V. On nævi materni

Chirurgicus

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in the same direction with different velocities ; that with the greater velocity, on overtaking the other, communicates part of its force, and of course loses so much in its velocity.

V. On *Nævi Materni*.

To Mr. Tilloch.

SIR, THE last Number of your Philosophical Magazine contains a discussion, by one of your ingenious correspondents, in support of the old prejudice that certain congenital marks or excrescences, commonly called *nævi materni*, originate from the influence of the mind of the parent. As the paper, no doubt, was written with a serious object, I comply with the writer's request in forwarding to you for publication some observations on the subject.

It is agreed that *nævi materni* resemble known objects in nothing more than *form* ; although, as ENCEPS (the writer's signature) observes, " more than one volume has been filled with reputed instances of the effects of the mother's imagination upon her offspring." The *forms*, however, of *nævi materni* in general are so far from having a resemblance to any known object, that the experience of practitioners, who are in the daily habits of operating on some, and seeing many others, proves as much as extensive experience can prove, that the relations of *nævi materni* resembling a bunch of grapes, or a bit of bacon, are to be classed with the idle tales of the nursery. Even Enceps himself " was for a long time prepossessed with the same notion," viz. that such fanciful forms of *nævi materni* were " idle tales," till a case " was related to him by an intelligent friend who had seen a child born with only one leg, as well as its mother, who declared her firm belief that the cause of this imperfection in her child was a violent fright which she experienced from seeing a beggar suddenly uncover the wounded stump of his thigh." This, however, is not an example of *nævus maternus*, but of *monstrosity*. Now I will seriously ask Enceps, at what period of pregnancy this unfortunate mother received such a *violent fright*. In the latter months of pregnancy, *after* the limbs of the fœtus had been formed? The separation of a limb, and its still more extraordinary annihilation, must then be explained as the effects of imagination,—or in the early months of pregnancy, *before* the ovum had become organized!

ized! The imagination must then be supposed to act on a part of the fœtus before such a part had any existence. The common opinion is, that monstrosity depends on *original conformation* of the ovum; nor is it by any means intelligible that a metamorphosis or annihilation of any part of the fœtus can take place from an impression on the imagination of the parent.

I have said that Enceps's object in writing was not levity; but when I came to the *tale* of the cat and the kittens, my suspicions were somewhat roused. "A pregnant *she* cat" had its tail trodden upon, and lo! when she littered she had an *even* number of kittens; otherwise the surprising things that did happen, could not have happened—that "*half* of her kittens had their tails bent in the middle!" and that *half* had not. The circumstance which roused my suspicion was the gravity with which Enceps says "this fact (or rather this *tale*) seems to be very important, and to *prove nearly to a demonstration*, that the imagination of pregnant females has the power of acting on the bodily conformation of their young!!"

As a medical man, I had reason to hope that the old prejudice of the perfection of the fœtus being in anywise contingent on the imagination of the parent was at an end; and having long been a reader of your respectable Magazine, I could not observe Enceps's reasoning in favour of such a prejudice, without presuming that it was subject to animadversion.

I remain, sir, your humble servant,

CHIRURGICUS.

December, 1809.

VI. *Memoir on the Mineralogical Geography of the Environs of Paris. By Messrs. CUVIER and BROGNIART*.*

THE country in which Paris is situated is perhaps one of the most remarkable hitherto observed, from the succession of the various soils which compose it, and from the extraordinary remains of ancient organizations which it contains: myriads of sea shells, regularly alternated with fresh-water shells, form the principal mass: bones of terrestrial animals, entirely unknown even with respect to their genera, fill certain parts: other bones of species remarkable from their size, and the counterparts of which are only

* *Annales du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle*, tome xi. p. 293.

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