

service-pipe, there must be every reason to think it would be best to draw all water through that cistern rather than incur the risks I have pointed out which arise from a dual service-pipe. There are one or two cisterns on the market which perfectly embody that principle of the enlargement of the service-pipe, and it was upon this aspect of the water-supply that last autumn I presented a special report to the Poplar District Board of Works, a copy of which was forwarded to you at the time. I am, Sirs, yours truly,

RUSSELL MAIN TALBOT,
Medical Officer of Health, Bow.

Feb. 21st, 1896.

* * Mr. Talbot has overlooked the fact that the cistern would be constantly emptied and refilled for the requirements of flushing purposes. Under the circumstances it is not clear how the water could become "dangerously stale and stagnant."—ED. L.

"PEROXIDE OF HYDROGEN."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In connexion with Mr. Page's caution concerning the "explosive tendencies" of solutions of peroxide of hydrogen¹ I would like to offer a caution from the clinical aspect. Some time since a boy was under my care with spinal caries and a large iliac abscess. Having opened and cleaned out the interior of the abscess cavity I proceeded to give it a washing with a solution of peroxide of hydrogen, introducing the nozzle of a syringe into the cavity for that purpose. On finishing the irrigation I found, greatly to my surprise, that the oxygen had been liberated with such energy that it had found its way up between the aponeurosis of the abdominal muscles and the superficial fascia, causing an enormous emphysema. A slough formed in due course, and when it became detached the aponeurosis was found denuded from over the false ribs (on the left side) down to Poupart's ligament, across the median line, and over to the left flank. We had a most anxious and apprehensive time with the child, but greatly to my relief he eventually recovered. I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

EDMUND OWEN.

P.S.—I have quite done with peroxide of hydrogen.

Great Cumberland-place, W., Feb. 24th, 1896.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—My attention has been directed to the letter of Mr. Herbert W. Page in THE LANCET of Feb. 22nd, and I shall be glad if you will allow me to point out that peroxide of hydrogen, as ordinarily manufactured, is always more or less prone to spontaneous decomposition into water and oxygen gas, and no doubt at times the decomposition is rapid and even attended with explosive violence.

It was from an intimate acquaintance with this subject that some years ago I was led to make a long practical inquiry into possible means of preserving that substance against chemical change, and in the result I discovered a means which was patented, and I may be allowed to add that the Sanitas Company have now for some years past been preserving peroxide of hydrogen by means of my process.

As thus made, peroxide of hydrogen is a perfectly safe article to handle, and it may be kept almost indefinitely without loss of strength. So little is it liable to change that it may now be shipped in wooden casks to America and Australia, a thing which is absolutely out of the question with peroxide of hydrogen as ordinarily prepared.

Peroxide of hydrogen is an exceedingly valuable liquid for many applications in surgical practice, apart from its industrial value as an oxidising agent, and when better known it will, I am sure, be used on an immensely larger scale than it is at present.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Feb. 25th, 1896.

C. T. KINGZETT, F.I.C.

"PHARMACY AND PHARMACOLOGY."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Dr. Murrell's timely letter in THE LANCET of Feb. 22nd deserves to be cordially endorsed by everyone who wishes to see the practice of medicine and surgery put on as scientific a basis as possible. As Dr. Murrell says,

¹ THE LANCET, Feb. 22nd, 1896.

pharmacology can be taught despite the Vivisection Acts; and even if students were only shown the most elementary experiments of the physiological action of medicinal bodies it would give them a grasp of the subject which few at the present day possess. After all, as students we only need be taught general principles, and upon this broad foundation we could build up our knowledge. It is only by adopting and making compulsory the attendance on lectures on pure pharmacology that examining boards can hope to get a class of men with a good fundamental knowledge of the laws of therapeutics. Perhaps no subject is so slurred over as the subject of therapeutics, and consequently on no subject of the whole student's course do we find so dense ignorance. Why, every dealer thinks he has a right to dictate to us combinations of drugs and chemicals, and we are flooded with mixtures, emulsions, pills, tabloids, and concoctions of all kinds, and we are asked to make our patients swallow them. Surely there must be some reason for it, and I ask, Is it not our ignorance of the subject of therapeutics? To remedy this state of things, then, let us see that the future medical man is educated in thorough knowledge of medicinal agents and he will then be able to suggest his own combinations. We often laugh at the laity in their support of quackery, but I often wonder if we are much better than they are.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

GORDON SHARP, M.B. Edin.

Grafton-street, Leeds, Feb. 25th, 1896.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—THE LANCET of Feb. 15th has in it an advertisement on the part of the Great Northern Central Hospital whereby it is made known to all men that the post of obstetric physician to out-patients is open only to Members or Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians of London or of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Now there is another College in this at present United Kingdom having the same privileges and Royal sanction as both of these and the same statutes and disciplinary regulations as the London College, though differing somewhat from the other in this latter respect. Is it possible that the Great Northern Central Hospital has not yet heard of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland? And if it has I would ask, What fact within the knowledge of its managers makes the diplomates of that College unfit for the competition they invite? One must assume that the managers wish to do their best for the administration of the charity—that is, of the public money entrusted to their care—and to secure the best men for their honorary staff. Then it may be asked in the first place, Why restrict the applicants at all? The larger the choice the better the selection. Secondly, if they see a special virtue in the membership of a college, why do they omit the Irish College? Above all, why accept the Scottish and reject the Irish diploma? The last question, though it deals with the greatest absurdity, is perhaps the easiest to answer in a speculative way. The boycott implied in the advertisement has hitherto been exercised by English hospitals in favour of the London College and by Scottish institutions in favour of the Edinburgh College. In Ireland it has been obsolete these many years. Irish medicine and Irish charities have taken the lead in stigmatising the system of protection in the medical industry. The question of reciprocity with Ireland, therefore, does not arise. Are the novel tactics of the Great Northern Central Hospital inspired by the fallacious doctrine of fair trade? It may be so. It happens also that the staff of the hospital is so fortunate as to include a good proportion of gentlemen whose names bewray them as coming from beyond the Tweed. If it is their loyalty and patriotism that has secured the acknowledgment of their College it is much to their credit and they are to be congratulated. But why is the Irish College so pointedly excluded? Is it lest the master of the Rotunda should don the white robe? The Great Northern Central Hospital may dismiss the apprehension; but the geographical expansion of the predominant partner is singularly ill-timed when it operates by proclaiming to the public that the alumni of a College so closely connected with the greatest school of midwifery in the world are unfit for the post of assistant obstetrician at a London suburban hospital, and not only unfitted to hold the post, but unworthy to engage the attention of those who have the patronage of it. If

the Irish Royal College of Physicians is alive to the interests of its members, if it can at last be made aware of the damaging effect upon its reputation produced by a class of advertisements of which this is the latest and most extreme development, an explanation will be asked and doubtless will be forthcoming. Meanwhile, the system of exclusion in its more usual form has been three times condemned by resolution of the British Medical Association and has been commented upon severely by Lord Sandhurst's Committee (Metropolitan Hospitals Enquiry); it has received the editorial censure of *THE LANCET*; and when an appeal has been made from certain hospital boards to the body of subscribers whom they are supposed to represent the matter has invariably been decided in accordance with the sense of justice and fairplay which belongs to the English people. Such appeals seem to be the only remedy, but they are vexatious and expensive, and it is much to be hoped that the governing bodies of English hospitals will see fit of their own accord to dispense with their necessity.

Wimpole-street, W.

JAMES CAGNEY.

"THE NAUHEIM TREATMENT OF HEART DISEASE."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—With reference to the article upon this subject which was published in *THE LANCET* of Feb. 15th, it appears that an important constituent in the mineral waters of Nauheim was not present in the baths given at the National Hospital for Diseases of the Heart and Paralysis. I refer to carbonic acid gas. It is possible that to this powerful agent more than to any other should be given the credit of the undoubtedly good results by which the baths of several well-known watering-places have acquired their reputation. The experiments of Grandeau, Roussin, Seguin, Currie, and others point to the positive conclusion that under the ordinary conditions of a mineral bath there is no appreciable absorption of the mineral constituents by healthy skin. With regard to the gases contained in a mineral water, it has been shown that the skin will more readily absorb these than the more solid ingredients; but it seems much more reasonable to believe that the great proportion of the effect produced is due not to absorption by the skin, but to direct inhalation into the lungs. The patient lies submerged to the chin, with mouth and nose on a level with the surface of the water and in a stratum of the gas which is continually being given off. The amount of carbonic acid gas given off in twenty-four hours by the Frederick William Sprudell at Nauheim is reckoned at 48,000 cubic feet. The amount given off at the sources of Kissingen, of Vichy, and of Schwalbach is equally considerable. At each of these and similar sources a lighted taper approached towards the surface of the water is immediately extinguished.

At all baths where carbonic acid gas is present in any quantity it has been found necessary to regulate very carefully (1) the duration of the immersion, (2) the temperature, and (3) the amount of agitation of the water. An extension of five or even three minutes in the period of immersion will cause a markedly different result, as will also a comparatively small alteration in the temperature or in the amount of agitation of the water. These last two conditions directly influence the liberation of the gas, and it seems more reasonable to attribute the difference in result produced by prolonging the immersion for so short a period as three or five minutes to direct inhalation of the gas into the lungs than to its absorption by the skin, which is known to take place only slowly. As regards the effect produced upon the heart by baths such as those of Kissingen, of Nauheim, of Schwalbach, of Vichy, or of Kniebis, it is no uncommon thing for the pulse-rate of a healthy individual to be reduced from the normal to 50 or even 40 within half-an-hour of taking a bath. From this depressed condition it will gradually rise in the course of a few hours to a frequency above its usual rate. *I believe that the beneficial result from this class of bath is due almost entirely to the action of the carbonic acid gas given off and to the reaction it induces.*

In many cases a beneficial result is not obtained for some time after the course of baths have been taken, the result being dependant upon the after cure in a well oxygenated atmosphere in order that the reaction induced may be as

great as can be endured. And upon this point I believe that in some cases the reaction may be induced to too great an extent and with disastrous consequences. I have in my immediate knowledge the similar cases of two persons who, after a course at Nauheim, went for the after cure to what was probably too high an altitude, with the result that in each case pericarditis quickly supervened and terminated fatally—an unfortunate issue which I attribute to too great a reaction having been induced.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Curzon-street, Mayfair, Feb. 15th, 1896.

RALPH BROWNE.

"TO THE DEGRADATION OF THE SPECTATOR."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Permit me to ask (in justice to the universally acknowledged good and proper conduct of the Royal Aquarium) for a modification of your expression of disapproval *re* the trance. I hope you do not, in your issue of the 15th inst., use the term "disgusting" in opprobrium. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in any way disgusting or unseemly in the exhibition. Probably your remarks are more especially intended to suggest that such exhibitions are better suited to medical institutions, and in that view I cordially agree.—I am, Sirs, faithfully yours,

JOSIAH RITCHIE,

Chairman and Managing Director.

Royal Aquarium and Summer and Winter Garden Society, Limited, Feb. 21st, 1896.

* * We print Mr. Ritchie's letter which comments upon an annotation entitled "To the Degradation of the Spectator," which appeared in our issue of Feb. 15th. We are happy to admit that the Royal Aquarium is conducted with a propriety as conspicuous as are the length and variety of its programme. We are happy also to see that Mr. Ritchie agrees with us in thinking that such an exhibition as the recent one of hypnotic trance could have been given in more suitable places than within a building devoted to popular entertainments; but surely, as managing director, he could have remedied this in the past and can do so in the future.—ED. L.

"UNSUCCESSFUL PROSECUTIONS UNDER THE MEDICAL ACTS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—With reference to your comments, which appear in your issue of the 22nd inst. under the above heading, upon the recent decisions of the Cardiff Stipendiary in the prosecutions of "Bridgwater and Frikart" instituted by our clients the Medical Defence Union we may inform you, for the information of your readers, that the Union are taking steps with the view of obtaining the decision of the High Court in each case. Application has already been made to the Stipendiary to state a special case in reference to each prosecution, but he has declined to do so, and further action in connexion with the position will be taken by us forthwith.

We are, Sirs, yours obediently,

35, King-street, Cheapside, E.C., Feb. 27th, 1896.

HEMPSONS.

"A QUACK DOCTOR WITH 'ONE OR TWO ASSISTANTS.'"

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The jury have returned a verdict in the case upon which you commented under this title last week that deceased died from natural causes, but that they considered that the conduct of Townson, if the law could not reach him, called for severe censure. We in Liverpool are anxious to see if the local authorities will institute a prosecution here. In Liverpool there appears to be great confusion in the minds of the legal and of the police authorities as to the person upon whom lies the onus of prosecution in these cases. It clearly cannot be the duty of the medical profession to do so. For the sake of argument, were this duty laid upon them, would not the public, who in this country almost demand quackery, look with suspicion on their action and attribute their motives to professional jealousy? Clearly the time has