

felt bound to write so much, in the hope of averting from the profession such a scandalum magnatum. At the eleventh hour, at the last minute of the twelfth hour, something should be done by the authorities to rescue the College from its threatened degradation. Will it be possible that Drs. BUDD, CHAMBERS, COPLAND, HALL, TODD, and WATSON, and the many other fellows of the College who have been by name singled out for vilification by this firebrand Mesmeriser, will meet him, and brand themselves impostors in the most solemn convocation, the most public consultation, as it were, of the medical year? We cannot, we will not, believe it, until the degradation has actually taken place.

MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE.

A NURSE DISEASED BY AN INFANT.—IS SECONDARY SYPHILIS CONTAGIOUS?

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the last number of your valuable journal, you deemed it your duty to make some comments on evidence given by Dr. Bull and the writer of this, in a trial which lately took place in this city, and which has been published in several of the medical periodicals, under the head "A nurse diseased by a syphilitic infant."

My object, in seeking the insertion of the following observations, is not for the purpose of vindicating myself—which would be of less interest to your readers than it would be of consequence to me,—but, laying aside personal considerations, to state this case at full length, and correctly, in which form it has not hitherto appeared.

Julia Walsh, a woman of good constitution, the wife of a peasant labourer, both bearing an excellent character, got a child to nurse, which, at the time, was in wretched health, and was observed to have some sores on the mouth, around the anus, and on the scrotum. It was also remarked that the mother of the child had an eruption on her skin, and a sore on her breast. Shortly afterwards, the nurse having perceived a sore on her nipple, and that the rash on the child became more general, went to a quack, who pronounced it to be chicken-pock, which he would readily cure, and gave her twelve pills, which made her mouth sore. Her alarms not being quieted, she remonstrated with the father of the child on her condition. He accompanied her to the man who was in attendance on her, promised to pay him for curing the nurse and child, and at the same time put his own wife under his care; from which it may be inferred that he was of opinion that they were all suffering from the same complaint. Shortly after this, she went to Dr. Ahern, of this city, who at once pronounced that both the nurse and child laboured under syphilitic disease. The symptoms which then presented themselves, as appears from his testimony, were an ulcer on the nipple, with a syphilitic rash on the breast, and ulcers at the angles of the mouth. When she presented herself, some time after, to Dr. Bull, she had, in addition, condylomata on the palate and round the anus, with tubercles on the pubes, several of them with yellow ulcerated heads.

In this state she came under my care in the workhouse hospital—where she remained about six weeks—but went home without being quite well, being anxious that her confinement, which was approaching, should not take place in a workhouse. She was soon after delivered of a child, which was covered with a syphilitic rash, and which died shortly after its birth.

Some weeks after the wife first complained, her husband was taken ill. His symptoms were several tuberculated ulcers on the dorsum of the penis, with desquamation of branny scales all over the body, and loss of hair. Of the husband it may be observed, that although he accompanied his wife to the quack, and to Dr. Ahern in the first instance, he never complained of himself, and that when he did feel ill, he made no concealment of his symptoms. A child of Walsh's, who had been previously healthy, also got condylomata round the anus and on the palate, which the mother attributed to her having been fed with the same spoon as the diseased child. She never had any symptoms of syphilis but these, and was in other respects in good health. After this statement, every word of which has been or may be attested on oath, I cannot but feel astonished that Dr. M'Ever, in his communication to you, should state

that Julia Walsh never had syphilis, though he did not examine her, and that her disease was produced by corrosive sublimate, though the quack denied ever having administered it. If the testimony of three physicians were not sufficient to prove such a fact, the birth of a child covered with a syphilitic rash should remove any doubts of their accuracy. Dr. M'Ever, however, supplies one link which was hitherto wanting in this chain of inferences, by admitting that the father of the child had syphilis some time before his marriage, which would be quite sufficient to account for the whole train of events which followed.

In looking over Mr. Colles' work on Syphilis, I was struck by the exact resemblance between all the symptoms and facts I have described, and those detailed by him in page 283, with much more clearness and accuracy.

How far this case will bear out the conclusions which he drew from his vast experience, I shall not attempt to say. But without entering on the question as to whether secondary syphilis is contagious or not, a practical question may be asked.

Is there danger in nursing a child affected with syphilitic eruption? And are we justified in saying that the almost universal opinion is, that there is danger, in such case, of the nurse becoming affected with the disease? These questions may, I think, be answered in the affirmative, even admitting that secondary syphilis is not contagious, as the modern advocates of that opinion assert that primary disease may be reproduced in parts of the body where it could be least expected, as in the mouth, on the nipples, &c., and this during the existence of a secondary eruption. There is no class of patients in which this is more likely to occur than in infants, from their attendants passing the towel with which they wash them over every part of their body, which may convey primary disease, if it existed, from one part to another. With reference to the part I took on this trial, I have only to observe, that I am not reported as alluding to Hunter's opinions, which I did at some length. And although I was not aware, and did not profess to be, of the full merits of the question regarding secondary syphilis, I thought I was safe in resting my opinion of the point then at issue (namely, the liability of a nurse to be affected with syphilis by a child at her breast) on such authorities as Sir Astley Cooper, Colles, Blundell, Hey, Travers, Reid, &c., and what to me was not of less consequence, to be sustained by the presence of a surgeon of Dr. Bull's eminence, who, I was aware, had for a long time directed his attention to this subject, and whose opportunities for observation are by few exceeded.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

D. C. O'CONNOR, A.B., M.B., L.R.C.S.I.

Cork, June, 1846.

* * The subject of this letter is of so much importance to the peace of families, and the whole case involves so many questions of interest with respect to the accurate discrimination and treatment of disease, that we have thought it right to give to Dr. O'Connor's communication an immediate insertion. In the next LANCET we shall offer such remarks on the subject as it may appear to us to demand.—ED. L.

THE LATE HUNTERIAN ORATION.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

"It will not end here, it must not, it *shall* not."

THE LANCET, Feb. 21st, 1846, p. 224.

SIR,—The scene enacted in the theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, on the occasion of the last Hunterian Oration, must be a source of profound and painful regret to the sober-minded, reflecting members of that College, who are animated with the desire of seeing the honour of their profession, as a scientific body, sustained with rigid integrity before the nations of Europe. That an occasion consecrated to departed genius—such as is revered by scientific, intellectual men in every part of the world—should have been perverted by the official head of that institution, to the vile purposes of party strife and contention, is a foul blot upon the national professional character, and as such deserves to be denounced and execrated. Of a truth, men of science, individually and collectively, beyond the limits of our sea-girt isle, must regard the surgeons of England as sunk to the very lowest depths of professional and moral degeneracy, when the boasted "head of the profession," on such an occasion, can so far forget the high behests of Science, the reverence due to her