

WESTMINSTER HOSPITAL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Allow me to call your attention to a notice that I find in the *Morning Herald* of, I think, Thursday last, and which has been, I believe, repeated by some other journals. The notice states, that the governors of the Westminster Hospital have determined on abandoning the former practice of disposing, by sale, of the office of physician's pupil-assistant; and that, instead of the old *house pupil*, a *clinical assistant* is, for the future, to be selected from among the pupils of the hospital: the appointment of that officer is hereafter to depend on his qualifications, which are to be determined in a public examination, to be held by the physicians at the hospital. He is to have board and lodging free of expense, and is to hold the office for six months.

Now, the change in question appears to me a very great improvement on the old system, and therefore deserving of the notice of THE LANCET. Without an efficient amanuensis, or clerk, it is quite impossible that medical histories and cases can be recorded with regularity and at full length; autopsies cannot be duly performed, nor morbid changes described, nor the effects of remedies noted; in short, comparatively few data can be gathered, from which practical medicine can derive emolument. Hospitals, in fact, that do not afford to their medical officers efficient clinical assistants, cannot possibly yield to the healing art all that extension, or to the sick all that relief, which might, under better management, be expected from them. The office, then, of physician's amanuensis, or clerk, or, as the Westminster Board has it, clinical assistant, is one of considerable importance. But the duties of such an office are necessarily troublesome at all times, and often difficult. Considerable industry and knowledge are therefore required for their proper discharge; and this brings into view the defects of the old plan, and the advantages of the new.

A *house pupil*, who pays eighty guineas per annum, and whose competency to assist the physicians has not been secured by preliminary inquiries, is not likely to prove a very efficient aide de clinique. He will do nothing, or else try to recover the value of his sacrifices. He will occupy himself in studying pharmacy, anatomy, therapeutics, instead of assisting to heal the sick and instruct the ignorant. He is too independent to be punished for neglect, and is therefore subject to no efficient check, and burdened

with no practical responsibility; hence, the house pupil of the Westminster, as probably also of other hospitals, has hitherto been a comparatively useless officer, and its medical wards have been less fruitful of clinical instruction than they are hereafter likely to prove. The present measure will remedy every defect of the former arrangement. The sick will not hereafter be dependent for any assistance, the learner for any instruction, on the fragments of an apothecary's leisure, or on the capricious industry of an irresponsible, and probably ignorant, house pupil. The clinical assistant will have time, motive, and ability, sufficient for the discharge of his important duties. With such assistance, clinical prescription must be efficient, and clinical observation instructive.

One advantage peculiar to the new plan I had almost omitted, viz. a general excitement of an ambition amongst the pupils, by the frequent return of the period of election, and often-recurring chance of obtaining so desirable a situation.

On the whole, I think the friends of clinical medicine will hail the projected changes in the Westminster hospital, and join with me in hoping, that other hospitals will not be slow to imitate the excellent example of the oldest medical charity of our metropolis. And above all, THE LANCET should contemplate with pride the intended improvements, as direct results of that spirit of amelioration, to the diffusion of which, its bold criticisms and public-spirited appeals have so largely contributed.

Your very humble Servant,

J. C.

Lincoln's-inn-fields,
May 7, 1827.

MAN-MIDWIFERY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

IN your last Number there is a copy of a second letter, which has been published in the *Times* newspaper, and signed "Anthony Carlisle," containing many coarse insinuations against the practitioners of midwifery; and, as one of that body, I feel called upon to make a few observations upon it. Why the enraged Knight should direct his spear against this particular class of the profession, and accuse them of "wordly designs," and of "regarding the healing art chiefly for its profits," I am at a loss to conceive. Why are not we, in common with those who

practise the other departments of the profession, to expect a remuneration for our days of anxiety, and nights of toil? But will any man of common veracity and common sense say, that the former does by any means compensate for the latter? I can from experience affirm that it does not; that no "profit" (taking this word as I suppose the author of the letter means it, in a pecuniary point of view,) is a sufficient recompense for the intense degree of anxiety which must be felt by every practitioner whilst conducting his patient through the perils of a dangerous labour. If a man wishes to practise his profession "chiefly for its profits," I would strongly advise him to relinquish this branch, and turn his attention to some other, for I can assure him it is not a bed of roses. But before I go farther, the following questions naturally arise: Who is this man? Is he competent to give an opinion on this subject? Has he studied it? If not, he has no right to obtrude his "professional thoughts" upon the public, and still less right (if possible) has he to make those "thoughts" the vehicle for malicious insinuations, slanderous abuse, and most abominable and false imputations, upon a body of men whose characters would suffer nothing from being brought into competition with that of the redoubtable Knight himself.

Now it happens, *as I am informed*, (for of him and his professional feats I know nothing,) that the author of this most extraordinary letter belongs to the privileged class of HOSPITAL SURGEONS; men who are excluded by their regulations, from obtaining a knowledge of the obstetric art, and therefore men of all others the most unfit to give an opinion upon the subject; and yet it is to them, forsooth, that recourse is to be had when cases of real difficulty occur: by the by, this admission of the possibility of such difficulty, falsifies one of his assertions, and a very principal one too, viz. "That the birth of mankind is a purely natural process, most wisely and sufficiently secured by the unerring ordinations of Providence." His "long-continued meditation and experience" ought to have taught him, that in the present artificial state of society, many are the causes, both physical and moral, that tend to interfere with his "purely natural process," often converting it into one of difficulty, and not unfrequently into one of danger; and in a case of this kind, would any one in his senses request the assistance of this Knight, although in his own estimation he may be an "Hospital Surgeon of ENLARGED INTELLECT," whilst there is a Blundell, a Gooch, or a Clarke, to be had? Any person who has been brought into contact with these gentlemen, can amply testify that men of "enlarged intellect" are to

be found, even without the precincts of an hospital.

Can a man unacquainted with the natural movements of any piece of mechanism, be expected to remedy it when defective? and if he cannot so act in inanimate machinery, how can he, in that most complex of all machines, the living body? How then can any one ignorant of natural labour, (and ignorant he must be, if not allowed to practise in ordinary cases of midwifery,) be expected even to *give an opinion* whether nature requires assistance, much less to interfere, for the purpose of rendering it? The truth is so obvious, that I trust "all the respectable and disinterested members of the profession" will need no further elucidation.

It is also stated, that "men-midwives teach their disciples to assume directional offices, and to be curiously and officiously meddling under various pretences, by which the terrified and shocked distressed object is rendered obedient." The above sentence must have been written in a temporary fit of insanity, for no man possessed of reason would have committed himself by uttering such a palpable falsehood. Terrified and shocked! In a former effusion of his "professional thoughts," by this same scribbler, did he not complain of the "unbounded influence" which the accoucheur possessed in the family? (it is true this influence might render unnecessary the attendance of an hospital surgeon.) Now I know not whether the worthy Knight is in a state of single blessedness or not; but whether married or single, he ought to know, that to terrify, shock, and distress the most interesting branch of the family, was not a very likely way of obtaining their confidence and esteem, so as to enable him to exercise this unbounded influence over it. He wishes to know what security we have against "surgical acts of violence," being performed in the "privacy" of a lying-in room? Talk about privacy, indeed! I say, that in no place is there less real "privacy" than in a parturient room,—none where the acts of the practitioner are more severely commented upon; he is judged chiefly by the result, and if the case terminates unfavourably, wo be to his character, if he cannot bring forward a satisfactory explanation of his mode of conduct. A man had much better select the theatre of an hospital, if he wishes to engage in "questionable enterprizes," than a lying-in room. But what right has he to assert that this will be the case, or that women and children will be subject to "many unnecessary and secret operations?" Why are we to be branded with this charge, without even the shadow of evidence to support it? I sup-

pose this is another of his "professional thoughts;" but let me advise him not to give vent to them, if by so doing he is to stigmatise, to say the least of it, a very respectable part of the medical profession. He backs, it is true, one of his assertions, by the puerile accusation, that he once knew a celebrated accoucheur mistaken in his opinion with regard to the life of a child. Indeed! and did he never know an hospital surgeon mistaken in his opinion? And did it never enter his wise head to transfer all hospital surgery into the hands of females on this account? He states, in reference to this case, that the "presumed deformity" was disproved by the woman's bearing five living children afterwards; now I say that this circumstance in itself does by no means militate against the propriety of performing the operation in the first instance. The state of the soft parts of the mother are different at one time to what they are at another, as is also the size of the child's head.

The author of the letter is evidently much piqued at a late regulation of the Royal College of Surgeons, for by it they clearly manifest their opinion, that regularly and properly educated male practitioners are less likely "to tamper with pregnant women, under the pretence of hastening, easing, or retarding the most portentous and delicate work of the creation," than a set of ignorant and officious women. In common gratitude, however, these females ought to hold a public meeting, and to pass a vote of thanks upon the individual who has made use of such exertions in their cause, although it appears to have been a forlorn hope; they ought also to come to an unanimous resolution of applying to him, and *him alone*, whenever in cases of difficulty they require the assistance of an "HOSPITAL SURGEON OF ENLARGED INTELLECT." The reiterated charge of indecency is almost too frivolous to be noticed; are there not many operations of surgery much more revolting to the tender feelings of a delicate female, to which, nevertheless, for the sake of her health, she is obliged to submit? and yet who ever heard of teaching females to perform them? I fear I have trespassed too long upon your patience, and must therefore abruptly conclude.

Remaining yours, &c.

CHARLES WALLER.

Aldersgate-street, May 7, 1827.

THE LANCET.

London, Saturday, May 19, 1827.

CARLISLE, in his first letter to Mr. PEEL, says, "If, however, the greediness of a few individuals should expose this subject (man-midwifery) to free discussion, and the judgment of married men and modest women should be copiously awakened, perhaps the general custom of employing women may be again resorted to;" and in his second letter, this disgusting egotist submits the following proposition:—"I, therefore, now propose the restoration of the practice of midwifery to females, beginning with the introduction of the *wives, widows, or female kindred of medical practitioners.*" Hence, according to his own showing, he recommends that the wives, widows, and female kindred of medical men should addict themselves to "a *degrading vocation,*" a "dishonourable vocation;" that they be "associated with nurses and gossips for whole days and nights," * * * * * "in a lying-in room, where often none but ignorant women are present."

If the GENERAL PRACTITIONERS of the British empire, previously to the publication of this proposal, were ignorant of the opinion entertained of them by the *Hospital Surgeons* of London, they cannot be so now. Sir Anthony confesses, indeed, that he has not written "*unadvisedly,*" which implies, we presume, that his letters have been sanctioned by his colleagues with "enlarged intellect." One would have supposed that Carlisle could have communicated his "professional thoughts" to Mr. Peel without mixing them up with charges of the most horrible description, and suggestions of the most insulting character, appertaining to the professional avocations of GENERAL PRACTITIONERS and their wives. Pray who are the wives of general practitioners? Who? why, the daughters of the most respectable, the most wealthy, and independent gentlemen and merchants