

editor of THE LANCET. We make no unreasonable demands. We have a longing after peace and concord; but we will fearlessly and openly assert our right to be heard, and never bind our necks to the yoke of a galling monopoly.—I am, Sir, yours, &c.

GEORGE T. HAYDEN.

Harcourt-street, Nov. 2, 1839.

THE RARE RHIZOMORPHOUS PLANTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—A fine specimen of *rhizomorpha subterranea* was discovered a few weeks since at Hertford, and has been presented by Mr. R. R. Shillitoe, of University College, to Professor Lindley, as an addition to the Botanical Museum of that institution. It was found attached to the under surface of an oaken slab (forming part of the covering of an old well that had been closed for eleven years), by a stem about the thickness of a goose-quill, and upwards of three yards in length, the lower extremity of which, on reaching the surface of the water, branched out into innumerable ramifications, the whole presenting a matted appearance, and covering a space of at least a yard in diameter.

The entire plant, when fresh, was moist, emitted a fungoid odour, and was of a deep green hue externally, which, on exposure to the air, was soon converted into a dark brown; the interior of the stem is pale yellow, whilst that of the branches consisted of a white elastic substance. An occasional anastomosis occurs between the smaller ramifications, otherwise they terminate in blunted extremities, covered by an extension of the cortex. The general aspect of the plant (bearing, as it does, so strong a resemblance to that of a long root with its attached fibrillæ) is briefly, but most significantly described in the generic name applied by botanists to its congeners—it is, in reality, rhizomorphous.

In the smaller branches the white and elastic axis is composed entirely of filamentous cellular tissue, without any admixture of either spiral vessels or dotted ducts; the filaments themselves are extremely delicate, white, and transparent, somewhat waved in their general outline, and arranged, for the most part, in a direction parallel to each other, and to the axis of the branch itself; in the stem the ultimate filaments are of a dirty yellow colour, and are more irregularly disposed, being somewhat intermixed, interwoven with each other.

The integument of the branches presents a smooth, but dull aspect; it is brittle and inelastic, and consists of several layers of condensed parenchymatous tissue, of a dark brown colour; the cortex of the stem is thicker, drier, and is irregularly fissured, the

clefts running more or less in a longitudinal direction; issuing from these dehiscences are numerous tufts (invisible to the naked eye) of bright fulvous filaments, apparently indicative of the situations in which rupture of the integument had occurred to admit of the emission of the sporules by which these plants are propagated.

It is not known whether this specimen possessed the luminous property usually displayed by the members of this genus rhizomorpha; no observations having been made to ascertain this point until seven days after it was discovered.

The extreme rarity of rhizomorphous plants in this country may be inferred from the fact, that in the Rev. J. M. Berkeley's continuation of Sir J. E. Smith's *British Flora* no mention whatever is made of this genus; whilst in Hooker's *British Flora Cryptogamea* some smaller parasitic species of the rhizomorphous plants are only incidentally alluded to as insinuating themselves beneath the bark of decaying willow-trees; many species, however, have been discovered on the Continent in mines, pits, hollow trees, and other moist situations, excluded from the light of day. In the mines of Bavaria they vegetate so luxuriantly, and manifest their luminous properties to such an extent, as to entwine themselves along the walls and pillars of these mines, extending several hundred feet in length, and shedding a soft but brilliant effulgence over those gloomy and dreary excavations.

I have, with the assistance of my kind friend, Mr. John Marshall, endeavoured to make an analysis of the plant, but the quantity we had to operate on was so small that it was very unsatisfactory; we expected to have found phosphorus, but did not succeed, probably from want of experience in such nice operations, and from the quantity being so small.

R. R. SHILLITOE.

26, Gower-place, London,
Nov. 1839.

BITE OF POISONOUS SNAKES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I am happy to find that your insertion of my letter to Mr. Corbyn has called forth the instructive communication of Dr. Knox, which appeared in your last number; although, notwithstanding that gentleman's assurance of his desire to avoid all criticism, I feel it necessary to fill up an omission which, had the wish to criticise existed, would no doubt have afforded ample space for its indulgence. I mean the non-performance of the operation of excision. This operation was not only thought of, but proposed; yet so evident was the near approach of death to our patient, that

it was simultaneously, and at once, rejected by the skilful surgeon who then afforded his assistance, and myself, both conceiving that no benefit could possibly be expected to arise from its performance at so late a date.

As I, like Dr. Knox, can honestly disclaim all wish to enter the arena of criticism, he will perhaps have the courtesy, in his promised letter, to afford me answers to the two following queries:—

Has Dr. Knox ever seen a case of injury from the pseudo-boia?

Is the doctor positive as to the familiar knowledge possessed of *this* species in India?

Mr. Corbyn, whose reputation as a literary and scientific man stands high in India, did not know the snake from the description of it that he received; which, had it been frequently met with, he surely would have done.

The snake in question was, I know, preserved, and is, in all probability, by this time in England. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
J. G. BRIGHTON.

Kniver, Nov. 5, 1839.

OVARIAN CYSTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—In reply to Mr. Gorham's very elaborate and valuable observations on excision of ovarian cysts, in *THE LANCET* of October 5th, I beg to state that I was perfectly sincere in claiming the more simple mode of operating in these cases, as the suggestion of my own mind, never having seen or heard of Dr. Hunter's paper on the subject. Indeed, I think that it is the deference which has been paid to the gigantic authority of John Hunter, more particularly to his theory of "Continuous Sympathy," which has kept abdominal surgery in comparative abeyance.

Since the publication of my last paper on this subject I have witnessed the extirpation of an ovarian cyst by my friend, Mr. Crisp, of Harleston, Norfolk, from the abdomen of a lady residing in that town, which had existed during more than 20 years, and for the relief of which she had twice submitted to tapping. It contained about three gallons of fluid, but had formed no adhesions to the surrounding viscera, nor to those points of the reflected portion of the peritoneum which had been punctured in the previousappings. This lady perfectly recovered, and is still in good health.—I am, Sir, your's very respectfully,

W. JEAFFRESON, Surgeon.

Framlingham, Nov. 2, 1839.

THE LANCET.

London, Saturday, November 16, 1839.

WHEN the proprietors of the King's College found that their shares were every day declining in value, that the medical classes were at the lowest ebb, that the Professor had to address empty benches, and that hypocritical observances could no longer be substituted for scientific acquirements, they appealed to the public for subscriptions, and cast about to build an Hospital for the poor. They have partially succeeded in their object. A "King's College Hospital" is to be erected, certainly not in the healthiest locality of the metropolis. Mr. ARNOTT, in his printed lecture, traces Hospitals to the benignant fountain of Christianity, and strenuously advocates their extension in this country. We are quite ready to admit that the medical attendance upon our sick poor is inefficient; and that it is upon public charity, and the assistance of the wealthier classes, that they must always look for relief, as they cannot, by any exertions or sacrifices of their own, remunerate medical practitioners. But we cannot admit that the Hospital and dispensary system at present in operation, is calculated to meet the exigencies of the case. They are imperfect institutions at the best, and are, in every respect, very inadequate substitutes for attendance upon the sick poor at their own houses. Instead of sinking immense sums of money in building more Hospitals, would it not be better to improve the dwellings of the poor, and to provide them with the means of warmth, ventilation, and cleanliness, at home? Instead of placing them at the mercy of nurses and strangers, would it not be more humane to provide the wife with the means of watching over her children, or her sick husband? Instead of electing three or four officers to walk with great ceremony, or to hurry with indecent haste, through the wards upon one or two days in the week, would it not be