

otherwise irritating certain nervous filaments in the guinea-pig to induce convulsions; and I think one can without difficulty understand how irritation of the branches of the fifth pair may produce convulsions in infants whose nervous system is so susceptible of impressions. That the convulsions in my two cases were caused in this way, and that they were arrested by relieving the congested gums, I have not the faintest shadow of a doubt. Dr. Cairns may say that the cessation of the attacks following upon scarification was a mere matter of coincidence and nothing more, and that the convulsions might have disappeared even suppose nothing had been done. This I do not deny; but I am inclined to think that, instead of ceasing spontaneously, there was a much greater probability that they would have continued. Besides, this is not, in my opinion, the proper spirit in which one should discuss the influence of any remedial measure. The progress of medical and all other science is no doubt furthered by a certain amount of wholesome scepticism, but surely it must be retarded if we doubt everything and believe nothing. As was well remarked by Dr. James Young, in a previous discussion on this subject—"It is imperative, in cases of convulsion, to give every relief we have in our power, and there should be no waiting to see what nature is going to do." I do not consider myself a heroic practitioner in any sense of the term, but at the same time I have no sympathy with those who stand idly by when something ought to be done. There is a great deal of truth and a spice of grim humour in the remark of one of the fathers of medicine, that the expectant treatment of disease is "a meditation upon death." And I think it is highly culpable to refuse to perform so trifling an operation as scarification of the gums when we are convinced that it is in them that the source of the irritation resides.

Dr. Cairn's second question was, Does scarification do any harm? To this I reply that, so far as my experience goes, it does not. Indiscriminate lancing of the gums cannot but be productive of mischief, but in properly selected cases I believe the operation is never followed by any evil consequences. That it may occasionally lead to fatal hæmorrhage I cannot deny; but such cases are extremely rare, and can only be regarded as accidents, against which it is almost impossible to provide. The extraction of a tooth may lead to death in the same way, but no one should on that account denounce the operation as an unjustifiable one. Besides, as Dr Ritchie suggested, the existence of the hæmorrhagic diathesis might be ascertained by inquiry as to the history of the vaccination.

Dr. Cairn's third question was, Is scarification in the circumstances warrantable? He thinks it is not, because it inflicts unnecessary pain, suprainduces some of those conditions which it professes to remedy, and,