POISONING BY THE SEBACIC ACID OF
GOOSE GREASE.

On the 2nd of April, 1829, Dr. Siedler was called on to attend M. M. H—— and their children. On his arrival he found the two brothers H——, one aged 31, the second 28 years, and the two children of the first, one a girl *æt.* four, the other a boy *æt.* two and a half, all presenting the following symptoms:—Cold sweat, anxiety, vertigo, general paleness and prostration of strength, eyes sunken and pupils dilated, burning pain was felt in the lower part of the belly, increased by pressure; violent vomiting, succeeded by ardent thirst, for which the patients had drunk large quantities of milk, which was thrown up without producing any effect; tongue dry; involuntary discharge of urine and *fæces*.

The eldest brother was insensible for six minutes, his respiration was scarcely visible, his pulse imperceptible, and the heart's action exceedingly weak. The second brother had vomited blood several times, but he experienced less abdominal pain than the others. In the little boy the globes of the eyes were turned upwards, the lips livid, and the pulse scarcely sensible. Lastly, the symptoms in the little girl were the mildest of all. M. Siedler suspected at once that these accidents were occasioned by the use of a certain quantity of goose-grease which had been employed in the preparation of some meat of which the four patients had eaten shortly before the symptoms began. An emulsion containing hyoscyamus was prescribed, and on the 9th of April all had recovered.

The vomited matters were subjected to chemical analysis, they were strongly acid but contained no metallic poison; but the following facts induced Dr. Siedler to attribute the illness to the effects of sebacic acid. The lady of the house had made use of goose-grease to dress some veal, and all the persons who partook of the dish fell quickly sick, the lady herself, who had barely tasted it, felt it so disagreeable that she took no more. None of the grease which was suspected to have caused the accident remained for examination, the pot which contained it having been entirely emptied and cleaned out, but on examining the same kind of grease contained in three other pots, it was found to exhale a strong repulsive odour, and it reddened strongly blue paper tinged by turnsole. Three ounces of this grease were given to a vigorous well-formed dog; an hour after his extremities became violently convulsed, he cried piteously, he refused to eat, his eyes were suffused, pupils dilated, skin cold, and arterial pulsations scarcely perceptible. In this state he continued for thirty hours, after which he slowly recovered.—*Hufeland's Journal*.

SKETCH OF M. DIEFFENBACH,
OF BERLIN;AND MEDICAL INTELLIGENCE FROM THE
SCENE OF WAR IN POLAND.

SKETCH OF M. DIEFFENBACH, OF BERLIN.

THE subjoined letters have been received in Paris from M.M. LEGALLOIS and BRIERRE DE BOISMONT, two young, but distinguished, physicians, who eagerly embraced the proposals of the Polish committee in Paris, and repaired to Warsaw to the succour of the gallant victims of the Autocrat's military savages. It pains us deeply to learn that the disease termed the *cholera morbus*, has shown itself amongst the heroic Poles, though we could hardly hope that, once imported into their country, it would long be confined to the ranks of those amongst whom it could be regarded as little else than a just visitation from Heaven.

(From the Gazette Medicale.)

M. Legallois, one of our colleagues, sent to Warsaw by the Polish committee, has addressed to us from Berlin the following letter, replete with amusing anecdotes of one of the most remarkable surgeons of the day:—

“A promise is a debt, and I proceed to discharge it. I have arrived in Berlin, and write you forthwith. I have seen Germany and Dieffenbach, but, if you'll allow, I shall say nothing of the country, but enough of the surgeon. Then what is Dieffenbach? Why, neither more nor less than a man of genius; a soldier at first, then a divine, and finally a physician; he is now chief surgeon to La Charité, and holds the first rank among German practitioners. Imagine a man about thirty-five, and of middle height, full of fire and animation, polite in his address, benevolent in his manners—and such is Dieffenbach. We have spent two delicious evenings with him, and while we sipped our tea, surrounded by the clouds of the hospitable calumet, he sought to initiate us into the mysteries of his practice, which may be defined as practical physiology. Dieffenbach excels, especially in rhinoplastic performances. He showed us at La Charité, several noses of his manufacture, and, on the faith of a Frenchman, I have seldom seen any so beautiful. Dieffenbach matches all tastes and caprices, and whether you wish for an aquiline, a cocked, or a needle nose, he will serve you to any pattern. He commences his process by cutting away a liberal slip from the fore-

head, and if this be too small, he snips from the scalp fearless of the future growth of hair in the middle of the physiognomy. Physiology first taught him what practice has since established,—that our tissues change their living actions when their relations are altered; and thus in every case in which he supplied a nose from the scalp, he has found the bulbs of the hair to become atrophied, and the hair itself to fall off. At first he does not trouble himself about the shape of his noses; he makes two long and deep incisions, not on a level with the former *alæ nasi*, but between the nose and the cheek. If any traces remain of the former nose, he husbands them carefully, and uses them in his new construction. He does not place the layer of skin in relief, as we do in France, but he lays it simply flat, and relies on the natural retraction of the parts, and on the assistance of cicatrization (the effects of which he has minutely calculated on) for the elevation and shaping of the organ. His septum is three times as large as the French, but when reduced by suppuration and gangrene,* it is just *comme il faut*. He does not apply the septum either to the upper lip, by a superficial paring, but he implants it deeply into the lip by an incision which penetrates through to the alveolar border. When the efforts of nature have partly elevated the nose, then Dieffenbach finishes the job, and communicates any desired form, by practising small incisions with a cataract knife, wherever retraction is desirable, and thus a perfectly symmetrical pair of *alæ* are obtained. *Nature medicus minister* is, in a word, his device, and in obeying its modest suggestions, he has attained a pitch of rhinoplastic perfection infinitely beyond anything in Paris. His noses are neither potatoes nor pumpkins, but noses as regular as if they had issued from the mistress hand of Nature herself.

“Dieffenbach has repeated the experiments on arterial torsion, and approves of the proceeding highly. I mentioned to him Velpeau’s views on the acupuncture of arteries; he considered them very ingenious, but as vascular aneurism is rather rare in Berlin, he will not probably have an opportunity of trying the experiment. Vesical calculi are also infrequent, and, consequently, both the section and lithotomy are very unusual.

“M. Dieffenbach brought us to La Charité, where we were surprised, especially at the extreme simplicity of the dressings. The diseased limbs are not laden with bandages and compresses as with us; a slip of lint retained in its place by a roller and diachy-

lon, constitutes the ordinary apparatus for wounds and ulcers. The plan appears to us both useful to the patient and expeditious to the surgeon.

“Fractured limbs are, in the second stage, shut up in plaster of Paris, allowed to set round them. At an earlier period he employs with much success the hanging shelf, or support, so much extolled by Cara Mayor and others. I shall say but one word about his surgical arsenal. Convinced that the essential part of a sharp instrument is, that it should cut properly, he has considerably curtailed the several other attributes of his set. His bistouries resemble little cataract knives; his amputating saw is no larger than the small saw of our dissecting cases. As to the rest of his materials, it would all fit in his pocket, as it is said of Berzelius, that his laboratory could be contained in a sugar bowl.

“At length all obstacles to our progress are removed (and it required to accomplish this, no less than the immense influence of Graefe, the Dupuytren of Germany). After five days’ marching and countermarching, we quit Berlin this evening at six o’clock, and we are off to Warsaw. We should certainly have failed in our object, but for the strong recommendations we brought to persons of rank in this city. Adieu, &c.

EUG. LEGALLOIS.”

On their arrival in Warsaw, M. Legallois and de Boismont were received by the Polish government with the most marked distinction, and on the morning after their arrival, were placed in one of the largest hospitals in the city.

(Letter of the 13th April.)

“The Polish army now occupies the posts abandoned by the Russians. It is certain the cholera morbus was amongst them; and it has shown itself also in the Polish ranks. It is at any rate positive, that the night before last, twelve men fell sick in the camp, and of this number five were dead before morning. I need not say, that should this disease increase, our place will be with the army and not here. At this moment the invitation arrives for me to repair to the hospitals—

“The unhappy news is confirmed; not twelve, but twenty-seven have fallen ill, and not five, but nine have perished. I am ordered to repair to head quarters, and M. de Boismont is in charge of the Russian prisoners in quarantine at Praga.”

(Letter of the 17th April.)

“Dr. Brierre has insisted on accompanying me. At four o’clock we arrived at head quarters. At eight p.m. we were introduced

* M. Legallois forgets to inform us how Dieffenbach stops this gangrene if it be inclined to proceed a little too far for the elegance of the organ.

to the generalissimo Skrysniecky, and had a conference with him and with the head physician of the Polish army. We have learned, that during the previous four days the army had lost upwards of fifty men, and that the patients were increasing hourly in numbers. A provisional hospital had been established at the convent of Menia, within a league of the army. We immediately repaired thither, saw the patients, and learned from them the particulars of their torments. All concurred to prove the nature of the disease. The same symptoms have also broken out among the Russian prisoners and their Polish sentinels at Praga. It appears that this malady is not as contagious as it is generally believed to be. I have been awkward enough to cut myself four times on Wednesday, and once again this morning. I have also respired the breath of the patients, and nevertheless I am perfectly well. M. Brierre was ill all last night, but is up to-day; I believe it was merely the effects of fatigue."

National Institute, May 2d.

The secretary read a long letter from M. Lassus, who contends that the Polish disease is dysentery, not cholera morbus. The arguments advanced were so perfectly untenable and absurd, that the assembly manifested much impatience during the reading of the communication.—*Lanc. Franç.*

MEDICAL EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND.

MR. CARMICHAEL AND AR. J.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—It was the statement of facts, numbers, and calculations, of the comparative expenses of the indentured and non-indentured pupil, contained in Ar. J.'s third letter, inserted in your 392nd Number, which induced me, as the friend of truth and justice, to reply to your correspondent's assertions; for Mr. Carmichael's character stands too high, and is too well known, to suffer the slightest tinge from the angry and malevolent assertions of such an opponent, whose character, it must also be acknowledged, is equally well known, and is appreciated as it deserves. Near the commencement of this letter we find the following assertion:—"It will scarcely be credited, that the article in which this letter appears, and which teems with such extraordinary praises of the 'laudable exertions,' 'liberality,' 'pungent reasonings,' 'dignity,' 'Berlin celebrity,' and so forth, of the writer, was actually composed by the party himself, or immediately under his eye. I state this advisedly, inasmuch as a copy of this

celebrated letter could not have been obtained from any other source. I may also be allowed to quote the following passage from the same article—"Why does Dr. J. wince at the thought of the publicity of Mr. C.'s letter? He can reply to confute its calumnies publicly, and I predict he will not." Well, I have replied to confute those calumnies publicly, and how have I been met? By hired abuse, and abortive attempts to stifle me and the discussion together, beneath a dunghill of scurrility." This, like all the other assertions of the honourable gentleman, is so easily refuted, that we are astonished at the temerity which could induce him to expose such total disregard for truth. The letter in question was read publicly in the college by Mr. Johnston; it lay on the table during the meeting, and it was afterwards placed in the letter-book of the college, where it has since lain open to the inspection of every member. With respect to the latter part of this passage, I have only to observe, that if Ar. J. has not already heartily repented that he did not follow my prudent, and to him friendly, hint to *beware*, I am certain he will before he comes to the conclusion of my replies,—already thrice too long for so unworthy a subject. As to "hired abuse and abortive attempts to stifle him under a dunghill of scurrility," he must greatly overrate his consequence, if he thinks Mr. C. would incur the expense of hiring and paying such able writers as have mispent their time in noticing this individual's "elegant epistles." Does he imagine for a moment that any one will believe that the eloquent and pungent writer in another periodical has been bribed by Mr. C., not to advocate his cause, for he scarcely refers to him, but to deprecate, in the strongest terms, the apprenticeship system of education; or is it likely that the pure sentiments and unanswerable arguments contained in the paper of *Aliquis*, inserted in No. 393 of *THE LANCET*, could be purchased for "filthy lucre?" Or does he think that the "damning fact" (one of a multitude, evincing to what tyrannical purposes the by-laws respecting pupils in the Irish college can be perverted) contained in the communication of *Nemo*, and which immediately, like an ill-omened bird, precedes the letter of Ar. J., which we are now considering, was got up by Mr. C. for the purpose of "stifling" this worthy public functionary "under a dunghill of scurrility." The pure gentle stream of some purling brook, flowing softly over the pebbles, like my courteous and mellifluous observations over the rough asperities of the angry professor's epistles, would be more likely to "stifle" the offspring of corruption than "a dunghill of scurrility." No