ERGOT OF RYE IN PREMATURE LABOUR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Should you consider the following case of sufficient interest and importance to the medical public to merit a place in your Journal, its insertion will oblige your obedient servant,

JOSEPH HODGSON.

Spitalfields, Feb. 4, 1841.

Mrs. M., residing at Salvador-House, Bishopsgate-street; of fair complexion, and other general characteristics of the strumous diathesis; has been married eight years, and is now thirty-four years of age; within twelve months of her marriage, at the full period of gestation, after a tedious labour of forty-eight hours, she was delivered of a living female child. Two years subsequently she miscarried, at the fourth month; and then, after eighteen months, gave birth to a still-born child, at the seventh month. On the 17th of May, 1839, she came under my observation, being again threatened with premature labour, at the seventh month, which was averted by placing her under favourable circumstances, and her pregnancy continued to the eighth month, when labour came on, and, after seven hours, the breech descended with the abdomen towards the sacrum; but, notwithstanding the chin was depressed upon the chest, I could not succeed in extracting the head without lessening it, by the operation of craniotomy.

Taking all the circumstances into consideration, and being of opinion that the pelvis had contracted in size, I desired my patient, the next time she became pregnant, to inform me, at the seventh month, in order that I might have an opportunity of bringing on labour at that time, as the only likely means of insuring the birth of a living child. Accordingly, in the middle of November, she informed me that she was then pregnant, and could trace her pregnancy from the middle of June. She continued in very good health during the remainder of the time, up to the 16th of January last, when I found her in good spirits.

Noon, January 16. I prescribed ten grains of ergot of rye every four hours, to the extent of six doses; visited her at nine o'clock in the evening, one hour after taking the third dose. She stated that every dose produced pains in the back, which continued about half an hour, or from that to three-quarters.

17th, 10, A.M. She had taken the sixth and last dose of the medicine, which at that time was causing her pain, and on making an examination, I found the os uteri softened, and readily admitting one finger, and then a second, between which I passed the

stilet of the female catheter, and ruptured the membranes, presentation natural, and the child's movements distinctly felt. I then returned home, requesting to be called when pains came on. 5, P.M. Seven hours from the time the membranes were ruptured, and os uteri fully dilated, the pains became regular, but having waited until half-past seven, and being quite satisfied that they were insufficient to complete the delivery, and also fearing the child would be destroyed by the pressure of the uterus, I mixed 3j of ergot of rye in ℥iv of water, and ordered one-third to be given every ten minutes, until the uterus acted vigorously; it was not before the third dose had been exhibited that any great increase of uterine action took place, and then, at the end of an hour, a living female child was expelled, which, with the mother, is now doing well.

Remarks.—The exhibition of the secale cornutum, previously to rupturing the membranes by mechanical means, appears to soften the os uteri, and generally to stimulate the action of that organ; and the practice accords with that recommended by Dr. F. H. Ramsbotham, in his valuable work, now in course of publication.

The novel feature in this case is the renewed administration of the secale after the evacuation of the liquor amnii, when the uterus was powerfully contracting, but its expulsive action feeble.

To such administration I attribute the preservation of the life of the infant; an opinion in which Dr. R. fully concurs.

IMPORTANCE OF CASE-BOOKS TO MEDICAL SCIENCE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I was very glad (in common, I trust, with some others of your readers) to see that in your "leader" of the 30th January, you advocate the interests of science in contending for the necessity of a more accurate record of facts. This must be the first step, if the science of medicine is ever to occupy the position to which it is entitled. I do not believe that there is a reflecting man in England, in our profession, who does not rise from the contemplation of medical, as compared with the other sciences, with feelings of dissatisfaction, or without perceiving that it is open to the very same imputations that it was at the time of Hippocrates. Now, Sir, nothing can, I think, be more plain, in a general sense, than the mode in which we should commence our endeavours after better things; and I am well assured, that there are a few, at least, who would be willing labourers,¹ but, hitherto, any attempt at new philosophical modes of proceeding have, so far as I can see, been but coldly received by the bulk of the profession. Our