

administration will not improve medical practice. The conditions at the Flanders front in the early months of the war occurred to me as an instance. The Regulars were practically all employed in administration, and the treatment of the patients was in the hands of temporary officers who, having but just joined the R.A.M.C. from civil life, were not at first at home in the novel and difficult conditions of war. They needed guidance, and it was not any official action but the teaching and efforts of the consulting surgeons, who were at that time civilians—for the one Regular consultant was appointed much later—which rapidly raised the practice of these young officers to a level which has, I believe, never previously been attained in war. Nor did the official authorities realise without the advice of the consulting surgeons the importance of the rôle which the clearing stations were to play. Of the second class of surgeons at the front, the surgical specialists, only, I think, two, and of the medical specialists not one, for the reason given above, could be drawn from the Regulars. It was, therefore, fortunate that civilians were available to conduct the treatment of the army. I further repeated, on the same line of argument, a statement often made by public servants themselves, and recent instances will occur to every one, that in Government service innovation is not viewed with favour, whereas in medicine it is essential that new methods should be constantly tried. I drew the conclusion that an atmosphere of official control is bad for a scientific profession. I said all that, and am prepared to say it again, but you will observe that although the report gives much the same words, the impression conveyed is very different.

I have no doubt that I am myself greatly to blame for not making my meaning clear. But when I consented to allow a short account of my address to be given to you I did not anticipate that what has the air of a verbatim report would be sent you, and still less that you would print it without my knowledge and without my correction. Had I seen it, it is hardly necessary to say that the whole paragraph would have been erased, not only because it is insulting to the Corps as a whole and to many of my personal friends, including the Regular consultant who was my own colleague, but also because it neither represents my meaning at the time, nor my settled opinion of the Corps. If anyone cares to know what that is they will find it in a book I have just published, where beside many scattered passages there is a special chapter on the subject. The opinions may be disputed, but I hope that at least they are not offensively expressed.

I regret to trouble you with a matter which, though it has given me the deepest distress, is after all of no great importance to anyone but myself.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Nov. 10th, 1919.

W. P. HERRINGHAM.

* * The wording of the report was brought to the attention of our colleague who wrote it, who has sent us the following: "Lest there should be any misapprehension about Sir Wilmot Herringham's remarks at the meeting of the Norwich Medico-Chirurgical Society, reported in THE LANCET of Nov. 1st, it should be stated that the speaker had clearly no intention of casting any slur on the abilities of the R.A.M.C. Undoubtedly by 'second-class surgeons' and 'absence of physicians' he was understood to mean that with so small a personnel it was impossible to have consulting surgeons of first-class rank on all the special sides, while it was not the skill of the physicians that was absent, but the actual men themselves, the personnel being so very small and the sick so very numerous. In these circumstances the additional help given by leading civilian consulting physicians and surgeons was extremely valuable."—ED. L.

FRIENDS' EMERGENCY AND WAR VICTIMS' RELIEF COMMITTEE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR.—May I call the attention of your readers to the fact that the Friends' Emergency Committee (Foreign Fund) and the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee have now been united under the name of the Friends' Emergency and War Victims' Relief Committee? This brings the whole of the foreign relief work of the English Society of Friends under one committee and this organisation works in close coöperation with the American Friends' Service Committee—a similar body with even wider functions. The tide of the work flows eastward. In France, where help has been given

continuously for five years, the need for emergency work is lessening. In the two devastated cantons near Verdun, in which we were asked by the French Government to work, wooden houses have been built, medical aid has been given, shops have been opened and handed over to a local coöperative society, land has been ploughed, and help too diverse to enumerate has been organised. The 550 workers are already diminishing, and it is anticipated that only a comparatively small band of relief workers will remain through the winter. The permanent reconstruction will, of course, take years to accomplish, and is beyond the power of a voluntary organisation.

Moving eastward one finds ruined children's bodies instead of ruined houses. The tragedy of Vienna is too overwhelming to depict here, but, in brief, the results of years of under nourishment may be seen written on practically every Viennese child, and unless help is given quickly and thoroughly many must be doomed to a crippled invalid life or to death. Food and coal are the most crying needs of this great city, and these needs must be met if disaster is to be averted. Unhappily, the commodities most needed are, under existing conditions, the most difficult to obtain. Our workers are coöperating with a committee on the spot in the distribution of supplies furnished from England, and are also engaged in various schemes for obtaining increased supplies of milk and for making of clothes, in which it is expected that barter will be resorted to owing to the extreme depreciation of the krone. All that has been said about the conditions in Vienna applies with almost equal force to the conditions in Germany, where the Committee is doing what little it can to send relief and to foster a spirit of reconciliation.

In Poland, too, a Unit is at work, the first foreign Unit, it is understood, to take up the much needed work of disinfection against typhus. More than 6000 soldiers, civilians, and children have been disinfected, and their immunity from disease thereby greatly increased—a matter of vital importance—for with the coming of the cold weather there is almost certain to be a recurrence of typhus. In addition to this the Unit is arranging for the distribution of clothes, and is starting workshops in which they will be made, as well as a dispensary for child patients. All this work is badly needed, as the utter rags in which people go about, and the sad condition of the children show only too clearly.

This, in barest outline, is the work already being carried on by the Relief Committee. Schemes for its extension, if the means are forthcoming, are under consideration. Surely winter can hardly ever have approached with such a black outlook for so many women and children all over Europe. And it is for us who still can eat our good meals by our warm fires to show them that England is a friend to those in trouble.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

A. RUTH FRY,

91, Bishopsgate, E.C.2, Nov. 4th, 1919.

Hon. Secretary.

CONJUGAL TUBERCULOSIS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I can quite understand that Dr L. S. Burrell (THE LANCET, Nov. 1st, p. 806) finds it difficult to follow me, because he looks at tuberculosis from the germ point of view and I from the side of environment. The battle between these two issues will have to be fought in the coming days. Meanwhile my contention is that in the majority of cases clinical facts and present-day observations do not warrant us to make any dogmatic statement as to the relation between tuberculosis, tubercle bacilli, and infection, briefly for the following reasons.

(a) The discovery of tubercle bacilli does not establish the infectiousness of consumption; it merely explains how infection may, but does not prove how it does, occur.

(b) The presence of micro-organisms in connexion with a disease does not necessarily prove they are its cause any more than the presence of eagles near a corpse proves they were the cause of death.

(c) Animal experiments with human tubercle bacilli, severe as they are, have not produced the effects and symptoms of natural tuberculosis of the lungs.

(d) It is a question if tubercle bacilli can be found in the inspired and expired air in the ordinary surroundings of tuberculous patients. We have tested the air in their rooms and chalets and the results were negative.

(e) Among those employed in our sanatorium—medical men, matrons, nurses, attendants, &c., who have daily come into contact with consumptive patients—there is no proof that even a single one has contracted tuberculosis by