ULCERATION OF THE BRAIN.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Ulceration of the cerebral surface is a disease of which there are few well authenticated accounts. Several of the cases which have been described under this head possess few of the characters pathognomonic of the affection; and this fallacy, according to the opinion of one or two distinguished authors, appears to have arisen from the fact that the narrators of such cases have regarded some specimens of ramollisement, and the disorganisation frequently consequent upon it, as examples of genuine ulceration. Whether or not it be admitted that softening and ulceration of the brain are both the result of the same primary agency upon the organ, it appears, I think, perfectly certain that the true ulcer of the brain presents characters as entirely distinctive, and as easily recognised, as the same lesion on the cutaneous surface. One instance only of this nature has been experienced by Dr. Abercrombie; a few have been detailed by others of our countrymen, and by foreign pathologists. A case of the kind, which I beg to submit to your notice, occurred recently in this town; for the history of which I am indebted to my friend Mr. Tomlinson, and for the opportunity of assisting at the examination post mortem.

CASE.—Daniel Prior, aged 15, thrown from a horse, Jan. 17. On being visited two hours after the accident, was found to have received an extensive lacerated wound of the scalp, across the right parietal surface, by which the bone was denuded to a great extent. Considerable hæmorrhage from the wound took place, amounting to more than a pint in quantity. He retained perfect possession of his senses, and complained little of his head, but referred his sufferings to his elbow-joint, which appeared to have received a violent contusion. On the fourth day after the injury he was able to come down stairs, and exercise himself in the open air; by this period a great part of the wound had healed by the first intention. For three weeks everything went on favourably, and the boy appeared to be the subject of little or no ailment. About the commencement of the fourth week symptoms of constitutional irritation began to manifest themselves; the pulse became quick, and the discharge assumed, for the first time, an unhealthy character; this condition continued, without much alteration, for six days, during which time he complained of pain of head.

Feb. 16th he became comatose, in which state he continued until his death, which took place the following day.

Section capitis.—The wound of the head had an unhealthy aspect. Around the denuded portion of bone, between the scalp

and periosteum, was an accumulation of pus, of a very offensive character; a small piece of the bone was carious, and exhibited some dark-coloured lamellæ when broken up by the handle of the scalpel; this condition did not extend through the external table. On raising the calvarium two or three drachms of foetid pus escaped. The dura mater and subjacent membranes of the right hemisphere were completely eroded in two places, one about the size of a shilling, situated immediately posterior to the Sylvian fissure, the other of smaller dimensions, nearer the occipital region; the ulcers extended about three lines into the substance of the brain; their bases were hard, their edges ragged, and coated with yellowish matter; the texture of the cerebral mass around the ulcers was apparently normal; a great quantity of lymph and pus was effused over the anterior lobe beneath the arachnoid membrane. The pia mater was highly injected, and the vessels of the convolutions and the sinuses were much distended with blood. The whole of the left hemisphere was very vascular; the corpus callosum, septum, and fornix, were in an advanced stage of softening; an excavation, the size of a pigeon's egg, was discovered in the posterior lobe, filled with foetid matter. The appearance of the cerebellum, left hemisphere, and ventricles, was natural. The thoracic and abdominal cavities were not examined.

This case is very interesting, as illustrative of the ambiguity which so frequently invests diseases of the encephalon. Every tissue here appeared to be the seat of some morbid action. The membranes bore evidence of acute and extensive inflammation. The cortical substance was, in two places, eroded to some depth; and the internal parts of the brain exhibited that alteration of structure most usually considered to be the result of inflammatory action; but until within twenty-four hours of death, there was scarcely a symptom diagnostic of any of these lesions. Up to this period the patient retained perfect possession of all his faculties, mental and physical; there was no delirium, paralysis, convulsion, or contraction of the limbs, which has been regarded by some French pathologists as indicative of cerebral ramollisement. These, with most of the conditions symptomatic of cerebral and meningeal inflammation, were altogether absent. Dr. Abercrombie, in his valuable treatise, has detailed some cases similar in this particular, and represents "the danger of being guided by system in our diagnosis of affections of the brain, and the necessity there still is for extensive and careful observation of facts in regard to this class of diseases." I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

GEORGE P. MAY, M.D.

Maldon, April 2, 1839.