

THE LANCET.

LONDON, SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1847.

ON Tuesday last, Mr. WAKLEY, on a motion made by him in the House of Commons, obtained leave to introduce a Bill "FOR THE REGISTRATION OF QUALIFIED MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS, AND FOR AMENDING THE LAW RELATING TO THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND."

A verbatim copy of the measure will be published in the next number of the *THE LANCET*, when we shall explain the mode of petitioning in its favour, and print a form of petition. Probably this is the last Parliamentary effort that will be made in the present generation to obtain an Act for the Registration of Qualified Medical Practitioners, and for amending the present anomalous condition of medical law.

If an immense majority of the medical practitioners of Great Britain and Ireland unite their exertions in support of the Bill, they will obtain a law which will confer both upon them and the public inestimable advantages. If the profession be indifferent, Parliament will be indifferent, and the Bill must be lost.

WE wish to direct attention to the admirable report, in the first page of the present number, by Mr. WHARTON JONES, on the progress of knowledge regarding the structure of the sympathetic. Written in a clear and intelligible style, it embodies all that is yet known of the minute anatomy of the ganglionic system, and is especially useful at the present time, as laying bare the low state of anatomical knowledge in the physiological committee of the Royal Society, and proving, beyond the possibility of a doubt, either the ignorance or the corruption of the decisions and honorary awards made by the Society in matters pertaining to anatomy and physiology.

THE following advertisement of the Council of the Institute of Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery, has been going the round of the medical press:—

"*The National Institute of Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery.*—The Council of the National Institute having observed an application for the introduction of a Medical Registration Bill into the House of Commons, the Members are hereby informed, that any Bill for amending or altering the laws of the profession will obtain the immediate and most earnest attention of the Council, and that the Council will take the earliest opportunity to make a Report on the Provisions of the Bill in question, and if necessary, convene a General Meeting of the Members of the Institute, in order that their opinions may be expressed on the subject.—By order of the Council,
"GEORGE ROSS, Sec."

"Hanover-square Rooms, Hanover-square, April 13th, 1847."

After the former declamations of the Council, it would have been only straightforward if they had said that they would give opposition, instead of "attention," to any measure of medical reform. They have again and again declared that they will attempt to thwart any alteration in the laws relating to the medical profession, unless they have united with it an incorporation of and for themselves. Then why disguise their intentions by such a specious advertisement. The few active members of the Council know very well that the members of the Institute would not join in an open opposition to the Registration Bill, and hence this plausible show of fair-

ness and deliberation. It may be all very well for the few metropolitan members of the Council, who look to hold office in the (for the present) imaginary College, to contend for the incorporation of the embryo institution. They may want the superstructure; but their constituents care less for the superstructure than for the base; and the mass of the profession know and feel that a Registration Bill would be a basis—a root, upon which a superstructure might be raised, or a goodly tree produced. They know right well that before particulars can be arranged, the general plan must be settled; that before internal organization can be effected, the external boundary, the landmarks, so to say, of the profession, must be defined. We warn the general practitioners not to be cajoled, by the coffee and sandwiches at the Hanover-square Rooms, by testimonials to the meek and suffering secretaries, or by special but hypocritical advertisements, into an opposition to a just system of registration. If they do, under pretence of demanding a college charter, they—the general practitioners—may depend upon it they will have lost the substance in grasping at the shadow; and the Council of the Institute, keeping the promise of protection with the ear, will assuredly break it to the hope. We can say that we have the welfare and prosperity of the general practitioner more at heart than the interests of any other branch of the profession, and we may point for the proof to the whole existence of *THE LANCET*. Through a quarter of a century, in hundreds of numbers, and many thousands of pages, we have steadily advocated the cause of the general practitioners, never fawning or flattering, but speaking what we have held to be the truth and to their true interest, whether palatable or unpalatable; and but for our exertions, we are well assured the British general practitioner would never have held the high rank he does hold—would never have been in a position to dream of contending even for a separate College. We claim, then, to be heard, when we earnestly advise our brethren not to be misled by the Institute into an opposition to the REGISTRATION BILL, for no better reason than because it is a foundation upon which the whole profession may rest—and simply and no more than a foundation, without reference to the interest or inclinations of any classes or castes, if such can be held to exist.

Correspondence.

ETHER IN MIDWIFERY.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—Having used the ether on Sunday last, in a difficult labour, I consider a report of the case may be acceptable:—Mrs. W—, aged thirty-six, having previously borne three children, was taken in labour on the 8th inst., in the evening. The following morning, about four, the liquor amnii escaped. The pains subsided until the 10th, at nine in the evening. Her medical attendant was again sent for; he found it to be an arm presentation. Experiencing difficulty, he called in another gentleman. All their efforts to pass the hand through the vagina were fruitless. At three the following morning, I was sent for. I could not get near the os uteri, the contraction of the vagina was so firm. At half-past three, her pulse being 140, I administered the ether: it fell to 130. She was insensible for two or three minutes, during which time I passed my hand through the vagina, and seizing a foot, I brought it into it. Consciousness now returned, and with it the contraction of the vagina; my hand was then as in a vice. The other gentlemen tried, with like results. At a quarter past four, I again gave the ether, when the insensibility continued for ten minutes, during which period the foot was brought down and secured. The uterus all this time continued firm, the pains being perpetual, so that there was no such

thing as entering it, thereby showing that the ether produced no effect upon the uterus in diminishing its contractile powers. At half-past four, forty drops of sedative solution of opium were given her; in less than two minutes, she was fast asleep and snoring, which we attributed to the ether, and not to the opium. Examination was again made at a quarter to five, five, six, and seven o'clock; the uterus still continuing as firm as before, it was agreed that rest should be given her for a few hours. The pulse was now 120. At ten we met, and found the rigidity of the uterus had in some measure given way; so that, by steady perseverance, the second foot was brought down, and the delivery completed at a quarter to eleven. I wished, at this latter time, to have used the ether again, to have prevented her from suffering during the turning; but the gentleman whose case it was feared some danger might ensue, as he had been called in to see her about three years before for some affection of the heart. During the second exhibition of the ether, she was not conscious of anything; she had previously been and was then grasping her friend's hand with great force during the attempt to bring down the foot; but as the ether took effect, she gradually withdrew her fingers, and laid back her head in a perfectly quiescent state.

April 15th, I visited her, and found her quite as well as she would have been at the same period after a natural labour. To-day, the gentleman attending her told me she had not had a bad symptom: her own expression was, that she was better now than upon former occasions, and that, should she ever be so circumstanced again, she should beg to have the ether given to her.

The apparatus used was a bladder without any valve, the patient consequently respiring into the bladder, and again inhaling the same. I have now performed thirty-eight different operations with the bladder, and have twice used Robinson's apparatus. Not in one instance have I seen anything approaching to asphyxia; neither has there been any cerebral congestion.

From what I saw in the above case, I shall not hesitate to give the ether in any natural labour during the latter pains, when the head is commencing to bear upon the perinæum, that being the point at which I consider the ether to be of benefit: to give it at an early stage would be perfectly useless, as it would not act upon the uterus; and it is only when the head is approaching the outlet that there is any occasion for relaxing the muscles for the egress of the child. Certainly, if used in the early part of the labour, the pains would not be felt; but as its duration is always uncertain, it would be imprudent to be following up the ether for several hours, should it be so long required.

It is probable I might not have troubled you with this, but as I am written to by practitioners in the country for my opinion with regard to the ether, I think a few accounts of its practical use and consequent effects far more beneficial for them than all the theoretical surmises which may be put forth upon the subject.—Believe me, Sir, yours obliged,

Bristol, April, 1847.

J. G. LANSDOWN.

ON THE DISCOVERY OF THE USE OF NARCOTIC VAPOURS IN MITIGATING PAIN.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—When a new discovery of wide importance is brought before the public, the individual by whose agency it is more immediately introduced is seldom suffered long to enjoy, undisturbed, the applause which is the meed of the discoverer.

"Coming events cast their shadows before."

The establishment of every great discovery has been preceded by the accumulation of isolated facts and glimmerings of the truth brought together by various labourers. When the fulness of time is come, these facts and glimmerings supply the materials out of which the truth itself is deduced, and a discovery results. The early pioneers of a discovery often deserve a larger portion of honour than those who bring it tangibly before the world. These remarks particularly apply to the new method of rendering patients insensible to pain by the inhalation of vapours.

The discovery of this method has been boldly claimed by Drs. Jackson and Morton: and to them must certainly be accorded the chief merit of bringing it into use. No sooner was the discovery announced, than Dr. Collyer claimed priority of invention, without, however, adducing those proofs which could alone substantiate his pretensions. Still another aspirant, Mr. Horace Wells, appears in the field, with apparently better-founded claims. History will, in due course, assign to each his just award. In the meantime, while leaving the living competitors to assert their own rights, I venture to put in a claim on behalf of the "illustrious dead."

When the new method was first noised abroad, I recollected that an institution called the Medical Pneumatic Hospital had been founded by Dr. Beddoes at Clifton; and that, in the year 1798, Humphry Davy had been called from his seclusion in Cornwall to take charge of this establishment. In it, the great chemist laid the foundation of his future fame, by making an extensive series of observations and experiments to determine the value of gases in the treatment of disease. An indistinct presentiment assured me that the powerful minds of Beddoes and Davy could not, in the course of their comprehensive researches, have overlooked the special application of the inhalation of gases to the mitigation of pain. On reperusing the beautiful work of Sir Humphry Davy, entitled "Researches chiefly concerning Nitrous Oxide and its Respiration," 8vo, 1800, I found my expectations realized. And I would earnestly recommend those who are engaged in the interesting inquiry as to the effects of the inhalation of vapours, carefully to study this work, which may be said to form a model for all future observations, and patiently to follow in the footsteps of the great father of pneumatic chemistry as applied to medicine.

I will now submit two extracts from Sir H. Davy's writings, which will satisfactorily prove that he at least anticipated this important discovery. These extracts will probably be acceptable to those who have not an opportunity of consulting his works. It would be superfluous to quote the many observations he made as to the effects of nitrous oxide upon man. Similar experiments have since become familiar to every one. For these and many other interesting points relating to the subject—his comprehensive mind left nothing untouched—reference must be made to his work.

"In one instance, when I had headache from indigestion, it was immediately removed by the effects of a large dose of gas, though it afterwards returned, but with much less violence. In a second instance, a slighter degree of headache was wholly removed by two doses of gas."

"The power of the immediate operation of the gas, in removing intense physical pain, I had a very good opportunity of ascertaining."

"In cutting one of the unlucky teeth, called *dentes sapientiae*, I experienced an extensive inflammation of the gum, accompanied with great pain, which equally destroyed the power of repose and of consistent action."

"On the day when the inflammation was most troublesome, I breathed three large doses of nitrous oxide. The pain always diminished after the first four or five inspirations; the thrilling came on as usual, and uneasiness was for a few minutes swallowed up in pleasure."*

"As nitrous oxide, in its extensive operation, appears capable of destroying physical pain, it may probably be used with advantage during surgical operations, in which no great effusion of blood takes place."†

The foregoing extracts I leave to speak for themselves. I feel, that by recalling attention to the admirable work from which they are taken, and which has been unaccountably overlooked, I have discharged a duty to departed worth.

I deem it right, however, before concluding, now that experiments upon the human frame are being so enthusiastically made, to adduce the caution recommended by Dr. Beddoes and Davy, against employing the nitrous oxide in the cases of hysterical females. They cite cases showing the danger of the practice.

The most appropriate termination to this letter will be found in the concluding words of the great discoverer, whose claims I have asserted:—

"An immense mass of pneumatological, chemical, and medical information must be collected, before we shall be able to operate with certainty on the human constitution."

"Pneumatic chemistry, in its application to medicine, is an art in infancy, weak, almost useless, but apparently possessed of capabilities of improvement. To be rendered strong and mature, she must be nourished by facts, strengthened by exercise, and cautiously directed in the application of her powers, by external scepticism."

Notting-hill, March, 1847.

ROBERT BARNES, M.B. Lond.

THE POISONED MIND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The mind may be poisoned as well as the body. I am consulted by young men who, after sexual intemperance, perhaps after an attack of gonorrhœa, have been to consult some of the advertising quacks of the day. By these persons,

* Sir Humphry's Collected Works. By John Davy, M.D., 1839, p. 276, vol. ii.
† Op. cit. p. 329.