

THE EXAMINATIONS AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

SIR,—Those who have noticed the recent results of the examinations at the College of Surgeons, must, I think, feel, as I do, that there is something very wrong somewhere, either in the schools or in the examinations; the number of rejections being so very great, out of all reasonable proportion, and such as to demand thorough investigation. I see by your report in the JOURNAL, that at the recent examinations, 70 candidates were rejected out of 136; surely there must be either a very lax system at the schools, or the examinations are not fair tests. I incline strongly to the latter view, more especially at the Primary Examinations; take for instance the subject of physiology; with so wide a subject there should be some limit, either certain books should be specified, or some guide given as to the branch of the subject upon which they would examine—it is so arranged at the universities; and then, above all, I believe that sufficient allowance is not made for highly nervous men, which is more than ever necessary now that such vast numbers are rejected, that both teachers as well as candidates feel that there is no certainty as to who will get through. As a rule the quick men, with good memories and self-possession, are successful, and the dull plodding men, probably in the end the best, with indifferent memories, and no self-confidence, are rejected, whereby grievous harm and discouragement are inflicted upon the student, and a heavy penalty imposed on the parents.

I believe I am right in stating that the rejections at the College of Surgeons exceed largely those of any other examining body in the United Kingdom; and that, therefore, the subject urgently needs ventilation amongst those interested, and, indeed, on public grounds, and I shall be glad to know the opinion of others on this matter, and shall be surprised if the mention of it does not elicit some remarks.—I am, yours etc,

M.R.C.S., etc.

SIBERIAN PLAGUE.

SIR,—With reference to your note on the prevalence of Siberian plague in Russia, it may reassure some to know (as was clearly ascertained by Surgeon-Major Colvill and myself during our visit to Russia in 1879) that what the Russians mean by Siberian plague, is a contagious cattle-disease occasionally transferred to man, that is, anthrax, or some very closely allied disease. It has nothing to do with bubonic or Oriental plague, though a confusion has sometimes arisen on this point, and did even at one time find its way into official reports in this country.

As to the bubonic plague of the neighbourhood of Bagdad, noticed in your JOURNAL, as well as in some London morning papers, it was announced in July that the plague had been "stamped out"; but it is well to remember that this is the official statement published in every plague-year at that season, when the epidemic is temporarily extinguished by the intense heat of the weather. Whether it is to recur in the winter, or next year, no one can say.—Yours faithfully,

J. F. PAYNE.

78, Wimpole Street.

SCHULTZEN'S METHOD OF DETERMINING OXALIC ACID IN URINE.

H. V.—The urine is rendered weakly alkaline with ammonia, and then treated with calcium-chloride to complete precipitation. The whole is next evaporated to a small volume, strong alcohol added, and the mixture laid aside for twelve hours, then it is filtered, and the precipitate washed with alcohol and ether. The precipitate is subsequently washed with water and acetic acid in succession, the residue dissolved in hydrochloric acid, filtered, and the filtrate first made alkaline with ammonia and then strongly acid with acetic acid. The resulting oxalate of lime is collected on a filter, washed, and converted into caustic lime before weighing. Fehrbinger's modification of Neubauer's process also gives very good results, and it is less troublesome in its performance than the above.

SCARLET FEVER.

SIR,—Will you or some of your many scientific readers be so good as to show how to account for the fact, that scarlet fever, that was in 1803, according to Dr. Reece, "a disease so mild as to require nothing more than to observe a low diet, and to avoid cold air and cold drink," has become, in 1884, "one of the most dangerous and contagious diseases known," so says Dr. Newsholme in *Hygiene*, page 365? There must be a cause for this sad change.—Yours, etc,

ENQUIRER.

THE TREATMENT OF PHIMOSIS WITHOUT (CUTTING) OPERATION.

SIR,—Recently a child, aged 18 months, with tight phimosis, was placed under ether; I then inserted within the prepuce the end of a pair of dressing-forceps, expanded the blades, and with great ease retracted the prepuce behind the glans. The facility and rapidity with which this was done (the whole process being almost momentarily), and the satisfactory results, lead me to doubt whether it is justifiable to submit any infant to the risk, however slight, attending circumcision (to say nothing of other objections); and in the case of adults (for whom Mr. Richmond's ingenious instrument appears specially intended), it seems to me highly probable, at any rate, that a similar proceeding could well be borne without anaesthetics, and that it would be preferred by the patient to a tedious gradual dilatation—I am etc.,

HERBERT L. SNOW.

40, Norfolk Terrace, Bayswater, W.

THE ASPIRATOR.

SIR,—Dr. Protheroe Smith, in his letter in the JOURNAL for November 8th, referring to my paper on Aspirators, seems somewhat aggrieved that I remarked that "it was not until the year 1869 the instrument attained anything like perfection." I think if he will refer to my paper again, and will read the following paragraph, he will see that I have given him credit for what he claims. I say, "Dr. Protheroe Smith claims priority of invention to Dr. Dieulafoy, as he suggested a set of exploring needle-trocars, with exhausting syringe attached, which he exhibited, in the year 1867, at the annual meeting of the British Medical Association held in Dublin." He will pardon me, however, I am sure, if I repeat that his instrument was "not nearly so perfect as Dr. Dieulafoy's."—Yours obediently,

FREDERIC B. JESSETT.

16, Upper Wimpole Street, W.

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