VIII

CORRESPONDENCE

THE EDITORS, THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF VENEREAL DISEASES

GENTLEMEN,—The queries in the letter of "A Puzzled G.P.," published in the October number of the B.J.V.D., raise so many controversial points, that I am prompted to respond, and hope others may do likewise.

Cases similar to the one quoted are by no means uncommon, but in this particular example it is impossible to come to a definite conclusion, as the data supplied are insufficient.

Several points occur to me :—

(1) Unfortunately there was no P.M. on the macerated foetus, and this makes it impossible to answer the queries conclusively, for everything depends on the actual state of the foetus. Although a macerated foetus, stillborn, is suggestive of congenital syphilis, it is not conclusive, especially when we remember that according to most authorities syphilis is responsible for no more than approximately 15 per cent. of stillbirths.

(2) The evidence submitted does not prove that the mother was uninfected, although this seems likely, considering the lapse of eight years from the time of the man's infection until his marriage. That the mother may have escaped the disease is also supported by the facts that her Wassermann is still negative, and she has had a healthy boy previously. These are not proofs, however, seeing that exceptional cases have been recorded of husbands infecting their wives much longer than eight years after contracting the disease. Also, it is well known that a certain percentage of mothers with congenital syphilitic children have a negative Wassermann. Again, women with florid secondary syphilis have been known to give birth to healthy children, while cases are on record of one of twins being syphilitic, the other being healthy. Syphilis is essentially an intermittent, a recurrent disease, and it is of frequent occurrence to find a syphilitic child born between older and younger healthy children.

(3) In view of the uncertainty in this case, it seems the most advisable course to act as "A Puzzled G.P." suggests, *i.e.*, to advise no treatment of the mother unless she becomes pregnant again. Naturally it would be wise to keep the mother under observation by repeated blood-tests.

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours sincerely,

A VENEREAL M.O.