

COMMUNICATIONS.

THE TRAUMATIC ORIGIN OF CANCER.

To the Editor CANADA LANCET :

SIR,—In a recent medico-legal case the entire argument turned on the point, "can traumatism cause cancer," and if we take our text books we will find that every one of them says, "it is possible," but were they to add highly improbable it would be much nearer the truth. Not taking the individual merits of the case into consideration I would like, Mr. Editor, to discuss "the traumatic origin of cancer." We are prone when we do not know a thing to speak in general and indefinite terms about it, and according to the care with which we make our statements they last or are forgotten.

With respect to cancer this is exceptionally true and as we have no certain origin or sure cure it is a fit subject for every one to theorize on. The reasons put forward for cancer are legion. Under humoral pathology it was a dyscrasia of the blood.

Hereditary influences were called in and a third of the cases were accounted for.

Mental emotions have been accused, traumatism both simple blows and constant irritation.

Of late years the germ theories have been advanced, the Blastomycetes, cancerous parasites proven to be cell enclosures and so on. In fact any one who had the courage to make any definite statement as regards cancer origin had at once an army of observers after him to prove that he was wrong.

So, I say, it is only the broad indefinite statements with which our books are filled to-day that have lasted. Cancer is essentially the same in whatever part of the body or at whatever age it happens to come; whether it be in exposed places as the breast or lip or in a deeply seated organ as the pancreas; therefore I would hold that just as tuberculosis is always caused by the bacillus, so cancer must always have the same and as yet unknown origin.

Syphilis is quite as much a mystery as cancer as regards its first cause, but as we can control its symptoms by empirical medication we do not pay so much attention to its cause. But the bringing in of the anti-toxin treatment for sarcomas and for other diseases has given an impetus to the laboratory men to try to find something which will stay the ravages of cancer.

The desire to find a plausible excuse for one of our greatest and most terrible scourges has led, in my opinion the writers to say that one of the causes of cancer is trauma. An unfortunate woman comes with cancer of the breast, she hears the diagnosis and demands, why? Her adviser immediately asks, do your corsets irritate your breast? Have your parents or relations suffered from this disease? have you ever been struck? and according as he gets his answer it is written in the history and she is told that that is the reason.