TREATMENT OF SCIATICA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—At a meeting of the Medical Society of London, held on the 30th November, the proceedings of which are reported in your Number for Dec. 5th, Dr. Clutterbuck is reported to have said, "that he lately suffered from sciatica, and the treatment of his case had afforded a good illustration of the unsettled state of opinion with reference to the remedies to be employed in this disease," &c. &c.

It appears that a dozen *infallible curatives* failed to relieve him, and this furnished him with a dozen infallible proofs, that infallible remedies, specifics, and universal medicines, cure sciatica as well as other maladies,—only accidentally.

The late Dr. Armstrong was accustomed to quote, in his lectures, the following sentence, or something to the same effect:—"There is no virtue in medicine, but that which arises from its precise application." Appropriate remedies, applied at the right moment, are, in fact, the only real curatives. As the state of opinion, with reference to the remedies to be employed in this troublesome affection, is so unsettled, the following observations, on the nature and treatment of sciatica, may not, perhaps, be deemed unimportant.

Before a medical man commences the treatment of any disease, it is necessary, if he would treat it effectually and rationally, that he should have a clear conception of its nature, as well as a knowledge of the seat of the malady. The pathology of some affections is, however, necessarily obscure; first, because they are of a slight and transient nature, and leave no marks behind as evidence of their having existed; secondly, because, though often severely painful, they are never mortal; and, consequently, are rarely or never the subject of morbid anatomical investigation. Sciatica belongs to this class; though often severely painful and of long continuance, it is not a fatal disease, and, consequently, we are destitute of any precise or positive knowledge of the pathological condition of the sciatic nerve in this affection. The surgeon must endeavour, therefore, to discover the nature of the affection, by carefully observing the symptoms as they present themselves in the slight and severe forms of the disease, whether affecting the robust, the plethoric, or the debilitated subject, and carefully marking the effects of the remedies employed in the diverse states of the affection, and with reference to the constitution and habit of the sufferers. What, then, are the symptoms usually observed in these cases? A person, after exposure to cold, sitting on the damp ground, or getting the feet and

legs wet, is attacked with a gnawing pain, more or less severe, at the upper and back part of the thigh, sometimes extending downwards to the foot, with great tenderness along the course of the sciatic nerve, more particularly behind the trochanter major, the whole limb feels weak, numbed, heavy, and semi-paralysed. In its milder forms, the disease commences (without any apparent cause) with a slight degree of tenderness at the back of the thigh, which renders sitting uncomfortable; a tingling sensation is felt in the leg, and some pain and stiffness at the hip, especially after walking; the leg is at the same time cold. The conclusion at which I have arrived, respecting the nature of sciatica, after a careful consideration of its symptoms, and the effect of remedies upon it, is, that it is essentially an inflammatory affection; that the inflammation is subacute, or chronic, and that its seat is the neurilemma and cellular tissue, entering into the composition of the nerve and uniting its fibrils. The plan of treatment I have adopted accords with this view of the nature of the disease, it is as follows:—

First, I endeavour to remove or reduce the inflammatory action of the affected part, by the use of antiphlogistic remedies, counter-irritants, &c.; and then to restore its tone by administering tonic medicines. The means I used to accomplish the former object are, the local abstraction of blood by leeches, (or cupping, when it can be borne,) purgative medicines, saline or others, according to the constitution of the patient; after these, one or more blisters, as may be deemed expedient, are applied; and after the removal of these, tonic medicines are prescribed. Amongst this class of medicines, those which I have found most effective are the sesqui-oxide of iron, quinine, and the liquor arsenicalis. For persons of a spare habit, the weak and ill-fed, the sesqui-oxide of iron will prove the most efficacious medium; whilst quinine and the liquor arsenicalis will be found more applicable to the robust and plethoric, after the abstraction of blood.

Should this communication be deemed fit to occupy the pages of THE LANCET, you will oblige by inserting it. Yours respectfully,

H. C. ROODS, M.R.C.S.

London, Dec., 1840.

P.S.—I omitted to state, that the dose I usually give of the ferro-sesquipedum is ℥j, sometimes ℥ss, but rarely more.

ILLNESS OF SIR ASTLEY COOPER.

WE regret to have to announce the severe indisposition of Sir Astley Cooper, which is assuming a dropsical tendency. He is attended by Dr. Chambers and Dr. Bright,