

evidence of the hospital surgeon or of the paid medical man might be unobtainable or in which their testimony might be usefully supplemented and confirmed. To do this would not only cause questions of medical ethics to be raised but would involve a considerable tax, through loss of time, upon those undertaking to do it.

An Impudent Fraud.

At the recent Durham assizes Adam Melrose Porteous pleaded guilty to obtaining by false pretences a sum of £81 and food from the visiting committee of the Durham County Asylum in the following circumstances. A. M. Porteous having at one time entered as a medical student at Edinburgh, and having since qualified as a member of the Veterinary Surgeons' Institute at Edinburgh, practised for some time as a veterinary surgeon at Plumstead, describing himself at the same time on his door-plate as Dr. Porteous, and practising medicine under that title upon human patients. In 1907, counsel informed the court, he made an attempt to get his name inserted in the Medical Directory, accompanied by an imposing list of medical degrees, to none of which he was entitled. The vigilance of the editor of the Directory, however, detected the deceit, and the prisoner merely repeated his claim to the titles put forward and expressed indifference as to their appearing with his name in the volume. In 1908, however, he applied for the post of surgeon on board a ship and assumed in so doing the names of Mr. William James Porteous, a registered medical practitioner. In this application he was unsuccessful, but, still personating Mr. W. J. Porteous, and armed with forged testimonials, he was afterwards accepted as locum-tenent during the absence of the medical superintendent at the Durham County Asylum. He occupied the post without detection until August, 1908, and it was not until after he had left the asylum that the fraud was discovered. He was at length arrested after his return from serving as a ship's surgeon, in which capacity he appears also to have been engaged between the time of his committal and his trial. Mr. Justice Ridley passed a sentence of six months' imprisonment in the second division, observing that he would have made it a heavier one if it had turned out that the prisoner had been ignorant of the duties which he undertook to perform. This reason for a light sentence on such an occasion hardly seems adequate. The fact that the visiting committee did not have their attention called to any proof of such ignorance does not show that none existed, and the dangers which have been incurred by helpless persons are obvious.

Looking Back.

FROM

THE LANCET, SATURDAY, March 17th, 1832.

ON THE

DISINFECTING POWERS OF HEAT.

BY WILLIAM WALLACE, Esq., Surgeon, M.R.I.A., Dublin.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—It is more than twelve years since a series of experiments were instituted and performed by me, with the view of ascertaining the power of heated air, and of many other agents, to destroy contagion. These experiments, and their results, were made known at the time in my lectures, and in conversations with professional friends. The attention of the General Board of Health of this city was also drawn to the subject by me nearly ten years ago, as will appear from the following letter, written at a time when contagious fever prevailed most extensively in Ireland:—

October 11, 1822.

"Sir,—At this moment, when fever is causing such devastation in some parts of this country, I feel it to be my duty to request, through you, the attention of the "General Board of Health" to the apparatus which I have constructed for destroying any contagion that may exist in the bed-clothes, or wearing apparel, of fever patients, upon the principle of exposing them to heated air of any temperature, either alone or saturated with aqueous vapour, or any gaseous agent. I shall not occupy your time by any details respecting its mechanism; this will be sufficiently understood from the drawings* which accompany this letter, and from an examination of a model, which I shall have the honour of sending you for the inspection of the Board; and as

the importance and utility of such an instrument will at once appear evident to you, whose attention has been for so many years and with such advantage directed to contagious fever, I shall not further trespass than by enumerating a few of the benefits which may be obtained from the employment of this apparatus.

1. It will afford the means of disinfecting articles which cannot be conveniently washed, such as hats, shoes, many woollens, and which it would therefore be often necessary to destroy.

2. It will greatly diminish, or altogether remove, the danger necessarily attendant upon the process of disinfecting clothes by washing; by often enabling us to dispense with washing, or by destroying the virulence of the contagion, before the clothes are submitted to this process.

3. It would cause a very considerable reduction in the expenditure of fever institutions by lessening the quantity of washing.

4. It can be immediately placed in any situation in which it may be required, being portable.

5. This apparatus, by a little addition, forms a most perfect instrument for fumigating partially or generally the surface of patients, or for administering any possible description of vapour-bath; its being applicable to these purposes must necessarily increase its utility in hospitals.

6. It is scarcely necessary to observe, how perfectly it will afford the means of destroying insects in wearing apparel or bed-clothes, and how useful it would therefore be in prisons and poor-houses. I have the honour to be, your most obedient servant,

W. WALLACE.

To Fr. Barker, Esq., M.D.,
Secretary to the General Board of Health,
Dublin."

To the above letter I received the following answer:—

"February 1, 1823.

"Sir,—I am directed to forward to you the following resolution of the General Board of Health, passed at a meeting held on February 1, 1823:—

"Resolved, That the instructions under which we act, as a Board of Health, do not authorise us particularly to notice Mr. Wallace's apparatus for the application of steam, gases, &c., as a means of curing disease, or destroying infection, but we feel ourselves bound to acknowledge that it has been seen and examined by several of the members of this Board, who have expressed a very favourable opinion of its utility and fitness for the purposes to which it is applied. I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your very obedient servant,

FR. BARKER,
Secretary to the General Board of Health.

To W. Wallace, Esq., &c."

* These interesting drawings were reproduced in the same number of THE LANCET from which the above excerpt is transcribed. Vide also "Looking Back" in THE LANCET of Jan. 22nd, 1910, p. 261, referring to the classic experiments of Dr. Henry of Manchester on the "Disinfecting Powers of Increased Temperatures."

Public Health.

COLONY OF HONG-KONG: PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT FOR 1908.

A JOINT report on the public health of Hong-Kong in the year 1908 has been issued by Dr. J. M. Atkinson and Dr. W. W. Pearse, respectively the principal civil medical officer and the medical officer of health of the colony.

For administrative purposes that portion of the colony which is under the jurisdiction of the sanitary board consists of the Island of Hong-Kong, together with a section of the "new territories" known as New Kowloon. The population of the colony is estimated at 336,000, of whom about 13,000 are either Europeans or Americans, the rest consisting of Chinese, Malays, East Indians, and Africans. Of the white population 6838 belong either to the army or the navy, the remainder being civilians. At the census of 1906 not less than 70·1 per cent. of the inhabitants, exclusive of the army and navy, were male adults; at the 1901 census the percentage had been 72·6, so that the proportion of females in the Hong-Kong population has increased in the last few years.

The birth-rate among the non-Chinese population was 14·43 per 1000, whilst among the Chinese population it did not exceed 6·24 per 1000. But the registered total of Chinese births does not even approximately represent the number that have actually occurred; for it is known that few, if any, of the births of infants dying within the first month of life have been registered at all. On this account the large number of infants at this early age which are found dead or dying in the streets, as well as those brought to the convents in a dying condition, are assumed to have been born in the colony but not registered. In order to arrive at something approaching a true birth-rate these are added to the registered births, but even then the birth-rate (6·24 per 1000) is believed to be far below the truth.

The detailed public health work of Hong-Kong is performed for the most part by sanitary inspectors charged with