

and physic. Future chroniclers will relate it somewhat after this manner:—

In the month of July, 1847, MARY-ANN HUNT, then an epileptic woman, committed (according to evidence) a murder upon an aged person of her own sex. In the month of September she was tried, found guilty, and condemned to death. In bar of execution, she pleaded pregnancy, and straightway a jury of matrons was empanelled, under Mr. Baron PLATT, to try whether she was quick with child or not. The jury of matrons retired with the prisoner for a short time, and then returned with a verdict that she was *not* quick with child, and upon this verdict, the wretched woman was ordered by the Judge for execution. The daily newspapers merely recorded the facts; there did not seem to arise in the minds of any of the parties concerned, or in the public press, any perception of the ludicrous yet cruel position into which the law had brought itself. Her execution upon the verdict of the second jury seemed imminent.

What followed is described by Dr. RADFORD, in a recent paper, which is somewhat disgraced by the vehicle in which it appears. There is no egotism in quoting an account of our share in the matter, for it is the bare and literal truth:—

"The powerful efforts first made by the medical press, *THE LANCET* and *London Medical Gazette*, especially the former, afterwards followed and supported by an influential leading article in the *Times* paper, had the effect of drawing the attention of the Home Secretary to the case of Mary-Ann Hunt. He humanely exercised his executive power, and directed her case to be examined by three medical men, who pronounced her to be *pregnant*. The execution was therefore stayed; a letter was despatched to that effect to the court of aldermen, by Sir G. Grey, dated Whitehall, Nov. 6, 1847."

Well, on Monday, December 27th, the denouement of one part of the drama took place. The criminal was, as we have said, delivered of a living child—a double delivery, indeed, for her!—delivery from present death, and delivery of the living fruit of her womb.

But beyond the reprieve or forgiveness of this individual woman, ought not the law under which the horrible tragedy of foeticide was so imminent, to be forthwith amended? Will not some benevolent statesman exert himself to take away the opprobrium involved in the holding an inquest of matrons in such cases, to ascertain whether a criminal be quick with child or not. When the law was framed, doubtless it rested on the best foundations which could then be found, and to the apprehensions of a remote period, the matron-jury, and the distinction between quickened and unquickened, may have possibly seemed the perfection of wisdom. But, now-a-days, diagnosis has certainly outgrown the skill of a jury of matrons, and physiology has gone somewhat beyond the notion involved in the phrase, "quick with child." We do not now recognise any period of utero-gestation at which the child becomes *quick* or *living*. It is alive, or quick, from the very moment that the spermatozoon fecundates the ovule. From the act of conception to parturition, the career of the ovum is distinctly, essentially vital—living; more so, perhaps, than in any other phase of animal existence. But this is no novelty to medical men.

In conclusion, we would repeat, that the singular denouement of this case, in the proved pregnancy and delivery of the miserable woman who was the subject of it, and her innocent

offspring, will be imperfect unless it leads to another and grander denouement—namely, the abolition of the cruel, absurd, and antiquated law under which it occurred.

Correspondence.

LETTER OF SATISFACTION FROM DR. WATSON TO DR. WILLIAMS.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

DEAR DR. WILLIAMS,—I thank you for your candid, temperate, and satisfactory letter of explanation.

If (as I am glad to know from your assurance) I misconstrued the meaning and spirit of your letter in *THE LANCET*, my excuse must be, that I did so in common with every one of those who have spoken to me about it, and they have been many. Indeed, it was the interpretation put upon it by some of my friends that first brought the letter under my own notice. It was especially the paragraph which you so frankly retract, with the addition of the next little sentence—"The result is known, and I make no further comment on it," that (as it seemed to me) gave force and point to all which had preceded. But for this paragraph, I should not have thought of troubling you with any expostulation on the subject.

I assure you that I did not know, until I saw it so stated by you in *THE LANCET*, that Mr. Liston had "first sought your aid," or that he had formally consulted you at all. On the very morning of the hæmorrhage, he sent me a message, simply requesting that I would call upon him. I did so on my first going out, and found him recovered from the faintness produced by the loss of blood. But I was not then, nor at any time, informed that he had previously sent for you. I became aware, indeed, at a much later period, that his chest had been once examined by yourself, as well as by another physician, also his colleague in University College. But I believed that these examinations had been casually made upon some occasion of your officially meeting together. Had I known that Mr. Liston had desired your counsel in the first instance, I should have been, not willing, merely, but anxious, in a case so painfully responsible, to obtain the comfort and advantage of your valuable assistance.

Let me assure you, finally, that if, writing to you as I did upon the spur of the occasion, I transgressed the just limits of self-defence, or so expressed myself as to cause unnecessary pain to your feelings, I am sorry for having done so. I trust also,—and, on my own part, am sure,—that what has occurred in this very distressful matter will not be suffered to impair the mutual respect and good-will which had hitherto subsisted between us.—I remain yours truly,

THOS. WATSON.

Henrietta-street, Cavendish-square, Dec. 1847.

USE OF CHLOROFORM IN DENTAL SURGERY.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—Believing that the value of any discovery is to be tested by the aggregate of its results, I venture to offer my humble testimony, founded on experience, as to the benefit to be derived from the employment of the new anæsthetic agent which has been brought into public notice by Dr. Simpson, of Edinburgh.

It cannot be doubted, that suffering humanity is deeply indebted to him for the introduction of chloroform, as an agent in annihilating the sense of pain, since it leaves nothing to be desired, whether we consider its rapidity of action, the completeness of its narcotic effect, or the persistence of the sedative influence.

On the 22nd Nov. I removed three painful molar teeth from a gentleman; again, on the 24th Nov., I extracted two very painful stumps of bicuspid teeth from the mouth of a lady; and I have this day removed seven decayed teeth from a young lady of a highly nervous temperament, and suffering from hysteria in a severe degree. In all these cases the patients were brought under the influence of the vapour of pure chloroform, and with perfect success.

It was gratifying to observe the complete absence of all excitement during the whole period of its effect; and the distressing difficulty of breathing, which often accompanies the inhalation of the vapour of ether, was, in all these cases, unfelt. In employing chloroform, the extreme simplicity in the manner of using it with advantage is of great value.

On a small sponge I poured about eighty drops of chloro-