

presence of the increased tissue change accompanying the high fever and hurried respiration.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

April 20th, 1896. ALEX. MCCOOK WEIR, M.D. R.U.I., &c.

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—I have read with much interest Dr. de Havilland Hall's instructive and highly practical article on the Bronchitis Kettle, Poultices, and Over-feeding in Acute Lung Affections, published in THE LANCET of April 18th. Writing on the question of poultices in the pneumonia of infants and young children Dr. Hall says "that the drawbacks inseparable from the use of poultices are not compensated for by the amount of benefit that can reasonably be expected to result from them," condemning especially the heavy linseed poultice. I have frequently seen that old-fashioned and simple contrivance, the hot bran bag, secure all the advantages of a poultice in such cases of pneumonia as alluded to without any of its disadvantages. It retains the heat for many hours if previously heated in the oven, and, being light, imposes no heavy weight upon the little patient's chest. Those of us in general practice have occasionally to respect the time-honoured beliefs of many of our patients, these beliefs in some cases—I do not say in this—having little foundation in fact; and to many of these patients who do not live "in mansions of the blest" the thought of "inflammation of the lungs" brings the thought of the application of heat to the chest inevitably in its train. To ignore this routine treatment in favour of a cotton-wool jacket involves no loss of prestige to "the doctor" if a successful issue result, but if the contrary be the case I imagine he would think it had been at least advisable to combine a line of treatment from which undoubted benefit accrues with a respect for the popular prejudice. Apologising for trespassing at such length,

I am, Sirs, faithfully yours,

C. HAROLD DYER, M.B., C.M. Aberd.

Clarendon-villa, Cleckheaton, Yorks, April 20th, 1896.

"THE NEW INFANTRY SWORD EXERCISE."

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—To an old swordsman cognisant of the fact that the questions at issue between the French and Italian schools have again and again been thrashed out to the nth term, THE LANCET of March 28th supplies some curious reading on the subject. Certainly no swordsman educated in the schools of Western Europe would dream of placing himself extended on the lunge in the hopelessly dangerous position depicted by your correspondent. In case of an unsuccessful lunge, if a parry of the ensuing riposte were deceived by a disengagement, anyone in the Italian position would be straight on his adversary's point without the slightest chance of recovery. Mr. Dent well points out that the Italian extension only has to be a little further exaggerated to bring the whole thing to a *reductio ad absurdum*. I know not why this over-extension should be dignified with the title of "Italian method," for in any school, if the fencer be foolish enough to so choose, he may thrust his head forward and over-extend himself. But expert fencers are prepared for this sort of thing and know how to deal with it. In actual warfare—i.e., on rough ground—the probability is that a combatant over-extended on the Italian method would lose his balance and fall over either to one side or the other. As to any previous straightening of the arm on the lunge, however much it may be needful to warn beginners to straighten the arm previously to extension in order to avoid the fatal habit of lunging with bent arm—and to such merely initial practice I presume Mr. Dent alludes—in advanced practice the extension of the arm and advance of the body and lower extremity merge into one combined movement. I can imagine the grim smile that would illumine the countenance of Roman Schweizer—if he were still living—or that of any other great swordsman of the last forty years as he exclaimed, in reference to this wonderful extension: "That is just the position in which I should like to see my adversary so as to knock his head all to little pieces." When the members of the British army have perfected themselves in the Italian practice, by all means let them send another invitation to "Point du Jour," and ascertain whether they can lower the

magnificent record of the French fencers exhibited on the occasion of their last visit to Islington.

I am, Sirs, yours very truly,

April 20th, 1896. GEORGE BARRACLOUGH, M.R.C.S. Eng.

"THE QUESTION OF MEDICAL DEFENCE."

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—Your correspondent, Dr. L. Drage, advocates the absorption of the Medical Defence Union by the British Medical Association solely on the ground of economy. If the Medical Defence Union were living up to or exceeding their receipts this might be a reasonable plea, but when the financial statement contained in the annual report shows there was a balance left for the year of £316, which, added to the balance of £325 remaining from the previous year, makes a total of £641 in hand, this cry for economy is manifestly a false one. The main object of his letter is to endeavour to make the British Medical Association a gigantic trades-union for the medical profession by compelling every medical man to join the Association, and then will come the tyranny of the few over the many. I admit there may be occasions when medical men ought to join together and stand firm for their just rights, as they are doing at Cork, Lincoln, Portsmouth, and other places, but they know well what they are fighting for and are continually in counsel together. But to propose that the whole medical profession are to be ruled by the clique that forms the Council of the British Medical Association is most objectionable. The Medical Defence Union is doing its work well and to the satisfaction of the members. As I said at the annual meeting, why not leave well alone? The president, secretaries, and the solicitors seem to thoroughly understand the special work required of them, and surely a subscription of 10s. a year is little enough to pay to insure yourself from false charges and the worries of a lawsuit. Mr. Felce stated that the name of the Medical Defence Union was sufficient to stay an action very often, and, if so, why alter it? I heartily thank you, Sirs, for the able articles in which you have opposed the absorption of the Medical Defence Union into the British Medical Association, and I believe this is the general opinion of the members. Let the last annual report of the Medical Defence Union be well circulated among all members of the profession and many more will be glad to join such a successful union.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Highbury, April 20th, 1896.

GEORGE T. KEELE.

MICROSCOPICAL EXAMINATION OF PLACENTAL TISSUE.

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—I remember a case which impressed me somewhat at the time it occurred and which may interest some of the readers of THE LANCET.

When I was attending the lectures on midwifery at St. George's Hospital my father directed me to ask the curator of the museum to examine the substance which passed from the bowels in the case of a woman who had married about two years before. Instead of being confined as was expected at the usual time nothing occurred, but she remained with all the symptoms and signs of pregnancy. After several months this material from the bowels began to escape, but the question whether it was or was not placenta was not decided by our curator, good microscopist though he was.

The end of the case was that one night my father bade me be ready early before lecture to call in Park-lane and make a post-mortem examination. I did this and found a fully developed infant in the abdominal cavity and the remains of a placenta adhering to the intestine. It was clear that the substance which had been passed before death was placental tissue. I am afraid that the microscopical examination of placental tissue at almost all stages is not as conclusive as one would wish or can claim for it.—I am, Sirs, yours, truly,

West Kensington, April 14th, 1896.

ROBERT LEE.

VENTRO-FIXATION.

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—*Apropos* of your report of the discussion on Ventro-fixation at the British Gynæcological Society on the 9th inst.