DERIVATION OF HERNIA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have too high an opinion of the liberality of sentiment which has always been so characteristic of your Journal, to suppose for a moment that you will disallow me the right and privilege of vindicating the term *hernia* which I gave, and which appeared in your Number of last week. As it is of importance that all terms of general use should be rightly explained and understood, you will, by permitting insertion to the following remarks in your next, further oblige

Your most obedient servant,

J. B. MELSON.

Birmingham, April 10, 1829.

The first argument used is the following: "ramex is the Latin synonym for *hernia*; and as *ramex* is derived from *ramus*, so *hernia* is, by the same analogy, derivable from *επρος*." This argument can have no force, when it is known that *ῥήγμα* is the Greek term used to express *hernia*. Thus Galen, in his *Lib. de Constit. Artis Medicæ*, p. 36. 28, writes, "γίνεσθαι τὸ ῥήγμα διασπῶμεν τε καὶ ῥήγνυμεν κατὰ τὸ σαρκῶδες αὐτὸ μέρος τῆς μύτης,"* which term *ῥήγμα* is admitted by all lexicographers to be derived from *ῥήγνυω*. It is therefore more proper, analogically speaking, to say, that as *ῥήγμα* is derived from *ῥήγνυω*, so *hernia* will have for its theme the same verb.

The next objection is, that *επρος* is aspirated. This is an assertion altogether incorrect; *επρος* is not aspirated; in corroboration of this statement, it will be sufficient to say, that it is unaspirated in the lexicons of Scapula, Hen. Stephanus, Suidas, Hesychius, Hederic, and every other which I have had an opportunity of examining, in a very extensive classical library. On this last point more particular stress is placed, from the great importance of the aspirate in establishing the Greek theme.

We have already intimated, that we consider it a waste of time to pursue such inquiries as that to which our correspondent attaches so much importance. As Mr. Melson, however, attacks the reasoning by which we endeavoured to convince him of the fallacy of his conjecture, we will add one or two words in support of the observations we made in a former Number, though we have no hope of weaning our corres-

pondent from the partiality with which he evidently regards his supposed etymological discovery.

Supposing the word *hernia* to be derived from a Greek original, we argued that that original was, in all probability, *επρος*, the branch of a tree, to which the descending portion of intestine was supposed to bear a resemblance, inasmuch as *ramex*, a Latin word synonymous with *hernia*, is unquestionably derived from *ramus*, the branch of a tree. This reasoning would equally apply, whether we suppose *hernia* to be an older word than *ramex*, and the latter to have been formed by analogy from the former; or, on the other hand *ramex*, to be a word of more ancient date than *hernia*, and the latter to have been formed from the analogous Greek theme. That *ramex* is used in the same sense as *hernia*, may be seen by a comparison of two passages—rather *paw-paw* ones—in Juvenal.

"Nil ibi per ludum simulabitur, omnia fient
Ad verum, quibus incendi jam frigidus ævo
Laomedontides, et Nestoras *hernia* possit."—*Sat.* vi. 324.

"Non eadem vini, atque cibi torpente palato
Gaudia; nam coitus jam longa oblivio;
vel si
Coneris, jacet exiguus cum ramice nervus."—*Sat.* x. v. 203.

But what says Mr. Melson to this argument from analogy? He pronounces that it can have no force, when it is known that *ῥήγμα* is the Greek word for rupture, which word is admitted by all lexicographers—who could ever doubt or dispute it?—to be derived from *ῥήγνυω*. It is therefore, proceeds Mr. Melson, more proper, analogically speaking, to say that as *ῥήγμα* is derived from *ῥήγνυω*, so *hernia* will have for its theme the same verb.

Mr. Melson is evidently unconscious that what he here puts forward as an argument from analogy, and as a better argument of that description than the one we ventured to suggest, is, in fact, nothing but a *petitio principii*, a begging of the proposition with which he set out—an assumption of the thing to be proved, or rendered plausible.

The thing Mr. Melson wishes to prove is, that *hernia* is derived from *ῥήγνυω*. What is his argument? Because *ῥήγμα* is de-

* Ruptionem fieri divulsa aut rupta musculi carnosæ parte.

rived from ῥήγνυω—which nobody disputes, for the letters composing the chief part of each word are identical—therefore *hernia* is derived from ῥήγνυω, which is the thing disputed, for it is only by an awkward transposition, by a species of etymological legerdemain, that one word can be brought to bear the remotest resemblance to the other. The argument for deriving ῥήγμα and *hernia* from the same original, those words having at least one or two letters in common, may be thus illustrated. *Jackson* is clearly, on the score of family likeness, a relation of *Jack*; but *Simpson* and *Jackson* both wear green spectacles, therefore *Simpson* is a relation of *Jack*.

With respect to the breathing of ἔρνος, we have only a Hederic's Lexicon before us, (edit. 1739,) and we there find the initial vowel aspirated, wherever the word and its derivatives occur. But supposing it to be unaspirated, that circumstance would not much help our Correspondent's argument, for the ancients wrote *honus*, *honustus*, &c., for *onus*, *onustus*, &c., and many Latin words are written indifferently, with or without the initial h, as *hedera*, *edera*, *hallucinor*, *allucinor*, &c.

But, finally, *hernia* may not be derived from a Greek theme at all, and we observed, in noticing Mr. Melson's former communication, that Celsus expressly tells us, that the word is of Sabine original. For this reason we used the word *derivable*, and not *derived*, in considering the reasons in favour of deriving *hernia* from ἔρνος. Celsus, it is to be remembered, lived nearly in the Augustan age of Roman literature, and was more likely to know the true derivation of the word in question, than any modern lexicographers. Now, if his derivation be correct, there is an end at once to the controversy. This is a part of the argument on which our Correspondent seems to have been too much pre-occupied with the merits of his discovery, to bestow any portion of his attention. Servius, in his commentary on the following passage in Virgil,

“ Quique altum Præneste viri, quique
arra Gabinæ

Junonis, gelidumque Anienem, et ros-
cida rivi

Hernica saxa colunt ;”

notices the sense of the word *hernia* in the Sabine dialect, from which Celsus deduces

the name of the disease. We are ashamed of the extent of observation into which the discussion of this very trivial point has carried us; but our Correspondent seems determined to break a lance with us, and we never decline a challenge. We cannot afford, however, to concede any more space to this or any similar subject.

A Practical Treatise on the peculiar Tonic and Stomachic Properties of the Round-leaf Cornel, (Cornus Circinata,) particularly in Cases of Indigestion of Weakly and Elderly People; and for local and general Debility, the consequences of excessive Indulgence in Spirituous or Vinous Liquors, Savoury Dishes, or a long Residence in a Tropical Climate; and for the Breaking-up the System, termed the Climacteric Malady: with Directions as to the Choice of Articles of Diet, &c. To which is added, an Account of the Antispasmodic Properties of the Lobelia Inflata, with Directions for its Exhibition in Spasmodic Asthma, Hooping Cough, St. Vitus's Dance, &c. By J. H. ROBINSON, M.D. London, Highley, 1829; pp. 110.

COMMEND us to a short title. The reviewer has then some opportunity of saying a few words, at least as to the contents of a book, if there be nothing either demanding criticism or calling for extraction; but this is as lengthy as the titles of Mr. Frost or Dr. Granville, and, with the addition of a few figures, would form a complete index to the book. It forestalls our remarks, and allows us little more than to say, that the intentions of the author are praiseworthy, and that the *cornus circinata* is a medicine deserving the attention of the profession, if half what is said of it be true.

It is the misfortune of new or newly-revived remedies, that they are too highly extolled at first, and that greater expectations are excited, as to their powers, than experience ultimately justifies. The result is injurious to the character of what is, perhaps, really a valuable mode of treatment. Whenever great expectations are excited, a proportionate impatience of effect is excited also, and the consequence often is, that if that effect be not as speedy as it is promised, the physician is disappointed, and the