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U. OGDEN, M.D.,

R. ZIMMERMAN, M.D., L.R.C.P., Lond.,

} Consulting Editors.

A. H. WRIGHT, B.A., M.B., M.R.C.S., Eng.,

I. H. CAMERON, M.B.,

} Editors.

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✉ All literary communications and Exchanges should be addressed to Dr. CAMERON, 28 Gerrard St. East.
✉ All business communications and remittances should be addressed to Dr. WRIGHT, 312 Jarvis Street.

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Original Communications.

THE CAUSES OF THE PRESENT EPIDEMIC OF TYPHOID FEVER.

Read by Mr. W. H. Montague, at the Inaugural Meeting of the "Toronto School of Medicine Medical Society," January 14th, 1882.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—As you are aware, the medical world has never been unanimously agreed upon the exciting cause of this disease. At the present day we meet with two principal theories which in altogether different ways account for its rise and spread. The first of these, whose most illustrious advocate is Dr. Murchison, declares the source of the affection to be a poison derived from the decomposition of either organic or inorganic substances. The product of this decomposition by various means gaining entrance into the body of its victim, and there performing its characteristic work. In defending this, which he names the "Pythogenic" theory, Dr. Murchison refers to the outbreak of the disease at Westminster School in 1857. In that case he tells us that the disease followed very exactly in its course the line of a foul and long neglected private sewer or immense cess-pool, in which fecal matters had been for years collecting without means of exit. This sewer communicated directly with the drains of all of those who were stricken with the epidemic, and from this fact Dr. Murchison concludes that the cause of the disease is the poison of ordinary decomposition. With regard to this, however, Dr. Collic, of the Homerton Fever Hospital, has pointed out that although the contents of this cess-pool had been accumulating for years and emitting its horrid stench,

yet the outbreak did not occur until immediately after several minor cess-pools had been opened into the larger one.

Had the typhoid appeared comparatively early in the history of this cess-pool and continued during its existence, it certainly would be admissible as evidence of the probability of ordinary decomposition being able to produce the disease. I might refer you to the records of numerous instances where epidemics are supposed to have had a similar origin. Indeed I do not doubt that we ourselves have most of us seen occasions when, to say the least, it would be very convenient to adopt this view of the matter; but let us understand that not only do such instances not establish the correctness of the theory but that positive evidence is at hand to prove that from the very worst forms of ordinary decomposition no typhoid has arisen. Dr. W. Budd records a most remarkable case of sewage decomposition unattended by any outbreak of disease, viz., that of the Thames, in 1858 and '59, "When," to use his own words, "the sewage of nearly three million of people had been allowed to seethe and ferment beneath a burning summer sun. So horrid was the stench that the river steamers lost their accustomed traffic, and even hurried travellers passed miles around rather than cross London bridge," and yet with all this the city was remarkably healthy. Another argument, which may be justly urged against the pythogenic theory of the disease, is the fact of its exhibiting no choice of those who in the meanest and lowest walks of life are in the midst of continued filth, who are no more liable to the disease (beyond the fact of want, dissipation, and consequent low vitality rendering