

## Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

## THE MEDICAL TREATMENT OF LONDON SCHOOL CHILDREN.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—I cannot help thinking that your correspondents have misapprehended the intentions of the London County Council in the above matter. They write as if it were the wish of the Council to get the school children treated by the honorary staffs of the hospitals, and treated gratuitously. So far as I can discover this misrepresents entirely the view of the Council. What is desired is (1) to utilise the accommodation and equipment of the out-patient departments of the hospitals at times when these are not otherwise in use and to pay a reasonable rent for the privilege of doing so; and (2) to appoint special salaried officers to attend the school children in the accommodation thus provided. The honorary staffs of the hospitals would not be asked to undertake the work, but it certainly would be an advantage if the special paid officers could act under the supervision of members of the hospital staffs, for in that case the Council would be able to waive the question of inspection.

There is here no question of "subsidising" the hospitals; the latter simply rent out rooms at hours when they are not wanted for the ordinary out-patient work and the salaries of the special medical officers need not be paid through the hospitals at all. In any case, the principle of paid clinical assistants is no new one and is already in operation at some hospitals.

If, of course, the out-patient department of any hospital is working at such high pressure that all of its rooms are in use all day that settles the question as far as that particular institution is concerned, but this is certainly very far from being the case with those with which I am best acquainted.

The case against school Clinics seems to me very strong. If the Council is driven to adopt them it would mean setting up what are virtually a number of small children's hospitals, or, at the least, out-patient departments, all over London at great cost to the rate-payers. These would inevitably compete with the hospital out-patient departments and would draw away from them a large amount of valuable clinical material.

Observe, too, that this increased expenditure on bricks and mortar is to be undertaken in spite of the fact that the number of children in the London school area is declining; that the number of out-patients at some at least of the hospitals is also declining; and that within a year or so of the establishment of the Clinics the arrears of children needing treatment would have been worked off and the number to be dealt with weekly would have sunk to comparatively insignificant proportions. The Clinics would then have become of the nature of white elephants, and in order to justify their existence would probably start treating general medical and surgical ailments in addition to those special troubles for dealing with which they were first called into existence.

I have said nothing of the legitimate interests of the general practitioner as I do not think these are likely to suffer more under one scheme than under the other. If the Clinics are established they will certainly need to be officered by specialists and the appointments on them are likely to go to junior consultants who are not yet attached to any honorary staff. It is not probable, therefore, that any of the money to be paid for treatment at the Clinics will find its way to the practitioner. As to what is to be done in the case of those children whose parents can pay for private medical treatment there is need for discussion, but if the Council is unjust enough to treat these at the expense of the ratepayers the establishment of Clinics would only facilitate such an intention. I hope, therefore, that before it is too late the hospitals will reconsider their position and try to meet the Council half way, for if the alternative of school Clinics is adopted I feel convinced that it will be the

members of the hospital staffs who, next to the ratepayers, will be the first to regret it.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

May 19th.

ROBERT HUTCHISON.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—Those of us who are members of the honorary medical staffs of the metropolitan hospitals ought to owe you a debt of gratitude for opening your influential columns to a discussion of this important question. I have reason to believe that some of the hospital secretaries, as well as several members of the boards of management, are greatly tempted by the alluring bait of a little extra money—the proposed subsidies or capitation grants—to fall in with the wishes of the "Education Department of the London County Council"; and there can be little doubt that if the honorary staffs of the various hospitals do not make a firm stand our services will be still further exploited to the detriment of the general practitioners of the respective neighbourhoods. For many years I have been calling attention to the unwarrantable demands of the late "School Board" and of their successors, the "Education Department of the County Council," on the gratuitous services of the hospital staffs, and I personally have always declined to sign their official documents or to do work for which their own officers should be responsible. On the present occasion I have distinctly stated to the authorities of my hospital (1) that it is not my intention to treat any cases which may be sent to the hospital by the school nurses or inspectors which do not seem to belong to the hospital class; (2) that not being an officer of the London County Council I shall not sign their official documents or perform the duties of a sanitary or medical officer of the department; and (3) that I shall not be dictated to as to my methods of treatment by any such outside body as the London County Council. It seems that the cases of ringworm are to be sent to my department "for x ray treatment"; it so happens that I decline to treat all cases of this disease by that method—I know I am not "in the fashion"—as I get excellent results in early cases in other ways; and I regret that I cannot agree with the writer of your leading article on the Roentgen Ray Treatment of Ringworm (May 15th), that "so far as our knowledge goes, it is perfectly free from harm." I know of several cases in which extensive scarring or permanent alopecia has been the result of, and others in which the disease has not been cured by, x ray epilation—at the hands, indeed, of skilled operators.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Henrietta-street, W., May 17th, 1909.

PHIN. S. ABRAHAM.

## THE SPREAD OF TUBERCULOSIS.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR,—I have read with considerable interest Dr. J. G. Emanuel's address on the Spread of Tuberculosis published in THE LANCET of May 15th, p. 1369. Whilst agreeing with most of his arguments, there are two points upon which I should like his explanation. Whence does he derive his information for the following statement?—"The appearance of phthisis in places now used as health resorts, previously immune from the disease." He mentions certain places in the South of Europe where it is alleged such infection has occurred. It is of importance that no undue alarm should be caused by exaggerated statements as to the infectivity of pulmonary tuberculosis and that any opinion in regard to the spread of the disease should be fully supported by experience. Already serious inconvenience has been caused to the unfortunate sufferers from the disease by their exclusion from certain European resorts, and Dr. Emanuel's remark quoted above is likely to add to the feeling of nervousness already felt as regards the justification of allowing tuberculous individuals to mix with their fellow creatures at such resorts. As far as I am aware no such statistics as would support Dr. Emanuel's statement have yet been published; if they have I should be obliged if he would be good enough to give me the reference. The infectivity of pulmonary tuberculosis cannot be denied, but undue exaggeration of the fact is likely to lead to uncalled-for disaster to individuals.

Dr. Emanuel also remarks that the subject of his address was prompted by the knowledge of the attitude of insurance