

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

PURIN-FREE DIETS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—When doctors disagree, who shall decide? Unfortunately, in the matter of treatment there is sad disagreement among them. So much so, indeed, that one may well question whether therapeutics has yet attained to the dignity of a science. A science implies the codification of a number of propositions having such a show of truth as to be accepted by all its serious students. Applying this test, are we justified in including therapeutics among the sciences? I fear not; for there is scarcely a disease regarding the treatment of which physicians show anything like agreement. Therapeutics can never, it is true, become an exact science, since it is always the individual patient rather than a stereotyped disease that has to be treated. Nevertheless, it is much to be regretted that physicians are not one and all agreed on elementary principles, but that each gangs his ain therapeutic gait, to the bewilderment and sometimes, I fear, amusement of the general public.

Nothing better shows the chaotic state of present-day therapeutics than the hopeless disagreement that prevails regarding the dietetic treatment of disease. For many years past we have been taught by a band of enthusiasts that uric acid is a deadly poison and responsible for most (if not all) the ills to which flesh is heir; and so sedulously and successfully has this dogma been disseminated that the public has been wrought up into a veritable uric acid mania—a circumstance of which the enterprising chemist has not been slow to take advantage.

But what is the actual truth regarding the toxic action of uric acid? This, that—as Bouchard has shown—it is no more poisonous than distilled water. No doubt benefit can often be got from a so-called purin-free diet; but, as Dr. Francis W. E. Hare has shown in his remarkable work "The Food Factor in Disease," the disorders which can be benefited in this way can be equally, if not more, successfully treated on a diet containing an abundance of purin bodies, if only the carbonaceous ingredients be curtailed. Any one can prove the truth of this for himself.

A knowledge of man's past dietetic history should alone suffice to give the *coup de grâce* to the uric acid fallacy and the belief that animal food is necessarily injurious to man. In my papers on "The Evolution of Man's Diet," published in THE LANCET in 1904, I endeavoured to show that from the anthropoid period of his phylogeny down to the discovery of cookery he became increasingly carnivorous, until he actually came to consume more animal than vegetable food; and that even when he had learnt to prepare his food by cookery and other means, and thus to increase his vegetable supply, he still continued to be largely carnivorous, as is shown by the dietetic customs of the surviving precibiculturists who consume, on an average, about equal parts of animal and vegetable food. It was not until the agricultural period was well advanced, and the supply of vegetable food thus enormously increased, that man came to consume distinctly more vegetable than animal food, and in some cases even to subsist on vegetable food alone. In other words, man—proud man, "the roof and crown of things"—has evolved from the ape on a highly animalised diet. It was on such a diet that during some hundreds of thousands of years he slowly mounted up the rungs of the evolutionary ladder which leads from the beast to the man, that he evolved the faculty of language, the power of self-analysis, of pondering on the past and present, and speculating as to the future; on such a diet that he first dreamed of a life beyond the grave.

If, then, man has passed from such depths to such heights on a richly animalised food, what folly to contend that food of this kind is necessarily poisonous to him. Man is omnivorous and distinguished from all other animals by his extraordinary adaptability to foods of different kinds. It is this adaptability, coupled with his skill in cultivating and preparing his vegetable food, that has enabled him in some parts of the world to become almost entirely a vegetarian; and it is this adaptability and this skill, fortified by a growing moral sense, which will one day perhaps lead him to

refrain altogether from eating that which has once throbbed with the pulse of sentient life. This may come; this ought, I think, to come. As at present constituted, however, man is largely carnivorous in nature and it is idle to pretend otherwise.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Wimpole-street, W., Oct. 21st, 1906. HARRY CAMPBELL.

MEDICAL MEN USING MOTOR-CARS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Will you allow us, on behalf of the committee of medical men who are users of motor-cars, to call attention to a matter of importance? Under the existing Motor-car Act, which has been temporarily prolonged, the owners of motor-cars are called upon to pay (1) for a licence to drive; (2) a registration fee; and (3) a carriage tax of £2 2s. for cars under one ton weight, and of £4 4s. for cars over a ton weight.

Now there are good reasons for anticipating that in the Act which is being drafted the last of these three will be materially increased, and that cars will be taxed according to either their weight or horse-power. In either case the new taxation will fall heavily upon medical men, who, owing to the exacting nature of their work, the requirements of reliability, the rough roads and steep hills they have to traverse, must use substantially built cars with adequate horse-power. It is not right that motors used by medical men in their daily work should be taxed as though they were the pleasure vehicles of the rich. The medical man has neither time nor money to allow of such luxuries; his motor-car has to be used strictly for professional purposes, and, in consideration of the enormous amount of gratuitous work that he does, ought to be exempt. Surely it is to the advantage of the public to encourage the use by medical men of a means of progression which enables them to render such speedy help in moments of emergency. It is, however, likely that heavy taxes will be thrown upon medical men unless they bestir themselves and try to defend their own interests. We would, therefore, suggest that each medical man should forthwith write to his own Member of Parliament or to any others that he may know for protection and support. Those members of the public who are favourably disposed are asked to write to Members of Parliament and express their sympathy with this movement.

We remain, yours faithfully,

C. B. LOCKWOOD,

Chairman of Committee of Medical Men who are users of Motor Cars;

H. E. BRUCE PORTER,
Honorary Secretary.

6, Grosvenor-street, London, W.

MEDICAL BARRISTERS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Twelve months ago you kindly published a list of medical barristers which I had compiled.¹ Since then, owing largely to the publicity afforded by your columns, I have been able to extend and in a few cases to correct the previous provisional list. Before the days of registered medical practitioners it is, however, somewhat difficult to know when a man should be called a medical man. Thus the following well-known barristers commenced the practice of medicine but forsook it for the law: Lord St. Leonards (Lincoln's Inn, 1807), was son of a barber-surgeon; Joseph Chitty the elder ("called" by Middle Temple, 1816) was diverted from medicine by Lord Erskine; Charles Wilkins (1835) and Samuel Warren (1837) probably never were more than students; the same may be said of William Campbell Sleigh (Sjt.) (Middle Temple, 1846); Sir Thomas Dickson Archibald (Middle Temple, 1852), is said to have been a medical practitioner in Canada, he was called to the Nova Scotia Bar in 1837.

The names which should be added to the first list are:—1803: William Warren Baldwin (Ontario Bar). 1819: John Rolph (Inner Temple and Ontario Bar in 1821). 1870 (June): Frederick Victor Dickins (C.B.) (Middle Temple). 1883 (January): Robert John Price (Middle Temple). 1895 (May): Sidney Iorwerth Mansel-Howe (Gray's Inn). 1903 (June): George Jones (Gray's Inn); (November) John Spencer Low (Middle Temple). In addition to these, 11

¹ THE LANCET, Nov. 4th, 1905, p. 1360.