

vitaly affect the interests of those holding the degrees of the University of London. These degrees seem no more to have entered into the consideration of the corporates than the degrees of Giessen or Erlangen. The senate of the University seem to be very torpid on the present occasion, and to require the stimulus of a decided movement among the graduates. The graduates of medicine in the metropolitan University should contend for the same rights and privileges as those possessed by graduates of the same rank in the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. They should demand and obtain no less, unless they are contented to let a slur fasten itself upon their Alma Mater. There are sundry points upon which the graduates should seek information from the senate. A few years ago the College of Physicians agreed that their censors should attend the examinations at Somerset House, and that graduates should forthwith be admitted to the College of Physicians without any additional examination. On some occasions we believe the censors did so attend. This was in the days of the former Whig ministry. We believe, however, that this arrangement lasted but a short time, and that it was broken by the authorities of the College. It is said, moreover, that the date of the retirement of the College from the University was coeval with the advent of a conservative ministry, and the diminution of the parliamentary vote to the University. It is highly discreditable that political considerations of any kind should affect treaties between two such bodies, and this matter ought to be thoroughly sifted. The arrangements should have been based upon right and justice, and not have wavered to and fro, with political opinions; still, least of all, should the University of London submit to insult at the present time, when its founder, Lord JOHN RUSSELL, is at the head of her Majesty's government. The graduates are a body sufficiently numerous and distinguished, and they have only to exert themselves, in co-operation with their Senate and Chancellor,—himself in close connexion with the government,—to obtain substantial justice from the state; but there is no time to lose, if it be true, as reported, that a new and secret charter "has been prepared" and "submitted to the government" by the College of Physicians. Delay in such a case is certain defeat.

Correspondence.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE USE OF CHLOROFORM IN NATURAL LABOUR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I had not intended to take any part in the question as to the propriety or impropriety of the exhibition of chloroform in midwifery, nor should I have done so, if, as I had hoped, like other things of the same kind, it would have quickly died away.

I did not, however, expect that Dr. Simpson would have appealed so directly, and through so many channels, to the feelings and imperfect knowledge of society in general, for it is, I am happy to say, still very uncommon, in our profession, to find those of its members who should give tone to its bearing and conduct,—professors, for instance, of our ancient universities,—going about from one city to another, to announce and exhibit the wonderful effects of a new gas, and, as I am informed, somewhat after the fashion of a showman, to demonstrate them personally, at dinner parties, and in drawing-rooms.

Certainly the great discoveries of Laennec, Marshall Hall, Bright, Robert Lee, and others, have never exceeded, in their enunciation, the dignified modesty of true science.

I am aware of the opinion entertained by Dr. Simpson of the London practitioners, whose conduct, in this matter, he attributes, not very courteously, to apathy and indolence. I

rejoice that they have hesitated, waiting, very properly, for stronger, less partial, and more universal testimony. Nor must we condemn their extreme caution, as many of them, like myself, regard the employment of chloroform in midwifery as a dangerous practice, founded, or rather attempted to be founded, on principles altogether erroneous.

I beg Dr. Simpson will not imagine that I intend anything personal (far from it) in what I am about to say, but he should recollect, that all the new matters he has so lavishly and, as I think at present, so crudely propounded to the profession, have yet to pass through the ordeal by which alone it can be determined whether what he has regarded as new be really true. I have in recollection his opinion about the exfoliation of the mucous membrane of the uterus in dysmenorrhœa, every three or four weeks, for months together; his operation for the division of the neck of the uterus, which he is said very frequently to perform; his singular notion, in opposition to the experience of the best authorities, of the frequency of anteversion and retroflexion, and of their related maladies; and his yet more singular and strikingly injurious instrument for their relief—viz., the introduction of an ivory one-pronged fork into the inside of the womb itself, to be worn for weeks or months together. And now, as though these views, and others of a similar character, were not enough, he proposes to interfere—as I think, most dangerously—with the progress of every natural labour.

I mention these facts, as justificatory of my personal allusion to Dr. Simpson, and my conviction, that chloroform ought never to be used in natural labour; as a further justification for my entering (only this once) on this question. I beg it to be understood, that my remarks are confined to the exhibition of this new agent in midwifery alone; I have no quarrel with its judicious use in surgical operations: these are not parallel cases, nor can they be put in the same category.

Of course much might be said as to the propriety or necessity of the innovation; but this I waive, and I ask at once—Why is this great risk to be run? It is not pretended that it shortens the duration of the process; nay, if anything be attributed to chloroform on this head, it is almost certain that delay must be the consequence of its exhibition. There is no evidence to show that any favourable effect, save the unconsciousness of pain, can be traced to its influence.

I do not deny that physical pain is an evil; but before we attempt to abolish this hitherto invariable accompaniment of natural labour, it is incumbent on the advocates of the use of chloroform, to prove to demonstration that this interference is entirely safe. A careful perusal of one of the able and admirable Lectures of Dr. Tyler Smith, (vide THE LANCET, March 27, 1847,) will satisfy any impartial inquirer that obstetric etherization is, at least, of very doubtful benefit and of very complicated and uncertain operation.

Baron Dubois says: "My profound conviction is, that inhalation of ether in midwifery should be restrained to a very limited number of cases, the nature of which ulterior experience will better allow us to determine." Let it be remembered that this opinion was given of ether, undoubtedly (according to the recent and ably-conducted experiments of Mr. Wakley, jun.) a safer agent than the chloroform. M. Dubois remarks, that in one of his patients "the most intense premonitory signs of convulsion were induced; the congestion was so great that he almost expected the eyeballs to syringe forth blood." Dr. Tyler Smith further adds: "I know it is ungracious to take the part of an alarmist in such a question, but many fatal cases have now occurred after operations in which etherization has been practised. The patient who underwent the Cæsarian operation died; another patient, on whom extirpation of the eyeball was performed, sank; a clergyman whose leg was amputated never rallied after the operation; two of the women delivered while under the influence of ether, by the Baron Dubois, subsequently died; and fatal collapse occurred in the case of a woman, from whose thigh a tumour was removed."

"The morbid phenomena fairly attributable to ether, (a safer agent, be it remembered, than chloroform,) in cases which have recovered, have been, nausea, sickness, stertorous breathing, pulmonary and cerebral congestion, convulsions, and protracted failure of the heart's action;"—a sad list, truly.

These facts, and three deaths at least from the new agent, chloroform, besides many other serious results, will probably satisfy most practitioners that "a meddlesome midwifery" is still a bad midwifery.

In common with most teachers, I have long inculcated at Guy's Hospital, "that unnecessary interference with the providentially arranged process of healthy labour is sure, sooner or later, to be followed by injurious and fatal consequences."

I think the chloroform will be no exception to these precepts; nay, so sure am I that it needs only to be extensively used to ensure its entire abandonment, that I would willingly leave it to such a result, if it might be accomplished without further loss of life. But the instances in which it has already proved fatal, although they will alarm, may not so quickly as is to be desired lead to its final relinquishment. It is therefore a duty to urge every just plea against its further use.

Dr. Simpson has put forth a pamphlet to exonerate the new practice from any censure on religious grounds. In this I do not mean to follow him. But it does seem to me to involve a grave responsibility so far to interfere with a natural process as to impair its integrity and perfection. The chloroform, if used effectually, induces at the least cerebral unconsciousness—in other words, a temporary paralysis or suspension of the functions of the brain, thus depriving the woman, during the most momentous function of her life, of all moral control. What may not be said of the irreligion and criminality, supposing the case to be a fatal one, of destroying before the extinction of life the higher principle, from the proper exercise of which our existence derives its true worth and responsibility—of the criminality of permitting a human being to cease to live, when we ourselves had destroyed the possibility of giving her any idea that this solemn event was certainly impending. The practitioner who administers chloroform in labour cannot tell, “a priori,” whether this may not be one of the few cases in which death is to happen; nor can he know, in many instances at least, whether there may not exist some unsuspected disease of the brain or heart, which this new gas may carry to a sudden and fatal termination. I do not envy the remorse which must follow the conviction, that by such practice the momentous arrangements of a dying hour have been entirely prevented.

I forbear to enter into the question—whether there be any form of labour in which chloroform should be used?—further than to say, in instrumental and flooding cases, we rely as a considerable evidence of the safety of the patient, and of the uninjured state of the womb and adjacent parts, on that very pain which it is the purpose of the gas to destroy. Whether in the very difficult cases of turning, where the womb is most firmly and tonically contracted round the child, it might be of use, I am not prepared to say. I fear, however, it would produce but little benefit. Lately, at Enfield, I was consulted in a case of rigid perinaeum, where the chloroform was fully exhibited, under the impression that it might induce relaxation. No such result followed. Dr. Millar, with great promptitude, applied twenty leeches to the part, and the child was eventually born dead. If there was any effect produced here, it was to weaken the uterine effort, but whether the chloroform produced the death of the child, I cannot say. In conclusion, I beg to assure Dr. Simpson that I entirely disclaim every feeling but a sense of duty.

I remain, Sir, yours obediently,

SAMUEL ASHWELL, M.D.,
Late Obstetric Physician and Lecturer
to Guy's Hospital.

Grafton-street, Bond-street, 1848.

P.S.—Dr. Simpson refers, in his pamphlet on the religious objections which have been urged to chloroform, to the first operation (!) ever performed—namely, the extraction of the rib of Adam, as having been executed while our primogenitor was in a state of sopor, which the professor learnedly argues was similar to the anaesthesia of chloroform. He further draws a justification of his own proceedings from this history of the creation of man. Putting aside the impiety of making Jehovah an operating surgeon, and the absurdity of supposing that anaesthesia would be necessary in His hands, Dr. Simpson surely forgets that the deep sleep of Adam took place before the introduction of pain into the world during his state of innocence!

A VISION OF QUACKERY.

(AFTER THE MANNER OF QUEVEDO.)

It was on a November evening of the past year, just at the time between daylight and darkness, that I was sitting at my fireside, observing the flickering of the flames, and musing inwardly on the position and future prospects of the medical profession,—wondering what was the real remedy for the evils cleaving thereto, and when and by whom a regeneration would come, and whether the crusade THE LANCET has undertaken against quackery, both in and out of the profession, would diminish that prolific monster, and its schemes, shifts, and turnings having been one by one exposed and exhausted, it would die a natural death; or whether, as in “the lowest depth there is a lower still,” our successors in legiti-

mate medicine, following the same path of degrading competition that a large number are now pursuing, would adopt plans and practices for the purpose of enhancing their medical reputation, of which we can now form little conception.

While thus meditating, I fell into a doze, and presently, to my astonishment, found myself in a room filled with a miscellaneous company of mechanics, operatives, and others of the labouring classes. They were seated on several benches, some discussing the merits of foaming tankards of ale and porter, others smoking, and all united in loud discussion (as I judged from the earnest expression of their countenances) on some weighty and important subject. On making inquiry, a journeyman mason informed me that this was the “United Society of Silver-toned Intellectual Harmonists;” that they were about, for the first time, to elect a surgeon to their club; and that this was the occasion appointed for considering the merits of the various candidates. The clock having struck the hour of nine, order was called for, and the chairman took his seat in a large arm-chair near the fire, with a round deal table before him. Pipes, glasses, and pots, were duly replenished. On casting my eyes around the room, I observed half-a-dozen coal-porters collected into one corner, who, having lacked inclination or opportunity to perform their weekly ablutions, had come in the same condition in which they pursued their daily avocations. Several dustmen, habited in their ordinary costume, were seated on a bench by themselves; and a couple of sweeps, in like manner, not ashamed of the insignia of their calling, had stretched themselves on the floor close by the fire. Silence having been obtained, the regulations for the election of a medical officer were read over. These enjoined that each candidate should be separately introduced, and having presented his testimonials, and explained the grounds on which he based his claims to their support, he should be required to withdraw, and give place to his successor.

A door being opened, the first candidate then made his appearance, and having smoothed his hair, buttoned his coat, and rubbed his hands, he announced himself as Mr. Fischcrackum. He informed the very respectable audience collected, that, agitated in his bosom by a variety of emotions, he felt a difficulty in giving utterance to the motives which had induced him to place himself in that interesting, highly important, and eminently honourable position. He felt animated by the purest philanthropy in bringing before that justly-named “intellectual society” a discovery which he had recently made; and if they elected *him* their surgeon, they should derive the full benefit of so great a triumph of science. He now produced from his coat-pocket a small tube, shaped like a stethoscope, and turning to a thin, pale, skeleton-looking printer's apprentice, whom he named Jacky Threttle, (and with whom I saw him exchange a significant glance,) he applied the instrument to the printer's neck, and desired the chairman and stewards of the club to listen for themselves, if they did not hear a buzzing sound. Each listened, and replied, with a look of amazement, that he did hear a “summut.” “That, gentlemen,” said he, “is the *bruit diable*, named after the boy which is in English called, asking your pardon, the devil, or, in more polite language, the dark-visaged gentleman; and, in truth, it is caused by a little animal, whose head is shaped like that of a man, with a tail like a fish, bifurcated posteriorly, flattened from side to side, and furnished with two stings. He likewise has ten claws on each side of his body. This little monster enters the jugular vein, runs down the great aorta to the legs and feet, from thence he mounts to the heart, lungs, and brain, preying on the vital powers, destroying the animal spirits, and drinking dry the fountains of the springs of life! The sound which you hear is caused by the shaking of his tail, agitating the nummoidal or money-shaped particles of the blood, and this, conducted by the instrument to my ear, informs me of the presence of this venomous creature, whose scientific denomination, as conferred by myself, is the *homopiscunculus*, or man-like little fish. I, by the application of a remedy, discovered after long study in the laboratory, bring about his instantaneous destruction. Here, gentlemen, is a diagram, representing the *homopiscunculus* killed by my powerful medicine. Mark that his two stings are extracted, his ten claws on each side bruised and broken, and a tight string is drawn round his neck, by which he becomes strangled.” He (Mr. Fischcrackum) next produced a number of testimonials, one of which only I shall here transcribe.

TESTIMONIAL.

“I hereby certify that Dr. Fischcrackum is a very clever, nice doctor; he did me and my daughter, when we