

CORRESPONDENCE

Mediterranean Fever Lab

From Dr. Paul Cassar.

Sir, — Allow me to make a few remarks on the letters of Col. T.G. Warrington and of Mr. J. Chetcuti Bonavita on the above named topic (The Times, July 21).

The detection of agglutinins against *Brucella Melitensis* in goats' milk was evidence that the animal had contracted the "infection now or in the past" as Col. Warrington states; but Zammit went beyond that demonstration with his discovery of June 25 for thereby he showed that the animal was the natural reservoir or carrier of the germ.

Your correspondent considers this to have been "an incidental episode" and of "minor significance" compared with Zammit's detection of agglutinins in the milk. It does not appear that Zammit thought so. Indeed he did not hesitate to publish his discovery of June 25 in the official Reports of the Commission (Part III, p.83).

It is also significant that he persisted in his efforts to culture

the germ from goats' blood until at least August 15 and whenever he succeeded in recovering it, he not only recorded the results but underlined them in red ink or pencil in his notebook — an indication that he attached a major significance to these findings. Apart from all this, the detection of agglutinins in goats' milk took place later, i.e. July 10 (Reports of the Med. Fever Commission, Part IV, p.97).

The term Mediterranean Fever is not a misnomer — as your correspondent holds — when used in the historical context of 1905 by which name Bruce and Zammit and the other members of the Commission called the disease in their day. It is relevant to point out that though Dr. M.L. Hughes had suggested the term Undulant Fever in 1897, the Commission never used this term but consistently and persistently referred to the disease as Mediterranean Fever. The name Brucellosis — by which the illness is now known — was introduced many years later as Col. Warrington himself states.

Mr. J. Chetcuti Bonavita, in the same issue of your paper, refers to Dr. J. Caruana Scicluna as having been the man "who first suspected that the vehicle of the *Brucella* was goats' milk". As a matter of fact the first man who goes on record for suspecting goats' milk as the vehicle of the infection was Major James Tidbury AMS in 1894 (Minutes of the Malta Branch of the British Medical Association, meeting of 16 May 1894). He was followed by Mr. A. M. Macfarlane, Government Veterinary Surgeon, who suggested in 1901 that the goat was the reservoir of the microbe but both these men went unheeded.

Mr. Chetcuti Bonavita does not say when and where Dr. J. Caruana Scicluna recorded his suspicions about goats' milk. Any documentary evidence on this point — as on other aspects of Dr. Caruana Scicluna's association with Bruce and Zammit — would be greatly appreciated by medical historians as efforts to trace his papers and manuscripts on

this subject have so far proved fruitless. He certainly deserves to be better appreciated.

Yours truly,
PAUL CASSAR
Balzan

CASUALTY RATE

From Brigadier A. Samut-Tagliaferro CBE.

Sir, — Whilst congratulating Colonel G.T. Warrington MD on his two excellent letters on this subject which you published recently, may I point out that the British Services stationed in Malta were the worst afflicted of all by Undulant Fever. Those men, lacking our acquired immunity, succumbed more readily to the disease and over the years suffered a casualty rate of as much as 25.6 per thousand per annum.

The discovery and isolation of the causative organism *Brucella Melitensis* which was to open the way for the eventual control of this disease long endemic in the Maltese Islands, proved a slow, laborious and painful process. In 1905, all goats' milk supplied to military units had to be boiled under strict supervision, but by the following year, even that became unacceptable to the Service Authorities who, from then on, allowed only condensed milk to be consumed by the troops.

The effect of that measure was immediately reflected in the rapid fall of daily sick and in deaths from Undulant Fever, and can best be illustrated by quoting the actual statistical data for the two vital years concerned:

1905 Reported Cases (Navy & Army) 913, — deaths 31; 1907 — reported cases 21, death 1.

This goes to show the extent to which humanity is indebted to men like David Bruce and Temi Zammit.

Yours truly,
A. SAMUT-TAGLIAFERRO
Sliema