

composition of an umbilical calculus shows, I admit, that urine has no direct share in its development, hence the former explanation of the relations of a calculus of this kind to patency of the urachal canal is more likely to be correct.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Sept. 12th, 1903.

ALBAN DORAN.

THE TREATMENT OF GOITRE BY THE USE OF DISTILLED OR RAIN WATER.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I think it would be premature at present to conclude that the use of *boiled* water is equally efficacious with that of distilled or rain water in these cases. The actual agent of mischief is confessedly unknown, a matter of surmise only. If of mineral origin, as thought by many, boiling cannot with certainty destroy it.

Many cases of goitre are very evanescent. I have seen cases lasting only a few weeks getting well naturally without any treatment or alteration in drinking water. To base any conclusions as to treatment upon such cases would obviously be fallacious and may have led to error in the past. But the cases which I described in THE LANCET of July 18th, p. 185, were quite of a different category. They had existed for years unrelieved, giving rise to symptoms of such a serious and alarming character that a dangerous operation was contemplated, and this in spite of all kinds of treatment in different hands and (at least one of them) in different countries, with different water-supplies. The evidence here is incontestable, and until we get equally satisfactory evidence in favour of boiled water only we had better stick to what we indubitably *know*. Moreover, boiled water is unpleasant, whereas the aerated distilled water which I described is remarkably pleasant to drink. This is a matter of no small importance where the treatment has to be continued for many months, with often very slowly progressing improvement, so that the patient gets tired and doubtful and open to the suggestions of friends that the treatment "is doing no good" and that he "had better try something else."

As illustrating the fact that the treatment by the use of distilled or rain water is really new to a large majority at least of medical men, I may mention that I have had a letter within the last few days from a well-known physician and lecturer on *materia medica* and therapeutics to a large hospital and medical school for many years, a Fellow of the Royal Society (I will not give his name without permission). In this letter after expressing the interest with which he has read the articles in your columns on the subject he goes on to say, "I cannot regard the influence of rain water as *negative*, it must be *positive*. Can it be that there is some hidden form of ozone in the rain water?" Of course, this cannot have anything to do with the real explanation, for it cannot apply to distilled water, of which fact the learned professor must have momentarily lost sight. But it shows that the idea was entirely new even to one accustomed throughout his life to consider and to ponder on the subjects of *materia medica* and therapeutics on which he lectured.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Lancaster, Sept. 13th, 1903. C. A. RAYNE, M.D. Lond., &c.

A CASE OF PRESUMED PTOMAINÉ POISONING.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—May the case recorded in THE LANCET of Sept. 12th, p. 755, under the above heading not have been one of perforated gastric ulcer? Against its having been one of ptomainé poisoning is the fact that the patient alone was affected. The absence of diarrhoea is also, I think, significant. On the other hand, perforation of a gastric ulcer usually occurs after a full meal. If my view is correct, then I believe that Dr. T. B. Broadway's patient had at first only a slight perforation but that the subsequent retching and vomiting increased the extent of the rupture and led to acute general peritonitis. The writer states that his patient did not show abdominal tenderness until the fourth day, but at the very outset of the history he tells us that when first seen (on the second day of the

illness) the patient "complained of tenderness about the epigastrium."

My object in writing is to point out the danger of giving even ice by the mouth in such cases. It is not, perhaps, sufficiently recognised that the gastric mucous membrane does not immediately absorb even water. Undoubtedly it is safer to feed the patient entirely per rectum. Such cases when they occur in private practice are difficult to manage as removal to hospital is not always free from danger and operation is often impossible in the patient's home surroundings. At the same time the patients in some of these cases recover if seen early when the perforation is small and mouth-feeding is entirely stopped.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Edinburgh, Sept. 12th, 1903.

JAMES BURNET.

A PROBLEM IN MEDICO-LEGAL PSYCHOLOGY.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I have read with interest the letters in THE LANCET tending to strengthen my surmise that the unfortunate clergyman whose case I narrated was in part the victim of suggestive influences from the Press.

I am in full agreement with your correspondent "R. S. P." as to the grave responsibility incurred by the Press in publishing the details of tragedies from day to day. The immense power of suggestion on the human mind is as yet practically unknown or ignored even by the majority of those who esteem themselves wise and prudent. But it must be conceded that in the particular case which formed the subject of my article incidental good accrued in more than one respect by the publication of particulars. Reports calculated to give infinite pain to relatives and friends were spread through the neighbourhood by careless or vindictive tongues, but the wide circulation of the true facts with the added glamour to the ignorant of their being "in print" served to reduce these to silence. Then, again, the facts of the case as published were calculated to bring home to the common understanding the restricted part played by "consciousness" and the immense field of action that may be covered by the "subconscious" and lower areas of the human brain. When the elements of physiological psychology have become matters of common knowledge we shall doubtless modify our attitude towards transgressors of social law, achieving in time, perhaps, that degree of mental orientation expressed in the French proverb, *Savoir tout c'est pardonner*. By this I do not mean of course that punishment is shortly to be eliminated from the criminal code. Punishment for the transgression committed wittingly or unwittingly is a preventive measure of nature which finds a somewhat more discriminating parallel in the courts of justice. But something substantial in human progress will have been achieved when we have learnt to judge our neighbours less harshly and cease to

"Compound for sins we are inclined to
By damning those we have no mind to."

However, we must, I suppose, be content to wait in patience for the day when primary physiologico-psychological concepts have been grasped by the mind of the general. To attempt to force new truths into minds unprepared to receive them is like blowing open a rosebud in the hope of converting it at once into a perfect bloom. We must wait and watch while we give what aid we can to the working of subtler forces.

Your correspondent "R. S. P." hints at the possibility of establishing a psychical branch of preventive medicine. Undoubtedly much could be done in the way of awaking public opinion as to the very real danger arising from the pandering of the Press to the cravings of the morbid-minded. In a case which I recently saw there was a pre-existing susceptibility to morbid ideas and the homicidal element was wholly to be ascribed to "Press" influences. To pursue the point further and ask whether all impulses, morbid or normal, are or are not invariably the result of impressions immediate or remote would involve a critical consideration of the determinist theory. It is the effect of the more immediate suggestions that concerns us, and surely it is time that some of our papers developed a keener sense of their responsibilities. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are already forces at work meeting evil suggestion by counter suggestion.