

respiration may even become necessary, as in Dr. Offenburg's case. The variation in strength of specimens of curara renders it important that the fluid to be injected should be procured from those who are likely to have exercised special care in the selection of the drug. A solution so concentrated—half a grain in five minims—as that prepared by the Messrs. Gale of Bouverie-street (THE LANCET, Nov. 10th), if reliable, seems to supply such a desideratum.

Faithfully yours,

EDW. WOLFENDEN COLLINS, M.D.,
Surgeon to Jervis-street Hospital.

Lower Baggot-street, Dublin, Nov. 13th, 1877.

THE

MEDICAL ASPECTS OF TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In common, I presume, with most members of our profession, I have awaited from week to week with interest and curiosity the letters that have lately appeared in your columns on the subject of abstinence from alcohol. I have hitherto refrained from seeking to take part in a discussion so fully sustained on either side; but I should now like, with your permission, to say a few words in reply to the communication of Dr. Braxton Hicks, in THE LANCET of Nov. 17th.

It appears to me that no better illustration could be found of the prevalent fallacy that underlies much of what has been said and written on this subject; for, to enable one properly to appreciate the writer's argument, he ought to have appended to his letter a portrait of himself. Otherwise, it would be impossible for anyone unacquainted with his physique to estimate the force of his reasoning. Dr. Braxton Hicks, as we know, is a gentleman of full habit of body, hale, and vigorous—just one of the many who, if they choose to abstain from wine, may do so with impunity, presumably even with advantage to bodily health. But can the same be said of people—and there are not a few such in the world—of an exactly opposite temperament, pale, thin, somewhat delicate, nervous, or phlegmatic? This, Sir, I take to be the gist of the whole question. I belong myself, to some extent, to the latter category; and I know, by various tests and long experience, that the daily use of a little wine is indispensable to my health. But I have never been in the habit of taking what is crudely designated alcohol, except as it exists in the light wines of France and Germany. If the pending discussion were upon the question of taking or not taking luncheon instead of on the question of taking or not taking alcohol, I have no doubt many would come forward and depose to the great comfort and convenience with which, for six months or a year, they had dispensed with that meal. Lord Macaulay never partook of food in the middle of the day till he was nearly fifty, and then he lamented the failure of strength that obliged him to have recourse to this ordinary necessity of self-preservation.

But really, Sir, the late lucubrations of English writers on the subject of what they call "alcohol" appear intolerably insular to anyone acquainted with the usages of continental countries, more particularly France, Spain, and Italy. In the latter, "il vino nostrale" is universally regarded as the natural adjunct and adjuvant of bread. Manzoni, in his memorable description of the famine that preceded the famishing populace: "A cui il cibo potesse ancora essere rimedio dispensavano minestre, nova, pane, vino." Sit down to a public *déjeuner* or dinner in any part of France, and you see men, women, and children partake of wine with as little consciousness of doing anything abnormal as have we when we drink tea or coffee. In Spain the use of wine has been universal ever since the days when Don Quixote and his squire emptied a skinful of the beverage in the goatherd's hut; and I have seen in that country more than one assemblage of 16,000 people at a bull-fight, in which there was neither a drunken person nor a policeman.

In truth, what we require in England is not so much total abstinence as a national reform of the public taste. M. Taine, in his "Notes sur l'Angleterre," has well expressed this. "Pareillement," he says, "leurs vins ordi-

naires, porto, sherry, très-chauds, très-liqueux, sont en outre coupés (mêlés) d'eau-de-vie; ce mélange leur ôte leur finesse. Mais s'ils étaient purs, les Anglais les trouveraient fades; nos vins de Bordeaux et même de Bourgogne sont trop légers pour eux. Dans la classe moyenne on préfère l'ale, le stout, le porter, surtout le *brandy-and-water*, sorte de grog où l'eau-de-vie entre pour moitié. Pour leur plaire, il faut que la boisson soit âpre ou brûlante; le palais doit être gratté ou raclé."

It may now almost be said of England, as an unsophisticated French traveller in the sister isle wrote of the native whisky, "Le vin du pays est diablement fort."

I remain, Sir, yours faithfully,

Sussex-gardens, Hyde-park, Nov. 1877.

T. FITZPATRICK.

OUTBREAK OF TYPHOID FEVER IN THE TOWN OF WESTBURY, WILTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—We have a slight epidemic of typhoid fever in this town, and my object in calling your attention to the matter is to elicit your opinion on the hygienic bearing of the case. The fever broke out at a dairy-farm in Westbury more than six weeks ago. The first one attacked was the wife of the farmer, the second was the maidservant, and the third the son of the farmer. The question arose, What was the cause of this outbreak? The copy of the report of the sanitary officer, Mr. Foley, will speak for itself—viz., "Nuisance at the dwelling-house and premises occupied by George Jackson at Gashouse farm, Westbury, Wilts, arising from foul and offensive defective drainage from the *dairy*, washhouse, and premises; also a foul and open cesspool to the privy at the back of the said dwelling-house and adjacent to the well, the water of which is fouled and rendered unfit for drinking and domestic purposes." He also goes on to state, "Water in well at back of dwelling-house foul; privy vault about ten feet from well." The dwelling-house is small, rooms low and small, dairy small and close to the scullery, which contains the pump from well. The water from the well is impure and unfit for domestic purposes. Jackson says that the water from well is not used for drinking or cooking purposes, but admits that it is used frequently to wash out the milk cans, unless when the well goes dry, when they use water from the river, which contains much of the drainage of the town. The cows belonging to Jackson's farm drink the water from the river.

I have already stated that three cases of fever arose from Jackson's dwelling. The maidservant was sent home, and on Mrs. Jackson's recovery she nursed her son, and at the same time assisted in the dairy.

The fourth case was the daughter of a draper in Westbury, living some distance from Jackson's. I can find nothing on his premises to account for the case. The privy, drains, and water-supply are very satisfactory. The supply of milk for the family comes from Jackson's dairy.

The fifth case is the daughter of a clothworker in Westbury. Privy, pump-well, and drains in a satisfactory state. The supply of milk comes partly from Jackson's dairy, though indirectly through a milkman.

The sixth case is the son of a draper, of Westbury. Privy, water-supply, and drains in a satisfactory state. The supply of milk comes partly from the same milkman who supplies case No. 5.

The seventh case is the son of another draper. Privy, water-supply, and drains in a satisfactory state. The supply of milk comes wholly and direct from Jackson's dairy.

There are at present no other cases in the town. I brought the matter before the Board of Guardians, and Jackson had an order to discontinue the sale of milk and butter till the fever in his house had abated, and the sources of the same removed. Did I exceed my duty in recommending the Board to take these steps?

Faithfully yours,

FRANCIS WILLIAM SMITH, M.B.,
Westbury, Wilts, Dec. 1st, 1877. Medical Officer of Health.

* * * From the medical point of view there can be no doubt that the action taken by Mr. Smith was right. Indeed, no