Correspondence

THE IDENTITY OF ALASTRIM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS."

Sir,—Some interesting clinical observations on alastrim by Major W. F. M. Loughnan appeared in the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps of November, 1922. In this article the author refers to the necessity for making a differential diagnosis between alastrim and various other conditions associated with cutaneous eruptions, but more especially between alastrim, smallpox and chickenpox, and quotes a table illustrating the differences observed in these three diseases.

I venture, in view of more recent work on alastrim which has come to my notice, to point out that experimental research in America has indicated that this disease is nothing more or less than modified smallpox. It is not surprising that Major Loughnan has overlooked these observations, as the difficulty of obtaining access to current literature when one is serving abroad and is divorced from a well-stocked library is inevitable.

The American work to which I refer, was directed to obtaining experimental evidence of the identity of the virus of alastrim with that of smallpox. The following is a very brief résumé of its results:

(1) A vesico-papular eruption in monkeys was produced by inoculation both with crusts and with vesicle contents from cases of alastrim arising in Jamaica and Haiti. It was subsequently shown that these animals were protected against re-inoculation with alastrim and vaccine virus.

(2) Rabbits inoculated with alastrim showed no eruption, but were almost completely immune to vaccine virus.

(3) Rabbits previously inoculated with vaccine virus yielded positive intracutaneous reactions to subsequent inoculation with smallpox crusts, alastrim material, and vaccine virus, but gave negative reactions when material from chickenpox vesicles was employed.

These immunological reactions, together with the fact that previous inoculation with alastrim material produces a definite immunity to vaccinia, is very strong evidence of the essential identity of alastrim with smallpox.

Confirmation of this work has come from Canada where a mild type of smallpox has been experienced for the last few years, and has been described by various names, such as alastrim and pseudo-smallpox. This research was undertaken with the view of obtaining some laboratory test which would help in the difficult question of differential diagnosis between modified smallpox and chickenpox.

Rabbits were scarified on the abdomen and inoculated with vaccine virus. Successful development of vaccinia led to sensitized condition of the animal, so that the subsequent intra-cuticular injection of either vaccine virus or of the contents of vesicles from smallpox patients was followed by the development within forty-eight hours of a red papule at the site of injection. The contents of chickenpox vesicles yielded consistently negative reactions on inoculation. It is

1 Leake, Public Health Reports, United States Public Health Service, 1921, 36, 25, p. 1437.
2 Defries and Hanna, "Studies from Research Division, Connaught Antitoxin Laboratories, University of Toronto," 1922, 1, p. 112.
Correspondence

concluded that this method affords a reliable laboratory test for the diagnosis of smallpox.

In conclusion, I might add that in view of the recent mild outbreak of smallpox in this country, rabbits have been sensitized in the above manner at the Royal Army Medical College, and the experimental work that has so far been undertaken is in substantial agreement with that quoted above.

Royal Army Medical College,
London, S.W. 1,
November 22, 1922.

I am, etc.,
H. Marrian Perry,
Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.M.C.

Notices.

EDITORIAL NOTICES.

The Editor will be glad to receive original communications upon professional subjects, travel, and personal experiences, etc. He will also be glad to receive items of news and information regarding matters of interest to the Corps from the various garrisons, districts, and commands at home and abroad.

All such Communications or Articles accepted and published in the “Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps” will (unless the Author notified at the time of submission that he reserves the copyright of the Article to himself) become the property of the Library and Journal Committee, who will exercise full copyright powers concerning such Articles.

A free issue of twenty-five reprints will be made to contributors of Original Communications and of twenty-five excerpts of Lectures, Travels and Proceedings of the United Services Medical Society.

Any demand for reprints, additional to the above, or for excerpts must be forwarded at the time of submission of the article for publication.

Matter intended for the Corps News should reach the Editor not later than the 15th of each month for the following month’s issue. Notices of Births, Marriages, and Deaths are inserted free of charge to subscribers. All these communications should be written upon one side of the paper only; they should by preference be type-written; but, if not, all proper names should be written in capital letters (or printed) to avoid mistakes, and be addressed: The Editor, “Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps,” War Office, Whitehall, S.W.1.

MANAGER’S NOTICES.

The Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps is published monthly, a volume commencing on 1st July, and 1st January of each year.

The Annual Subscription for the Journal and Corps News Supplement is £1 (which includes postage), and should commence either on 1st July or 1st January; but if a subscriber wishes to commence at any other month he may do so by paying for the odd months between 1st July and 1st January at the rate of 1s. 8d. (one shilling and eightpence) per copy. (All subscriptions are payable in advance.)

Single copies can be obtained at the rate of 2s. per copy.

The Corps News Supplement is also issued separately from the Journal, and can be subscribed for at the rate of 4s. (four shillings) per annum, including postage. (All subscriptions are payable in advance.)

Subscriptions for the Corps News Supplement separate from the Journal cannot be accepted from Officers on the Active List unless they are also subscribing to the Journal.

Single copies can be obtained at the rate of 6d. per copy.

Cheques or Postal Orders for Subscriptions, etc., should be made payable to the “Hon. Manager, Journal R.A.M.C.” and crossed “Holt & Co.”

All communications regarding subscriptions, etc., should be addressed to The Hon. Manager, “Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps,” War Office, Whitehall, S.W.1.

Case for Binding Volumes.—Strong and useful cases for binding can be obtained from the publishers at the following rates: Covers, 3s. 9d. net; binding 3s. 9d.; postage extra.

In forwarding parts for binding the name and address of sender should be enclosed in parcel.

All Applications for Advertisements to be made to

G. STREET & CO., LTD., 8, SERLE STREET, LONDON, W.C. 2.