

The following is the Petition referred to by Dr. Stewart:—

To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament assembled: the Petition of the undersigned Physicians, Surgeons, and General Practitioners, resident in London,

HUMBLY SHEWETH,—

That your petitioners, from their acquaintance with the labouring classes, and with the laws which regulate the human economy, are convinced that a Seventh Day of rest, instituted by God, and coeval with the existence of man, is essential to the bodily health and mental vigour of men, in every station of life.

That the system which provides for the gain of some, and the recreation, the amusement, and the vices of others, at the expense of their fellows, who require and are entitled to a day of rest as much as they, and thus consigns a large and yearly-growing proportion of the community to a life of unbroken toil, besides being at variance with that law of charity which enjoins us to do to others as we would they should do to us, has a direct tendency to undermine the health, exhaust the strength, and shorten the lives of those who are its victims.

That the proposal to open for profit the Crystal Palace, now in course of erection at Sydenham, and to create in connexion with it an enormous amount of railway traffic during a portion of the Lord's Day, lying manifestly open to these objections, and confessedly implying a still further extension of this hurtful system, appears to your petitioners pregnant with disastrous results to the labouring classes, because directly tending to defraud them of that boon, which the Sabbath-law of a beneficent Creator provides for the whole family of man.

That while they are more especially called to minister to the physical sufferings of their fellow creatures, your Petitioners cannot overlook the close relationship subsisting between moral and physical disease, or entertain the hope that any plans, which do not make full provision for their spiritual as well as for their physical necessities, will effect any great or permanent improvement in the health and the habits of the labouring population; and that, even if your Petitioners could altogether shut their eyes to the moral aspects of the above-mentioned proposal, in favour of which their opinion has been expressly invoked by its promoters, it would, according to their experience of the wants and slender resources of the labouring poor, be a mere mockery to offer the much needed blessings of health, fresh air, and recreation, at an expense far beyond the means of the vast majority, and sure to entail serious subsequent privation even on the few who might venture to incur it at distant intervals.

That your Petitioners, deeply sympathizing with the hard and cheerless lot of multitudes of their fellow-countymen, of whose health they may be considered in some sense the guardians, feel bound to protest against any encroachments, from whatever quarter they may come, on that day of rest which is the birth-right of the poor, and to claim for them far greater opportunities of healthful and innocent recreation than they now enjoy. Convinced that the present protracted hours of labour are not only hurtful but needless, and anxious to lighten instead of adding to the pressure of toil that now weighs so heavily on the working classes, your Petitioners desire to express their belief that the requirements of the Divine law, and the interests both of employers and artisans, may be harmonized by the concession, as in Manchester, and (to some extent) in Glasgow, of a portion of one of the working days as a weekly half holiday; and the provision, free of cost, in all the large towns of the United Kingdom, of Parks and Gardens, and of public Museums of Art and Science, fitted to elevate the habits and refine the tastes of the labouring population.

May it therefore please your Honourable House to refuse your assent to any measure calculated, in any way, to set aside the law actually in force and to legalize the opening of the Crystal Palace and its Grounds for gain on any portion of the Lord's Day.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

CHLOROFORM IN PARTURITION.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—It is indeed true that we live in startling times; and it would seem that some members of the medical profession are determined we shall not be behind the rest of the world in a "go-ahead" progress. Your announcement, a few weeks ago, of the Queen's accouchement under chloroform, and that, under no other than ordinary circumstances, the royal child-birth had been treated by anaesthesia, doubtless gave rise to considerable

emotion and excitement both in the professional and the female world. I entertain too much sense of delicacy and respect for royal station, either to make unnecessary allusion to, or elicit a discussion upon the circumstances which induced the eminent medical attendants to administer chloroform; but it is a remarkable circumstance that, in the bulletins issued, not the slightest allusion to any untoward or unfavourable symptom in the royal patient is made. For some time, however, before this, it was well known that, in certain districts, the married—especially the young married—women, even of respectable society, had been in much agitation respecting the recent discussions upon chloroform, and had become so solicitous for its administration in their own cases, as to have sought for the attendance of such practitioners as had not entertained scruples as to its employment, but had found in this way a very ready and popular—though it may be questioned whether a very legitimate—introduction to obstetrical practice.

The effect of such a proceeding may be seen in a case which I will here relate.

I recently attended a lady, for the seventh or eighth time, in labour. The parturient process in this instance, as in every other in her case, was admirably illustrative of the accurate physiological and mechanical relations between the mother and child requisite for the production of natural offspring. The dilating and expulsive powers of the uterus were regular and effective. These actions, however, could not be had without pain; and in the midst of them she most impudently begged, and even insisted, to have chloroform given to her. To this request I declined acceding; and the mother and child were happily relieved in half an hour after the request was made, and within two hours from the commencement of labour.

This patient urged her wish to me, by telling "that Mrs. — and Mrs. — had taken it, and why should not she?" I apprehend that such a state of things in the practice of midwifery ought not to exist. I would ask, then, upon what new principles can this meddling or interference with natural labour be defended? Is it proper, in the normal condition of the female, to administer chloroform? Is it justifiable? I apprehend that every agent legitimately used in medicine is only for the alleviation or cure of disease, functional or organic. Will it be attempted to place parturition under the head of disease? No one, I conceive, will be so bold as to make that attempt.

Whence, then, comes the justification for this modern proceeding? I presume, from that inherent weakness in human nature, of shrinking from pain, and an eager desire to avoid all suffering, however legitimately enforced. To meet this desire, certain medical men have decided to lend their skill. But how does the question really stand? If labour be undeniably a physiological process for the birth of human offspring, and if anatomy and physiology have proved that this process cannot be obtained without fulfilling the Divine enunciation, "that in sorrow and pain woman should bring forth", the whole of this being, notwithstanding, perfectly consistent with the health of mother and child,—what doctrine can be an excuse for mischievous meddling with such a miracle of contrivance? This, however, must be the obvious result—that, whilst the pains and perils of child-birth have always had a salutary moral influence on the female character, the interference proposed must have the opposite effect, viz., of seriously damaging the moral courage of parturient women, besides placing practitioners who object to such a procedure in embarrassment and difficulty.

In your own approval, by editorial remarks, of the regular use of chloroform, as well as in the result of Dr. Snow's experience in its administration and freedom from danger, as given in the number of the JOURNAL for June 10th, I do not observe a single ground of justification for interfering with perfectly natural labour; and it is easy to perceive, from the detail entered into by Dr. Snow in this matter, that, even under any circumstances, chloroform, like other agents on the living body, is irregular, and consequently may be very mischievous in its operation. Dr. Snow is not disposed to believe that the deaths which he relates—one in Dr. Ramsbotham's, and the other in Dr. Murphy's practice—were attributable to anaesthesia induced; but the question is, Could he say that death would have occurred had that not been practised? Those who have had a large amount of professional experience can testify to the very varied physical condition and temperament of parturient women, in whom there is not unfrequently a tendency to an abnormal condition of the heart and lungs. The indiscriminate use of chloroform in such cases must not only be mischievous, but often fatal. Besides, we can easily see the constant liability to danger from the regular use of chloroform in the lying-in chamber, especially in the enormous quantities stated by Dr.

Snow to be occasionally used—I presume in natural labour: and is it not likely to be a ready and quick means of self-destruction, eagerly seized upon by the unhappy woman, whose child-birth is only attended by shame and perhaps destitution?

What, then, is the course which ought to be pursued in this dilemma? The profession, as a commonwealth, is confessedly without any landmarks of polity or ethics by which to govern it; yet surely there is at this juncture an amount of character sufficient to defend the soundness of its position, and prevent it being "disturbed from its decent proprieties", although a flickering meteor may have moved over its horizon. From the example now given to the country by the medical attendants on royalty, every parturient woman in the realm will expect to be treated in labour by chloroform; and by the example thus set, great violence has been done to the judgment, the feelings, and the position of, I believe, many, if not the majority, of the best accoucheurs in the country. Is it not, therefore, incumbent on the teachers and examiners of midwifery in every school, especially in London, immediately to investigate the question in all its bearings, and to promulgate *ex cathedra* their opinions, both physiological and moral, on the subject, in order that as little time as possible may be lost in settling, by an amount of indisputable testimony, the scruples, the hesitations, and the doubts of the professional and the public mind. I am, etc.,

A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION.

Lancashire, June 13th, 1853.

LORD LYTTTELTON'S VACCINATION BILL.

SECOND LETTER FROM EDWARD BARBER, ESQ., TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—I do not question the good intentions of Lord Lyttelton in proposing his Vaccination Bill, but I doubt whether any of us are yet in a position to legislate for the suppression of small-pox. That its occurrence, subsequent to vaccination, is much more frequent now than it was twenty or thirty years ago, will, I think, be admitted by all who are of that standing in the profession; and my own observation leads me to the conclusion that within a much shorter period the protective influence of the vaccine virus has from some cause or other decidedly diminished. The subject is one in which hasty and crude legislation may do much mischief, and which presents many points necessary to be well considered before penal statutes are admissible. Amongst these are the points—whether vaccine virus taken directly from the cow is more effective than that which has been taken from a succession of human subjects; and if so, how long it may be used without reverting to the primary source, or rather, through how many of such subjects it may pass without materially impairing its protective influence; whether a scrofulous or other morbid diathesis diminishes the power of the virus; whether (as suggested in a former letter) infants of very tender age are less susceptible of the vaccine disease; and whether in them the constitutional effects are fully and perfectly produced, and the virus taken from them is as effective as that taken from children some months older; and if it be thought not to be so, what is the earliest age at which infants should be vaccinated to secure its full and effectual influence upon their own constitutions, and the transmission of a perfect and unimpaired virus to others? It should, if possible, be ascertained in what proportion of cases vaccination, duly and carefully performed, procures complete immunity from small-pox for life, and for how long a period it may on the average be relied upon in other cases. For, if its protective influence be only temporary (as it is believed in many cases to be), every measure must be defective which does not provide for general revaccination at stated periods.

For some years past it has appeared to me that small-pox, subsequent to vaccination, has been of more frequent occurrence than primary small-pox. It is the great difficulty we have now to contend with, and it is necessary, therefore, to consider whether time and circumstances may not have produced a modified form of the disease, for which the vaccine virus is not so effective an antidote as it has heretofore proved to be for the genuine small-pox, and if there be reason to think so, whether any and what protection can be given to the public against it. These are a few only of the points requiring careful investigation before the legislature can treat the subject of vaccination satisfactorily. In the meantime, perhaps, the utmost that can be done in the way of legislation is to impose restrictions and disqualifications upon the unvaccinated; for instance, exclusion of them and their families from charitable and public institutions of all kinds, from schools and public offices and employments etc., and from parochial relief: to enforce vaccination, and, if necessary, revaccination upon all tramps and vagrants, prisoners of

all kinds, and all who are brought into close contact with others whether in gaol or elsewhere, and to encourage it amongst the lower classes by rendering it as accessible as possible, and taking care not to identify it with parish relief. It seems vain to hope for any real improvement in the sanitary condition of the country, until such questions as the present, and indeed all questions affecting the public health, are submitted to the consideration and control of men whose attainments and pursuits give them the knowledge necessary to a proper handling of such subjects.

I am, etc.,

EDWARD BARBER.

Stamford, June 20th, 1853.

THE PENINSULAR AND ORIENTAL STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY *versus* HER MAJESTY'S NAVY.

LETTER FROM HENRY BENCRAFT, ESQ., TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—I entirely agree with you as to the importance of the Medical Department of the Navy; and I think that it is greatly to be deplored that the Board of Admiralty is so blind, as not to see that it is as much its duty, as it is necessary to the interests of the naval service, to endeavour to make the assistant-surgeon's position as agreeable as possible. In order to show you that this can be done at no very great sacrifice of money or convenience, I would beg to direct your attention for a few minutes to the manner in which our great steam navigation companies administer to the wants of *their* medical officers, and, indeed, do all in their power to make them feel that they are gentlemen, and that the office which they hold is one of great importance and responsibility. I am now speaking of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, in whose service I spent two years prior to engaging in a country practice. My salary was one hundred pounds per annum, with living. I had a most excellent cabin—one of the best in the ship, with a roomy dispensary; the company finding all requisites and a servant to wait upon me. From the class of passengers carried by this great and liberal company, it is scarcely necessary for me to tell you, that in a sea-going ship the style of living could not be surpassed.

Now we all know that, with these trading companies, every foot of room is of considerable value; and yet the directors rate the surgeon's services so high that they liberally, without regard to the sacrifice of either space or expense, do all in their power to make him comfortable.

I would ask you, sir, is it not perfectly astonishing that the Board of Admiralty does not consider the lives of those brave fellows, who man "the wooden walls of Old England", of sufficient consequence to be cared for and protected, at least as efficiently as the Board of Directors of a carrying company care for and protect their passengers and servants?

I hope, sir, that ere long the voice of public opinion will cause this most foul blot to be removed from the national escutcheon.

I am, etc.,

HENRY BENCRAFT.

Swimbridge, near Barnstaple, Devon, June 14th, 1853.

NEWS AND TOPICS OF THE DAY.

THE AQUATIC VIVARIUM, REGENT'S PARK. On the borders of the flower-bed in the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, has been constructed, of glass and iron, a building sixty by twenty feet in area containing fourteen six-foot tanks of plate glass. Of these, six are ready for exhibition. They enclose masses of sand, rock, gravel, corallines, sea-weed, and sea-water; and are abundantly stocked with crustacea, star-fish, sea-eggs, actinias, ascidians, shelled, and shell-less molluscs, and fish of the genera *gasterosteus*, *labrus*, *crenilabrus*, *blennius*, *gobius*, and *cottus*. The *algæ*, which serve at once as ornaments and shelter for the animals, and as purifiers of the water, appear to bear their new situation as well as the lively zoophytes, and no difficulty has presented itself, so far, to the conservation of both. The collection is altogether from the British seas, but the building is so constructed as to be capable of being enlarged, and the Society does not despair of exhibiting some of the more striking tropical and intertropical forms of invertebrate animals. The most complete portion of the collection are the *Actinias*, among which the specimens of *A. dianthus*, *parasitica*, *crassicornis*, are truly magnificent. The rare *Adamsia palliata*, *Actinea nivea*,