticed. Every letter must contain the writer's name and address, but these will be omitted, on request.

SPLENECTOMY

To the Editor:—1. Has it not been conclusively proved that the spleen is not essential to life? 2. What is the average duration of life after the spleen is removed? What is the longest period man has survived after splenectomy? 3. Granting that the spleen is diseased, other remedial measures failing, is not splenectomy a justifiable and approved measure?

J. L. DACH, M.D., Reeder, N. D.

ANSWER.—1. The spleen is not essential to the life of a person in the sense that it can be removed and that person continue to live in apparent health. It should not be inferred, however, that the spleen has no useful function in the body, but simply that this function may largely be taken up by other organs after the spleen is removed.

2. Persons have lived for many years after the spleen has been removed. Should no other disease be present, a person

whose spleen has been removed would probably live out his ordinary expectancy.

3. Splenectomy is a justifiable operation in many diseases in which it is thought that the spleen is concerned in the disease process. In some of these conditions, splenectomy seems to have been beneficial; in others, it has not yet been proved that splenectomy is followed by any permanent favorable result. It is probable that in these cases the spleen is not the site of the primary cause of the disease.

SINUSOIDAL ELECTRIC APPARATUS

To the Editor:—Can you give me any information regarding the Ultima No. 3 sinuistat, manufactured by the Ultima Physical Appliance Company of 136 West Lake Street, Chicago? Does it give a true sinusoidal current? Has sinusoidal therapy any real merit? If so, in what conditions is its use beneficial?

JOSEPH E. GOLDING, M.D., Roslyn Heights, N. Y.

To the Editor:—What is the present status of the sinusoidal current as applied in treatment? Is there sufficient evidence that it is worth while in the treatment of diseases of nervous origin, or in spinal therapy? The Ultima Appliance Company, Chicago, advertises a course in spinal therapy, after which a sinuistat made by them is to be used to apply the treatment. I enclose some of their literature. Is this a sound venture?

W. F. B.

ANSWER.—The Ultima No. 3 sinuistat is manufactured in Chicago by the McIntosh Battery & Optical Company. It is a neat, portable apparatus, operating on the alternating or direct current. It gives a true sinusoidal current slow and rapid, and also other modalities. The sinusoidal current bears a strong similarity to the ordinary faradic, but is less painful because of its greater evenness. According to textbooks on electrodiagnosis and electrotherapeutics, d'Arsonval recommended the sinusoidal currents especially for paralysis, atrophies, atonies, neuralgias, rheumatic affections, and in gynecologic diseases for resorption of the products of inflammation. It is difficult to see how the results to be obtained by the sinusoidal current could be expected to differ in any way from those obtained by the faradic, which is itself extremely limited in its therapeutic action.

AVERAGE LENGTH OF HUMAN LIFE

To the Editor:—I wish to learn what is given at the present time as the average length of life of man. Can you give me this either published in THE JOURNAL or by letter? If published, omit name.

C. M. W.

ANSWER.—As a result of a study of the vital statistics of Massachusetts for the period from 1893 to 1897, it was found that the average duration of life was: for males, 44.1, and for females, 46.6. On account of the absence of complete vital statistics records in the United States covering a considerable period, figures for the average duration of life based on the entire population of the country cannot be provided. Figures from European countries, in which records of vital statistics are more complete, show the following as the average duration of life for the periods named: Sweden, 1891-1900, males, 50.9, females, 53.6; Denmark, 1895-1900, males, 50.2, females, 53.2; France, 1898-1903, males, 45.7, females, 49.1; England and Wales, 1891-1900, males, 44.1, females, 47.7; Italy, 1899-1902, males, 42.8, females, 43.1; Prussia, 1891-1900, males, 41.0, females, 44.5. Figures for India, 1901, give the average duration of life for males as 23.0 and for females, 24.0.

MERCURIAL OINTMENT AND IODIN

To the Editor:—A patient appeared at my office, October 5, suffering from a contusion of the great toe on his right foot, which subsequently resulted in loss of the nail. It seems that the wound had been treated with a mercurial ointment from September 28 to October 4 by a physician in a neighboring town. On removing the dressing, I found that the wound had healed, except an area about one-half the size of an ordinary pea, which I painted very lightly with tincture of iodine. I should like to know if any untoward action could have developed as the result of such treatment.

J. A. PALMER, JR., M.D., Cumberland, Md.

ANSWER.—Applying tincture of iodine soon after the use of mercurial ointment on the same locality would be likely to cause a chemical reaction, dependent on the relative amount of mercury and iodine. If there was more mercury than iodine, mercurous iodide (HgI) would most probably result; if the iodine was in excess, mercuric iodide (HgI₂) would be formed. It would therefore be expected that an action of such salts in the tissues would take place. A case report on "Irritation