

As the optic nerve, even where it penetrates the coats of the eye, is not susceptible of the external impression of light, so we may probably conclude that no kind of impression which was confined to the nerve alone, and not conveyed by the medium of the retina, would excite the idea of light; and perhaps this may be the reason why in some cases of fever affecting the brain, in phrenitis, and in general, in all cases where the brain, or its membranes, acquire an unusual degree of irritability, the symptom of deep-seated pain of the forehead, shooting into the eye-ball, precedes that of increased susceptibility to light, owing, as I conceive, to the morbid irritability being communicated gradually down the optic nerve to the retina, and that it is only when the latter is affected that light becomes painful.

The other organs of sense are not so easily made the subject of experiment as the eye, but they appear in some degree to possess the same property of transmitting their peculiar sensations from very various kinds of impressions. Thus the sensation of ringing in the ear, which often occurs during a severe cold, may be occasioned by an increased irritability of the membrane of the tympanum, communicated along the Eustachian tube. The same irregular sensations of sound follow a violent blow on the external ear, and attend incipient deafness, in the same manner as those of the light attend the eye in similar circumstances; and in many cases of general affection of the head, where light is painful, noise is equally so. Perhaps the strong sensation of taste made on the tongue, by the metallic influence in the Galvanic experiments, may be owing to the same cause, and not to an actual solution of any part of the metal in the saliva, which must otherwise be imagined.

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### To the Editors of the Medical and Physical Journal.

GENTLEMEN,

THE maxim inculcated by writers on surgery, that a wound of the uterus is mortal, is confirmed by the uniformly fatal event of the Cæsarean section.

The operation is, notwithstanding, insisted on by some practitioners, in a speculative case; this, however, they have failed to describe, and the accoucheur is consequently left to conjecture the right application of their doctrine.

It may be useful to enquire into the existence of this supposed case; and also to fix a principle for the government of our conduct.

To do this, it will not be necessary to enter into nice calculations of the dimensions of the pelvis; for a general statement of the question will, I think, suffice, and lead to an obvious and apposite conclusion.

I can conceive, that an incision might be made into the right ventricle of the heart, and that a polypus might be extracted from its cavity; that the lips of the wound being brought into contact, union by the first intention might take place, and the patient recover.

A wound of this organ has, however, proved invariably fatal; so that, should such a project be put in execution, the operator might be deemed guilty of murder. The cruelty of such an experiment would not be lessened by the possibility of a recovery, as all rational practice must rest on moral evidence. To apply this argument to the Cæsarean section: Suppose the pelvis of a woman to be so distorted as to prevent the delivery of her child through its contracted aperture, and that it shall be certainly known that the child is alive, and strong; as the mother would die undelivered, and the child might be saved, would not these circumstances justify the performance of the operation?

This, I conceive, constitutes the only case in which a reasoning mind would ever entertain a thought of performing it.

All the experience of this country informs us, that the Cæsarean section will prove fatal to the mother; and therefore the whole question turns on this single point, Whether the mother's life shall be sacrificed to save her child?

I anticipate that the answer will, in general, be in the negative; for, besides that the intention of employing professional assistance is to save, and not to destroy; the legislature has not thought fit to enact a statute of indemnity for this particular case; and the sixth commandment says

“*Thou shalt do no MURDER.*”

Both divine and human laws then prohibit the employment of means, which will be destructive to the parent, though certainly preservative of the life of her child; and to perform the operation, even in the above-described case, would be to exercise a power in opposition to those omnipotent authorities.

The question then is stopped *in limine*, and our attention must be confined solely to the mother; as the consideration of saving her child cannot be entertained, without previously determining to destroy her.

But this is putting the question more favourably than experience warrants, for the signs by which we must judge of the state of the child before birth,

are inconclusive of its real condition; and, consequently, should the mother's life be yielded to its intended preservation, disappointment might even precede her melancholy catastrophe, in the extraction of a fœtus already dead.

This view of the subject leads to an obvious deduction, that the Cæsarean section is inadmissible during the parent's life; and hence is derived a rule, at once plain and precise, to direct our conduct on this trying occasion; for, when other means fail to accomplish the delivery, or are deemed inexpedient, we can only deplore the miserable sufferings of the patient, and the insufficiency of art to relieve them; and the disposal of life must be left to HIM who gave it.

MANCHESTER, Aug. 21, 1799.

W. SIMMONS.

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### *To the Editors of the Medical and Physical Journal.*

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING, by accident, a few days ago, met with the last Number of your Journal, I shall venture, through so respectable a channel, to lay before the Public any observations on professional subjects which I may be enabled to make. Satisfied that a Regimental Hospital, if properly conducted, is one of the best schools in the world for acquiring practical knowledge, I have endeavoured to improve the advantages of my situation to the utmost. I have been upwards of six years surgeon of the western regiment of Kentish militia, during which time our number of sick has never been inconsiderable; whereby much opportunity of practice has been afforded me. I have been in the habit of keeping a Journal of the different cases as they occurred, wherein I carefully noted every symptom of which a patient complained, the various remedies exhibited, the time when, and with what view given. I also marked every change that took place in the course of a disease, and the effect of the medicines made use of; and lastly, my own opinion of the method of cure which I had adopted. In the course of my practice, I have endeavoured, on every occasion, to determine the justness of pre-conceived theories, by experience, and on every subject to think for myself, uninfluenced by the "tenets of the schools," or the opinions of others. I have had an opportunity of giving every new remedy a fair and candid trial, and in every instance wherein my present practice or opinions differ from what are generally adopted, I can solemnly assure you, that they are the result of actual experience only, for I have no theory to serve. The prevalence of any mode of practice is certainly not a clear proof of its being useful;