

WESTMINSTER MEDICAL SOCIETY.

Saturday, March 10, 1844.—Mr. FISHER, President.

ANEURISM OF THE AORTA.

MR. SNOW placed on the table of the society a portion of the aorta with a small aneurismal dilatation just above the sigmoid valves. He said it had been taken the day before from the body of a man who had died suddenly. On opening the chest the pericardium was found to be distended to the utmost with blood, containing above a pint, and a small opening was found at the right side of the aorta, immediately above its origin, which led into an aneurism about the size of a nut, communicating with that vessel. The interior of the aorta was studded with small points of morbid deposit, which seemed in greater quantity around the mouth of the aneurism, and had no doubt led to its formation. The left ventricle was somewhat dilated, and rather softer than natural, but otherwise the heart, together with its valves, was healthy. The man was thirty-five years of age, and was apparently in good health at the time of his death; he had, however, complained occasionally to his wife of slight pain in the region of the heart. He had an attack of acute rheumatism six or seven years ago.

The discussion on Dr. Wigan's paper, which we published last week, was commenced by

MR. SNOW, who said that whilst he admitted that each hemisphere of the brain was a perfect organ in itself, and capable of performing its functions in some cases in the absence of its fellow, he could not consent to the propriety of speaking of the mind as being double. We had two lungs, either of which could perform its functions in the absence of its fellow, yet it would be incorrect to say that we had two respirations; we had two eyes, two ears, and two sets of fingers, endowed with touch, yet the senses were not double; and, in addition to this strong analogy, the fact that it was through the intervention of the brain itself that the senses were single instead of double, was an argument against the duality of the mind. He admitted that the mind of man was so complex as to allow of several ideas and emotions to be present at the same time; it needed no argument to prove this, for the very metaphysicians who contended that the mind could entertain but a single idea at once, divided ideas into simple ones and compound ones which included several simple ones. But when the mind was chiefly attending to one train of thought, and entertaining other ideas by a sort of under-current, he could not admit that the two hemispheres were differently occupied, all analogy tended to show that it must be symmetrical parts of both hemispheres which entertained one idea or emotion, and other symmetrical parts which entertained another; and when contending passions occupied the mind, as, for instance, rage and fear, at the same moment, we could not suppose that one passion occupied one hemisphere and the other the opposite, and that a man had a courageous and a cowardly side of his head; fear and anger were innate emotions, and wherever situated must both occupy symmetrical parts of each hemisphere.

MR. STREETER entered at some length into the question of the originality of Dr. Wigan's views respecting the duality of the brain. He observed, by reference to the writings of Gale and Spurzheim, that those distinguished anatomists had considered that there was a doubleness of all the organs of the nervous system constituting animal life. Indeed, this opinion was as old as Hippocrates, who considered the brain to be double, though emotion and thought were single. With respect to Dr. Wigan's cases, in support of the opinion that one hemisphere of the brain was sufficient for all the attributes of mind, he (Mr. Streeter) considered that no case exemplified this except the one related by Cruveilhier, in which there was complete absence of one side of the cerebrum. He did not think that one hemisphere had influence over the other when diseased, and referred to the fact that in cases of hemiplegia the volition was cut off from the opposite side of the body. Space will not allow us to give some further remarks of Mr. Streeter, in reference to the treatment of insanity, founded on these opinions.

Dr. CHOWNE considered the doctrine that insane persons

might correct their own insanity, could have but a very limited application; that is, to say there are instances in which persons labouring under morbid mental impressions, nevertheless, know that they are morbid, reason upon them, and in some measure counteract them, was but to iterate truisms old as the hills; but the maniac has generally no apprehension that he is insane; he reasons on his delusions as realities, and believes those by whom he is opposed to be the persons whose judgments require to be revised. Neither could Dr. Chowne consider that the double faculties of the mind, which had been the subject of discussion, depended upon there being two hemispheres of brain. The author of the paper had himself adduced instances in which one hemisphere of the brain being removed by disease, the remaining hemisphere had performed all the functions which had previously been performed by the two, and the mind, had appeared to continue sound; thus, there resided in the single hemisphere the powers of ratiocination, of giving birth to ideas, of reasoning upon them, and of correcting any errors that they may include. Hence the whole mind as regards the number, although, perhaps, not the strength of its attributes, resides and is perfect in each hemisphere, and duality (as it has been designated) of the mind cannot depend upon that which has been called dual, or double-brain. This appeared to be unfavourable to the doctrine that insanity consists in aberrations of mental function in one hemisphere of the brain, unrestrained by an admonitory or correcting power residing in the other.

MR. HIRD would not admit the truth of the doctrines advanced until we had uniform results from uniform causes. Injuries to the brain and their results, which were very various, were opposed to the doctrines advanced by Dr. Wigan. Comparative anatomy did not bear out the opinion that the brain was a dual organ, for in some of the marsupialia there was no evidence of the existence of two hemispheres.

Some conversation took place respecting the corpus callosum, or commissure of the brain. The celebrated case of Cardinal, who, many years since, died in Guy's Hospital, was referred to. In this man's case the corpus callosum was entirely divided longitudinally down its centre.

DIPLOMAS FOR SALE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR.—In consequence of powers lately given to the council and fellows, they are enabled to sell, on unprecedented low terms, for cash, the fellowships and licences of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland. The discount is of a most liberal character, amounting in some cases to four-fifths of the price mentioned in the charter. Persons wishing for either "honours," need not be deterred by the extended course of education or strict examination formerly required,—these obstacles have been removed; the only proof of education now necessary is the lowest diploma in surgery which could be procured anywhere, and there is not even the form of an examination. Early applications are requested, as the time of sale is limited.

By Order, &c.

What will the public think, when such an advertisement is the fittest announcement for the proceedings of a Royal College of Surgeons? Time will tell. The licentiates look on with undisguised disgust. How could it be otherwise? The framers of these laws did not even condescend to dupe either the public or the profession, but openly, without the slightest veil to cover such scandalous proceedings, wrested from the one security for life and limb, from the other its caste, as if the publicity of the deed could be a justification of its enormity. Indeed, to remove legal responsibility, a supplemental charter was applied for and obtained; loose by design—yes, by design,—the lawyer who drew it received, along with his fee, instructions to have it worded as loosely as possible, that full scope might be given to this nefarious traffic, and of course he complied. It has been often said that a coach and six can be driven through the most stringent net of Parliament; what then must this charter be? This precious document, which empowers a set of men to sell the fellowships and licences of the college to any practitioner, without inquiry as to his education, and regard-