and we would further expect, that this more guarded exhibition of it would save us from the frightful mischief that we sometimes see following it when largely administered; and which sometimes suggest to us the question, if mankind would not have been benefited by an agent, capable of such mischief, never having been introduced into the Materia Medica.

Art. XX.—An Examination of Dr. Hamilton’s Letters in Defence of his Opinions, especially in Reference to the Management of the first Stage of Labour. By Edward W. Murphy, A.M. M.D., late Assistant Physician to the Dublin Lying-in Hospital.

In a former Number of the Journal (XXXII.) an inquiry into the management of the first stage of labour was entered upon, in order to examine, and if possible to determine, the value of rules of practice, which being laid down by respectable authorities, were at the same time sufficiently contradictory to embarrass, rather than to assist the practitioner in his arduous and responsible duties. It was my intention to examine the remaining stages of labour in a similar manner, but circumstances have since interfered, which made it necessary to defer doing so. The persevering zeal with which Dr. Hamilton has reiterated the peculiar opinions which were then examined, the controversy which he has invited by his animadversions, both in his work and in his subsequent letters, upon the practice of the Dublin Lying-in Hospital, as given in Dr. Collins’ “Practical Treatise,” and the confusion in which the entire subject has been involved, by the novel mode in which it has pleased Dr. Hamilton to defend his doctrines, made it difficult to proceed without either omitting altogether any further notice of Dr. Hamilton’s labours, which would be an indirect admission of the justice of his observations, or discussing his arguments in the manner he has put them, and in connexion with the kind of evidence he has advanced in their support, which would be, in fact, little
more than a discussion upon a mode of reasoning, and a species of testimony almost as peculiar as the opinions themselves. To explain and defend an innovation on practice, by a selection of cases not treated on the principle advocated, but in opposition to it, is at least new, and it is the more necessary to determine its validity, because a different mode of testing Dr. Hamilton's opinions, by comparing them with the general results of hospital practice, has been objected to by him as that upon which "no logical reasoner could place any dependence." Dr. Hamilton also declares loudly, that his opinions have been misrepresented, and as it would be equally an injustice to him as to myself, not to notice such objections, I have to claim some indulgence in departing from the direct course of inquiry upon which I had entered, in order to investigate their truth. In reference to the latter, it is necessary to state, that in my former paper, allusion had been made to the doctrine which Drs. Hamilton and Burns maintained, of the necessity of limiting the first stage of labour to fourteen hours at farthest, and that in order to do so, artificial dilatation, when the os uteri is lax, dilatable, and thin, may be usefully adopted. In order to shew upon what grounds the assertion was made, I shall take leave to quote their own language. Dr. Burns states: "If the waters have been for some time discharged naturally or artificially, and the os uteri be not effaced, but be lax, soft, and thin, so that it is applied closely to the head and is very yielding, it is both safe and advantageous to dilate it gently with the finger during a pain." Again, "In the case I have just considered, I have spoken of the effects of dilating the os uteri, but I do not mean to say, that the practice is useful in such an one alone, for in most cases of tedious labour it is beneficial, and as the subject is important, I shall explain my sentiments on it fully." Dr. Burns then, after a discussion on the merits of the practice, and the cautions to be used, adds: "Of the benefit and perfect safety of this practice, I can speak positively, and am happy to strengthen my position by the authority of Dr. Hamilton, who