

services which they now, at any rate, can only obtain as a free gift, and by affecting or asserting a totally fictitious poverty.

There is already abroad, even among those whom one would expect to have clearer ideas, an extraordinary notion that money which they profess to give freely to the service of destitution can also at the same time purchase for them a valuable consideration which is actually itself of far higher monetary worth, and this idea is in many cases pushed to an extreme of meanness barely credible. This new suggestion is the very apotheosis of that "letter-system" which has been largely responsible in fostering this spirit of astute philanthropy, and is already utterly discredited. Once adopt in any disguise the principle that any payment, great or small, secures a right to use the hospital, directly or indirectly, for the benefit of the person making the payment, and the transaction loses its charity and becomes an insurance. Practically this plan would result in two certain consequences—the benevolent would find some better object for their attention, and the work of the hospitals would become so enormously enlarged that these institutions would be forced bodily upon the rates, a socialistic experiment for which we are as yet, perhaps, hardly prepared.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Oct. 25th, 1897.

H. H.

"BERI-BERI AND ERRONEOUS DIAGNOSES."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In an introductory lecture at St. George's Hospital Dr. Patrick Manson gives a long list of erroneous diagnoses as transcribed verbatim from the register of the Seamen's Hospital. In the list are anasarca, rheumatism, debility, pericarditis and fits, apoplexy, locomotor ataxia, myelitis, paraplegia, tachycardia, dyspnoea, cardiac diseases, asthma and anasarca, Bright's disease, progressive muscular atrophy, and hysteria. In answer to my inquiry, Dr. Manson has informed me that they are really taken from the register of the Branch Seamen's Hospital at the Royal Albert and Victoria Docks; and he asks me, if my experience does not agree with his, that I should publish it. This branch hospital contains eighteen beds, and his vague use without qualification of the term "seamen's hospital," has led members of the profession to suppose that he is referring to this institution with its 235 beds. I can find no such errors in our register, for at the worst they are merely incomplete diagnoses, giving a prominent symptom as sufficient for admission—e.g., dropsy, œdema of legs, loss of power in legs, anæmia and œdema, &c. We have admitted eighty-seven cases in the past four years. I would add that all the medical certificates, both at the branch and at this hospital, only come from the medical officers of one of our largest shipping companies.

It is because there is such a wide discrepancy between the experience at the two hospitals that I ask you to make this correction.—I am, Sirs, yours truly,

JOHN CURNOW, M.D., F.R.C.P. Lond.

Seamen's Hospital Society (*Dreadnought*), Greenwich, S.E.,
Oct. 27th, 1897.

"THE POLICE AND FIRST AID."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—With reference to a paragraph under the above heading from your Manchester correspondent in THE LANCET of Oct. 16th, although in very few police forces is the number of members holding the certificate of the St. John Ambulance Association greater than in Manchester, in many instances the percentage is higher. Much importance is attached by the Home Office, which requires an annual return of certificate holders, to the instruction of the police in rendering first aid "to the injured," and some interesting statistics in connexion therewith will be published in the first number of the *St. John's Magazine*, the official organ of the Order of St. John and its departments, which will appear on Jan. 1st next.

I am, Sirs, your obedient servant,

HERBERT C. PERROTT,

Chief Secretary, St. John Ambulance Association.

John's Gate, Clerkenwell, E.C., Oct. 21st, 1897.

THE PREVALENCE OF TYPHOID FEVER IN THE AUTUMN.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The autumnal season of the year is always of interest to medical men, as it is at this period in general we may expect an outbreak of typhoid fever to occur, and this year must be of especial interest, with the serious state of things existing at Maidstone; therefore it is a duty we owe to each other to render what aid we can to limit the spread of such disease or to point out any source of danger to be avoided for future years. I should like therefore to call the attention of my professional brethren to the games of the young, some of which I believe to be a great source of typhoid and scarlet fevers. I was for some time puzzled to know why boys should present more cases of typhoid fever than girls. The reason is not far to seek if we study the games themselves, especially in large towns, such as Sheffield, where that most abominable and insanitary arrangement of ash middens exists, and where the excrement from such places is simply shovelled out into the streets into large heaps, afterwards to be carted away, but leaving a considerable amount of excrement stinking for days lodged amongst the stones of the road, amongst which boys play at marbles, licking their fingers to prevent the marble from slipping whilst shooting from the hand, with the result that the germs of the disease are directly swallowed, and in no small quantities. Peg-top is also a prolific source of danger, for the whipcord used is drawn through the mouth to wet it and so prevent slipping; after the top is spun it is either thrown down or left dragging in the dirt until again used. These games affect boys and not girls, hence the difference in the numbers attacked in each sex, girls not as a rule playing at such games, which are usually on the go in autumn after cricket is over. Some weeks ago I saw a boy with typhoid fever and was asked by his parents how I accounted for his having it, as there was no case in the same street. I therefore asked his mother to let me see the trousers worn by the boy, and showed her how stinking the pockets were; they also contained marbles, &c., and dirt from the street. These games, to my mind, are a great source of danger to children living a town life. But how to remedy the evil is not very easy whilst such an abominable way of dealing with refuse is allowed to go on. I have pointed out this source of danger to the young, as I have not as yet seen any mention of games in any paper or book. Contaminated water, I much fear, is not the only source of typhoid fever, scarlet fever, &c.—I am, Sirs, yours truly,

W. SKINNER, L.R.C.P. Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng.

Sheffield, Oct. 21st, 1897.

"IMMORALITY AMONG SCHOOL BOYS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Dr. Hime's article in THE LANCET of Sept. 4th has been worthily followed by a letter published on Oct. 2nd from "The Medical Officer to a Public School," who speaks of preparing a pamphlet to be put into the hands of every public schoolboy. This may be one of the best preventives, but is this not a subject which could be authoritatively dealt with by the Society of Medical Officers of Schools? One would not like to think that this society confined its usefulness to merely physical ailments. No other body of men is in such friendly contact with both parents and schoolmasters, and there are many details which might be settled by conjoint wisdom. What, for instance, is the average age when a boy is tempted to put forth his hand and eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Rev. the Hon. E. Lyttelton tell us in "Mothers and Sons" that the battle begins after the age of fourteen and a half years, and that impurity in a school takes its rise and receives its impetus from boys of fifteen or sixteen years of age who have a constitutional propensity to it and whose wills are feebly developed. Is this the experience of others? The suggestion that meat and alcohol are harmful at supper might be confirmed perhaps. There are many other points on which the utterance of medical experts would be useful, such as cubicles, circumcision, school library books, games, &c.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

F. M. SANDWICH, M.D. Durh.

Cairo.