

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

"THE INFLUENCE OF SCARLATINA
HOSPITALS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—With reference to the influence of scarlatina hospitals, which is dealt with in your leaderette of July 14th, may I be allowed to refer to the evidence given before the Royal Commission on Infectious Hospitals? I examined nearly all the witnesses capable of giving evidence on this point, and no case was forthcoming in which there was the faintest charge proved that scarlatina was disseminated in the open air, or was in any way propagated by aerial diffusion beyond a few feet, and that usually in a confined and impure atmosphere. Dr. Tripe's conclusions seem to bear out that evidence, and, although not advocating rashness on the part of sanitarians, I think it is important to get rid of that morbid dread of scarlatina which is engendered by many at the present day, and which leads to much unnecessary expense and tends to cause senseless panic when a case of scarlatina does find admission into an otherwise healthy place. If those in charge of the case will prevent the carriage of foci of disease in articles of clothing or otherwise, and isolate the case, so that the feverish breath of the patient is not immediately inhaled by those susceptible, there need be no extension of the disease; and if the patient be properly disinfected, there need be no long-continued isolation after the fever has departed, unless there are sequelæ.—I am, Sirs, your obedient servant,
Croydon, July 23rd, 1888. ALFRED CARPENTER.

A MODIFICATION IN THE TREATMENT OF
BOW-LEGS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Allow me briefly to advocate through your columns a mode of applying plaster-of-Paris for the cure of bow-legs in children, and to point out some of the advantages that may be obtained from its use.

The method is as follows.—First, an examination is made of the deformed limb, to gain an accurate knowledge of the exact directions of the abnormal curves. Then a preparatory manipulation to estimate the facility with which the bones will bend. This they will do easily if, as is generally the case, the child be rickety, since they are deficient in earthy salts; moreover, they will not, for the same reason, easily break. Cut out the splints and apply them as if for simple fractures; and, whilst the plaster is still soft, endeavour to remove the deformities by a gradually increasing pressure, taking care that this is not intermittent, and that the shaft of the bone and not the epiphyses is grasped. The gain from the first application is often considerable. In about a week, the time depending much on how the application is borne and how the splint wears, it is removed. A little friction is then applied to the muscles, and another application made. When the bow-legs are cured, the splint is worn until all fear of re-deformity is at an end.

Plaster-of-Paris is of universal application, and can be modified to suit cases of the most varied kind. The length, shape, and weight of the splints rest with the surgeon. Locomotion can be accurately regulated. In the worst cases of rickets, when the disease is in an acute stage, no extensive manipulation can be made (*ça va sans dire*), but the deformity can be arrested. In cases less severe, but where it is necessary to take in the knee, the parents can be assured that this will only be for a short time, for it is soon possible to cut down the splint and use an elastic knee cap, thus allowing movement. The plaster can then be rounded over the sole of the foot and made of such a shape as to render standing impossible. Finally, as the child gets better, the plaster can be pressed into the arch of the foot. The child can then walk a little, without a recurrence of the deformity.

Rickets is acknowledged to depend largely on bad hygienic conditions, and therefore is frequently found among the poor. In manufacturing towns the houses are often converted into workshops; obviously, then, a light,

non-cumbersome apparatus that easily allows the patient to obtain fresh air is of enormous constitutional advantage. The application can be quickly made, often without making the patient cry; it is a perfect mould of the limb, and therefore does not produce sores. The splints and irons in common use appear to act as an ogre—at all events to the uneducated mind; and but few prejudices exist of wide-spread acceptance that are altogether without some reason. I have used this method with various modifications from time to time for between two and three years, and have here endeavoured to point out the more prominent advantages. To the practitioner conversant with the peculiarities of the poor many more will, I think, occur.

I am, Sirs, faithfully yours,

Luton, July, 1888.

W. BOLTON TOMSON, M.D.

JUDICIAL EXECUTIONS BY HANGING.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—A considerable amount of public attention has been attracted to the above subject by the recent revolting mishap which occurred at Oxford on the 17th inst., when a man named Upton was executed, and his head almost torn from his body in the process.

This and several similar accidents which have taken place previously at executions, under what is known as the "long-drop method," indicate, I think, that some improvement is needed in the mode of carrying out capital punishment. Without going into the question of what is the best means of inflicting the death penalty, I would suggest that, so long as hanging is the legal method, it should be carried out with more scientific care and judgment. Under the existing system the hangman appears to be the sole authority for deciding upon the length of drop required for causing death with despatch and decency, and he in this case formed his opinion in a most hurried and inaccurate manner, not discovering until the culprit was upon the scaffold that the drop was too long, and that the neck was not sufficiently muscular to bear the strain it was about to be subjected to without severe laceration and bloodshed. I have had some experience of judicial executions by hanging both in this country and abroad, and believe that timely attention to a few material points would obviate such an indecent spectacle as the head of a criminal being nearly torn off his body as in this instance. The hangman's explanation, that "the injury was owing to the thinness and shrivelled character of the neck," was probably correct; but surely this condition should have been noticed and taken into consideration by some competent authority before the wretched man arrived upon the scaffold, and the length of drop regulated accordingly. The prison surgeon is doubtless the most competent authority to determine what length of drop is necessary to cause speedy death by hanging after a due examination of the criminal, and taking into consideration the weight, height, and age, together with the muscular development and character of the skin, especially of the neck. The quality and thickness of the rope used ought also to be authoritatively determined. The surgeon's report upon the criminal's physique &c. would be a valuable aid and guide to the executioner (whose personal opportunity of forming an opinion is very limited, only two minutes elapsing, according to the account in *The Times* of the Oxford case, from the time the executioner entered the cell to the falling of the drop), and would, I think, come properly within the range of the former's duties in the cause of humanity, and greatly tend to lessen the chances of a repetition of these mishaps.

I am, Sirs, your obedient servant,

J. HIGHAM HILL, M.D., F.R.C.S.E.

Bedford-square, W.C., July 24th, 1888.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The Home Secretary seems, by his reply in the House last night to Mr. Brookfield, to be very imperfectly informed of the results from "time to time" of the present haphazard system of executing criminals. So late as April and August of last year the murderers Currell and Lipski (whose executions I attended) had quite narrow escapes from decapitation, the former getting a drop of seven and the latter eight feet, though Berry informed the Governor of Newgate that the drops had been arranged at five feet six inches and six feet respectively. In Currell's