GLOUCESTERSHIRE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND
SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

I am instructed to request that you will give insertion to the following account of proceedings at a quarterly meeting of the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association, held at Stroud, in this county, on Thursday, the 4th instant.

I beg leave to remain, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS HICKES,

Gloucester, April 25, 1844.

Hon. Sec.

The usual business having been transacted, the President, Mr. Wilton, said that it was now necessary for him to inform the Association, that circumstances had arisen which would interfere with their proposed plan of holding occasional meetings at the County Infirmary. He reminded them, that at the annual meeting in October last, it was proposed that additional meetings should be held for the purpose of improving professional knowledge, by reading original papers on subjects connected with medical and surgical science, the exhibition of specimens, morbid or natural, drawings, &c., &c., &c., and that such meetings should take place at the Gloucester Infirmary, and at other institutions of a similar character in the county. In consequence of the approval of this proposition, he stated, that as President of the Association and Senior Surgeon of the Infirmary, he had applied to the Weekly Board of Governors of that Institution for the use of a room, which was immediately granted, and that a similar request had been made to the Governors of the Cheltenham General Hospital, which was also acceded to.

The first meeting was accordingly held in the Gloucester Infirmary on the second of November (the month following.)

The second meeting was fixed for the 15th February, some days previous to which, the following communication was received by him from Mr. Hill, the Secretary to the Gloucester Infirmary.

*(Extract from the minutes of the Weekly Board,
February 8, 1844.)*

"An intimation having been made to this Board, that a meeting of the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association is proposed to be held at this Infirmary:—

"Resolved,—That Mr. Wilton, Senior Surgeon to the Institution, be requested to attend the Board on Thursday next, and that he will be kind enough, on that occasion, to explain such particulars, as may enable the Board to form a decision, as to the propriety of affording the use of a room in the establishment for such purpose.

"Ordered that a copy of the foregoing resolution be forwarded to Mr. Wilton."

*(Extract from the minutes of the Weekly Board,
February 15th.)*

"Mr. Wilton attended this Board, as requested by the Governors on Thursday last, and having satisfied them that an assent had been given, some time since, to the occasional use of the Committee-room for the

accommodation of the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association, whose purposes are the improvement of professional knowledge, by reading papers on subjects connected with Medical and Surgical Science, the exhibition of specimens, morbid and natural, drawings, &c. &c. &c.

"Resolved,—That the Board now assembled readily assent to the use of the Committee-room for the purpose specified, and regret that a minute was not ordered to be made on their records, that such assent had been obtained by Mr. Wilton on a former occasion."

At the close of the meeting at which the above resolution was passed, Mr. Wilton said, that he discovered that those of his colleagues who were not members of the Association, and who constitute one half of the Medical Staff of the Infirmary, felt themselves deeply aggrieved by not having been consulted by him, previous to his application to the Governors. He thereupon immediately expressed to those gentlemen, his unfeigned regret that there should have been any apparent omission of courtesy towards them, such omission being quite unintentional. He also represented that he had only pursued the course adopted by the late Senior Physician of the Infirmary, who had, in February, 1841, obtained for the Association, from the Weekly Board, the privilege of meeting in the committee-room. Although they admitted that they believed his declaration that no offence was intended, they have nevertheless remained dissatisfied, and insisted that he should again apply to the Board to suspend the permission which it had granted.

The President observed, that acting as he did for the Association, he had clearly no right to surrender the privilege he had obtained for it; and he therefore declined to accede to this demand of his colleagues. The meeting of the Association was accordingly held in the committee-room of the Infirmary on the evening of the same day.

The next meeting of the Governors was attended by the whole medical staff, excepting himself. Those gentlemen had prepared the following address to the Weekly Board:—

*(Extract from the minutes of the Weekly Board,
February 22nd.)*

"Gloucester Infirmary, Feb. 21, 1844.

"We, the undersigned, members of the Medical Board, beg respectfully to request of the Weekly Board that they will suspend the confirmation of their minute, allowing the use of the Committee-room for the purposes of the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association. We make this request because the application having been made, and the assent of the Weekly Board obtained, without our knowledge, we feel that some time may be fairly required for deliberation, thereby to enable us to present our opinion to the Board upon a measure of such importance.

"Signed,

"THOMAS EVANS, M.D.

"RALPH FLETCHER, M.D.

"W. H. FLETCHER.

"T. C. BUCHANAN.

"ALFRED JOSHUA WOOD.

"The foregoing address having been considered, it

was proposed by Dr. Evans, and seconded by Mr. Fulljames, that the confirmation of the minute in question be suspended until the further opinion of the abovenamed medical gentlemen shall have been obtained.

"An amendment having been moved by Mr. Sage, and seconded by Mr. Turner, 'that the said minute be this day confirmed,' and the Chairman having taken the sense of the Board upon the respective propositions, that gentleman declared the previous question to have been carried. (The five medical officers who signed the address voting in the majority.) "Ordered that a copy of the foregoing proceedings be transmitted to Mr. Wilton by the Secretary."

At the succeeding meeting of the Weekly Board neither of those medical officers who are members of the Association were present. The following letters were presented to that meeting:—

(Extract from the minutes of the Weekly Board, February 29th.)

"Gloucester Infirmary, Feb. 27, 1844.

"(1.) To the Governors of the Infirmary assembled at the Weekly Board.

"The Medical Board beg respectfully to express their opinion, that should the Governors allow the use of the Infirmary, or any part of it, to the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association, the meetings of such Association, being held for purposes connected with the Medical Profession, shall take place under such regulations as the Medical Board may decide to be advisable, a privilege to which, with submission, they think themselves fairly entitled.

"The Medical Board feel, and have always felt, great pleasure in rendering this hospital available for the promotion of the objects of Medical Science, and have ever made it of easy access to the members of their Profession."

"(2.) To the Governors of the Gloucester Infirmary, at their Weekly Board, Feb. 29, 1844.

"Gentlemen,—I understand a Report will be presented to you this day from the Medical Board relating to the meetings of the Gloucestershire Medical and Surgical Association in the Infirmary.

"I beg to remind you, that on Thursday last a proposition of Dr. Evans's was carried, which referred the subject in question to those of your medical officers there named, and of which I was not one. I did not, therefore, attend the deliberative meetings of my colleagues, and am no party to the report this day presented to you, in the name of the Medical Board.

"I remain, Gentlemen,

"Your faithful and obedient servant,

"JOHN W. WILTON."

"The above letter having been considered, it was resolved (two dissentients), that it is the opinion of this meeting that the Weekly Board have not the power to grant the use of this (committee) room, or any part of the hospital, for any purposes not directly or immediately connected with the objects of this institution."

The Medical Officers present voted in support of this resolution.

This communication from the President gave rise to a very animated discussion, and the following resolutions were unanimously adopted.

Resolved—1. That the honour, as well as the legi-

time interests and objects of the medical profession, are seriously compromised by the recent proceedings at the Gloucester Infirmary, relative to the scientific meetings of this Association.

2. That the Weekly Board of the Infirmary, in deciding that "it has not the power" to grant the use of the committee-room for professional meetings, *on the ground that such meetings are not "directly and immediately connected with the objects of the Infirmary,"* has taken a limited view of the objects of such meetings, and adopted a course at variance with the usage of other county Infirmaries, and with that readiness to promote the advancement of medical science which ordinarily distinguishes the Governors of these excellent institutions.

3. That this decision cannot be considered as expressing the deliberate opinion of the great body of the Governors, but as an act instigated and promoted by those Medical Officers of the Infirmary who are not members of this Association.

4. That the Medical Officers of the Infirmary, who proposed to control the internal regulations of a Society, of which they are not members, (in case the Governors had confirmed the grant of the committee-room for its meetings,) have entirely mistaken their position, and have claimed an authority to which they are neither personally nor officially entitled; and that the grant of the room, coupled with such an extraordinary condition, could not have been accepted by the Association.

5. That the attempt of these gentlemen *to throw the onus of the refusal on the Weekly Board* is fully understood by this Association; and that their warm professions of willingness to render the Hospital available to science, and easy of access to the profession, are unsupported by facts, and in direct opposition to their conduct on the present occasion.

6. That the whole transaction affords a fresh proof of the evils arising from the lamentable want of union and co-operation among medical practitioners; and that it is not surprising that the Governors of an Infirmary, or any other public body, should decline to aid the pursuits of a profession, the members of which are seen to be actuated by narrow views or illiberal motives.

7. That this Association is anxious to express its sense of the honourable and independent conduct of the President, J. W. Wilton, Esq., and its regret that he should have been subjected to such ungenerous treatment by his colleagues at the Infirmary, who can only allege, by way of excuse, that he inadvertently omitted to consult *them* before applying to the Weekly Board for the use of the committee-room.

8. That the next meeting (for scientific purposes) be held on Thursday, the 9th of May, at the Gloucester Dispensary, to which the Committee and Medical Officers of that institution have obligingly assented.

9. That these resolutions, with a copy of the proceedings at the Gloucester Infirmary, be forwarded to the Editors of the London Medical Gazette, the Lancet, and the Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal, with a request that they will have the goodness to publish them; and that copies of the whole communication be circulated among the Governors of the Infirmary, and the medical practitioners of the county of Gloucester.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND
SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

Permit me to request your readers to compare a letter from Mr. George King, of Bath, dated December 8, 1841, and published in the 3rd volume of the *Provincial Journal*, with that bearing his signature in this morning's number.

I may say of both these communications what you very justly observed of the first: they are really matters of curiosity—literary phenomena—professional monstrosities!

A little more than two years since we saw this eccentric gentleman defending the Poor Law Commissioners on the most indefensible point of their medical arrangements, justifying the *tender and contract system*, and declaring that the rules and orders of the Commissioners were “calculated to keep up the dignity of the profession rather than to degrade its members.” But now that the Commissioners are beginning to act more justly to the profession, and more humanely to the sick poor, we find that Mr. George King takes the opposite ground, and attacks them for calling in the aid of the College of Physicians to protect the objects of their charge.

Mr. George King *now* talks of the advantage of a Medical Commissioner. Should such an office be determined on by the Legislature, let the Profession take good care that no one shall obtain the appointment who, on the one hand, might oppress the regular practitioner, by again establishing the universally reprobated principle of *pecuniary competition* for Medical Offices; and on the other hand, patronize those who may find it convenient and economical to physic the unfortunate paupers with Hahnemannian granules.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A PROVINCIAL SURGEON.

April 24, 1844.

RETROSPECT.

ON THE EFFECTS OF OPIUM ON THE INFANT SUBJECT.

An excellent paper on this subject has been published by Dr. John B. Beck. He remarks, that with regard to the effects of opium on the young, there are two facts which seem to be well established—the first, that it acts with much greater energy on the infant than it does on the adult; and the second, that it is more uncertain in its action on the infant than on the adult. It is in consequence of these peculiarities that even the smallest quantities have not unfrequently produced fatal results. The causes of the peculiar energy and uncertainty with which opium acts on the infant subject would seem to be the following:—

In the *first place*, the great difference in the physical organization of the *infant* and the *adult*. In the young subject the brain and nervous system are much more impressible, and the slightest causes, as we know, will sometimes derange them. Besides, in the infant, the circulation is more rapid—there is a greater proportionate quantity of blood circulating in the brain, and hence a much greater tendency to cerebral determinations. From these peculiarities in the

organization of the infant, it happens that convulsions are so much more common in the early periods of life. Thus, for example, the irritation of teething—of worms or crude matter in the intestines, is frequently followed by convulsions. Intermittent fever, which in the adult commences with a chill, in the child is frequently ushered in by a convulsion. Scarlet fever, too, in the child not unfrequently commences with a convulsion, while in the adult Dr. Beck has never witnessed such an occurrence. Now, with such peculiar predispositions characterizing the system in infancy, it may readily be conceived how it is that such an article as opium should act with more power at that period than in after life.

In the *second place*, the difference in the *temperament* or *constitution* of infants. In the adult, we know as a matter of fact, that opium differs greatly in its effects in different constitutions. Thus, as a general rule, the sanguine temperament does not appear to bear the use of this drug as well as the melancholic or the nervous. In the former, it is much more apt to produce cerebral disturbance, and in large doses is more likely to prove injurious. Now, infants differ from one another, as much, if not more, than adults, in these peculiarities of constitution, and, as a matter of course, the difference in the effects of this article must be greater. Besides, as these peculiarities and differences can only be detected by actual experience, and as we cannot of necessity have the same benefit of experience in the case of infants, it is obvious that the difficulty of justly appreciating the action of this drug on the infant must be greatly increased. A greater or less degree of uncertainty, therefore, must necessarily from this cause attend its use in the early periods of life.

In the *third place*, the actual state of the system as to disease. There is no circumstance which modifies the effect of opium in so great a degree as this. In the adult we see this continually. In some conditions of the system even small doses produce the most unpleasant effects, while in other conditions, immense quantities may be given with little or no effect; thus, for example, when severe pain or spasm are present, quantities of this article can be borne, which under other circumstances would prove exceedingly injurious. As illustrative of this, an interesting case related by Dr. Percival is quoted. He states that a young man was admitted into the Manchester Hospital on account of a violent spasmodic disease which recurred periodically in the evening, and after trials of various remedies, doses of opium sufficiently large to mitigate the violence of the paroxysm were ordered, and he took twenty-two grains every night during a week, without producing any soporific effect. On the eighth night he had no return of the spasm:—he nevertheless took the opium, and in the morning was found dead. In this case a great and sudden change had unquestionably taken place in the nervous system of the patient, and to this must be ascribed the difference of effect. If in the adult the state of the system makes such a wide difference in the effects of this article, how much more so must all this be the case in the sensitive infant; and it is by not duly regarding this, that such unexpected results sometimes follow from the use of opium. Thus, for example, a child labouring under the acute pain of colic will tolerate doses which in