pure water. I might state that I added hydrochloric acid to the water at the end of twenty-four hours for the purpose of expediting the process, but it had not the effect I anticipated. Although the skin had been almost entirely cleared of the adventitious colouring matter, the friends could not undertake to identify the child from the features alone, these having undergone so great a change.

The skin, unless under very peculiar circumstances, does not readily undergo putrefactive decomposition. On the other hand, it resists most stubbornly, and, as in the case narrated, will often remain unchanged when less exposed textures, even the brain, shall have perfectly succumbed to that process. Moreover, the effects of macerating the skin, especially of young children, in water, have been shown by repeated experiments to consist in its conversion into adipocere, and the period occupied in this change—viz., from four to eight weeks—is so well established as to have supplied admissible evidence in a court of law as to the length of time that a body, found drowned, has been exposed to the action of the water.

I have thus, very briefly and hurriedly, sketched a case which I conceive to be of some importance in elucidating the subject which has so recently occupied the joint attention of Dr. Richardson and Dr. Edmunds. Although I differ, perhaps, from those gentlemen as to the nature of the blackening processes, I feel assured that the subject will continue to occupy their attention, and that it will be worked out by them with that energy, learning, and practical skill which shall ensure for it a solution for all time.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Finsbury-place South, May, 1863. JOHN GAY.

MEDICAL EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The medical press has always taken great interest in the education of students, and to its influence may be attributed the recent changes in the character of the qualifying examinations. I hope, therefore, that the subject of this letter will receive your consideration, and the much needed reform your advocacy.

The present high standard of the examinations at the Universities not having been accompanied by arrangements fixing suitable intervals of time between each, nor by a convenient division of the subjects, has, instead of promoting medical education, had a contrary effect, and caused widespread disappointment and distress amongst students and their friends.

Though the new system has had but a short trial, there are ample data to prove that it has hitherto failed to raise the character of medical education, though in one division of the United Kingdom (England) it may have promoted the introduction into the profession of youths of higher social origin than formerly entered it.

The subjects of medical study have made such gigantic strides of late years, that the present generation of students has much more work to do than its predecessors. The prevailing rule among British universities at present is to hold two medical examinations: one in Chemistry, Natural History, Botany, Materia Medica, Anatomy, and Physiology; and the other in the five or six purely professional subjects. To minds of ordinary memorial power, it is simply impossible to retain such a mass of knowledge as is necessary to pass a *bona-fide* searching examination in so many subjects at one time. Very many make the attempt, neglecting every other duty. How many succeed? An answer to this question may be obtained by comparing the number of matriculated medical students and of graduates of the Universities of Edinburgh and London; the latter attain the degree by an assiduous cultivation of the memorial power or by chance, frequently to the evident injury of the other mental faculties.

Numerous students, who from ill-health or other difficulty have their course of study interrupted, leave the profession or undergo repeated labour at accumulated expense. The two Universities seem now to be emulating one another in the severity of their examinations; and at Edinburgh recently the exactions in that not very essential subject—Botany—were difficult beyond precedent in any other seat of learning in the world. Of the severity of the examinations, however, the students do not complain; they only require that these should be held annually, and in those subjects which have been studied the previous year. How much better, for instance, would it not be if, at the end of the first year, examinations were held in Chemistry, Botany, and Natural History; at the end of the second, on Anatomy, Physiology, and Materia Medica; at that

of the third, in Midwifery, Medical Jurisprudence, and Pathology; of the fourth, in Theoretical and Clinical Surgery and Medicine. An arrangement of this kind prevails in all the continental universities: it induces continuous study, counteracts the tendencies of the naturally idle, enables the industrious to acquire a thorough knowledge of each subject, and is found to be productive of great professional and individual advantages.

In proof of the fact that the proficiency of young medical men has not kept pace with the increased exactions of the examining boards, I may refer to the last examination for commissions in the army, when not more than fourteen out of forty-five candidates satisfied the examiners.

It is reported that Sir William Hooker, Mr. Syme, and other eminent persons have expressed an opinion that medical education as now conducted under the influence of the present system of examinations is radically wrong; and I am sure most people practically acquainted with the *régime* will endorse the opinion of these gentlemen.

Let us hope that the attention of the authorities of the universities will soon be directed to this matter, which is yearly becoming more urgent. The changes required do not involve a wide departure from present routine, and, if adopted, would in their results prove beneficial to students, gratifying to professors, and creditable to the schools.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,
Scotland, April, 1863. PATERFAMILIAS.

* * The circumstance of only fourteen out of forty-five candidates passing the Army Board at the examination for commissions is worthy of note. But we believe that on this occasion the candidates were whipped up at the last moment for this now justly unpopular service, and they were deservedly rejected in consequence of their deficiency in information.—ED. L.

ASSISTANT-PHYSICIANS FOR DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT KING'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Will you allow me to state, with reference to a letter which appeared in your journal last week, that the candidates for the office of assistant-physician for diseases of women and children were required either to be members of the Royal College of Physicians at the time of their election, or should engage to become so within twelve months.

With regard to the "M.B. Lond." being placed after my name, may I say I had nothing whatever to do with it, though it is an honour to which I aspire within the same period.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
May, 1863. EDWIN E. DAY, M.R.C.S., L.M., L.A.C.

VACCINATION AND REVACCINATION; DEATH.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—With a view of affording some information to the profession of a remarkable case, and also for the purpose of eliciting some opinions from the faculty upon this subject, I have to ask the favour of your insertion of the following details:—

Some members of a family of great respectability being patients suffering from the prevailing epidemic, the mother, aged fifty-five years, thought it would be as well to exercise the usual precaution in such cases by herself undergoing the operation of vaccination. I performed that operation on the morning of the 14th instant, taking good matter from the vesicle of a healthy child. Immediately upon making the punctures the patient swooned, for which I ordered the necessary stimulants, and, after seeing that she would soon be brought round again, I left.

A visit on the following morning, however, disclosed the fact of very singular symptoms having set in: the arm was much swollen, and had a dark purplish hue, much resembling the colour of bullock's liver; the punctures nearly invisible, and the whole region of the operation presenting the appearance of having been bitten by some venomous reptile. Remedies were applied, but the patient rapidly grew worse. Other professional advice was necessary, and Dr. Bridge, of Argyll-place, Mr. Tatum, of St. George's Hospital, and Dr. McKinna, of Great Marlborough-street, attended; but the symptoms entirely baffled their skill and experience, and the patient died at midnight of the 18th, of (as agreed by the gentlemen present) phlegmonous erysipelas. It should also be