medical witness may be beaten down by the rambling questions of a blurring, noisy advocate, and how easy it is to shake the strongest scientific facts upon earth, by the feeble breath of a ready witness, who may have sense enough to bungle over an experiment, if he ever tried one, but not sense enough to obtain any of the results which science indicates; and to show how ready a cunning advocate is to reverse the axiom, and to make one negative worth, as that subtle one would say, ten thousand positives.—I remain, Sir, yours truly,

London Hospital, Dec. 1847.

H. LETHEBY.

LIFE ASSURANCE.—MEDICAL FEES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I will feel obliged by the publication of the following documents at your earliest convenience, and remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

CHARLES CLARK.

Peel-place, Notting-hill, Dec. 1847.

To the Secretary of the Eagle Life Assurance Office.

SIR,—I have received a printed letter from you, containing a series of interrogatories respecting the health and habits of Mrs. G—, with a view to that lady's life being insured in the Eagle Life Assurance Office, but as that letter does not contain any fee enclosed, I beg leave to decline answering any such questions until properly remunerated for my information and trouble; and for the following reasons:—

To answer the various queries contained in your letter requires a certain amount of medical knowledge; now mine, such as it is, has cost me not only a considerable sum of money, but also twenty long years' arduous labour and study to acquire, in different parts of the globe: having, therefore, purchased it so dearly, I conceive I have a perfect right to be paid for it in return, when communicated. The lawyer will not give his legal opinion for nothing; nor the soldier fight for nothing; nor even the clergyman preach for nothing; and I really cannot see upon what just grounds the doctor is called upon to reveal his knowledge for nothing, to suit the ends of a public company established for the sake of gain, and that, too, a species of knowledge only to be acquired by confidential intercourse with his own patients; for it is evident, that if general medical knowledge is all that is requisite, the opinion of the Company's medical officers ought to be sufficient to satisfy them; but, on the contrary, it is stated in the printed letter, that "on the answer of the medical attendant the validity of the proposed assurance must in a great degree rest."

I am aware it is argued, on the part of the insurance offices, that it is the business of the person wishing to be insured to satisfy the directors that his or her life is a fit one for that purpose. I admit this is partly correct; it is a question, however, *inter vos*; amongst you, therefore, be it; but I contend that, come from what source it will, the medical man has a right to be remunerated for his information and trouble; and I humbly consider that the insurance offices, (with some admirable exceptions,) by refusing to do so, not only stand in their own light, and obstruct their own true interests, but also force the medical man into the unpleasant dilemma of either disobliging his own patient, or doing an injustice to himself.

I am one of those, however, who think that medical men have been too long the slaves of the public in a variety of ways, for very inadequate remuneration, and that in no other profession are the members called upon to make so many personal sacrifices as they are in the exercise of their duties; I am therefore determined to stand up with my brother practitioners and resolutely struggle for the acquisition of all our just and honourable rights; and this I conceive to be one of them, and I hope every member of the profession throughout the land will do the same until this is fully accomplished, and the insurance officers are compelled to admit its justice.

In order, however, to contribute as far as they can to set this *veratio questio* at rest, perhaps the directors (amongst whom I observe some highly honourable names in the profession) will permit me to suggest that they shall take this matter into their consideration, and that the payment of the fee to medical men might perhaps be effected without injury to the company's interest, by partly adding it to the first instalment to be paid on the policy, and partly deducting it from the profits paid to the assured, or in any other way they might consider just to all parties concerned.

I remain, Sir, your obedient, humble servant,

Mr. H. P. Smith.

CHARLES CLARK, Surgeon.

(The Reply of the Insurance Office.)

Dec. 11th.

SIR,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. The office was ordered by Mrs. G— to apply to you; if you have any charge to make, she must pay it. I have merely to add, that in the absence of your reply to our inquiries, the proposal will be declined.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

C. Clark, Esq.

C. JELlicoe.

SUDDEN DEATH FROM LARYNGISMUS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the middle of September, I made a post-mortem examination, by order of Thomas Wakley, Esq., the Coroner for Middlesex, on the body of a child, seven years old, who had died suddenly. The account given by its mother was, that twelve days previous to its death, the child told her he had swallowed a cherry-stone. He continued well and without symptoms until the day of his death, when he had two or three fits of coughing, and, after one of these, observed to his mother that the cherry-stone was come up into his throat again; after this he appeared as well as usual, and was out at play with other children. As he was sitting still, with his head on his father's knee, he suddenly sprang up, after an effort to cough; was convulsed; and in a few moments, dead.

On removing the larynx, with the tongue and part of the trachea, and dissecting it from behind forwards, I discovered, immediately below the rima glottidis, a large plum-stone, lying transversely, and measuring exactly two-thirds of an inch in length, and half an inch in depth. It being very pointed at one end, and having serrated edges, it is extraordinary it did not produce more irritation whilst it remained in the bronchia.

I am aware that cases of foreign bodies in the air-tubes have frequently been published; but this one seems to point out to surgeons the necessity of using the stethoscope, if there be any suspicion of a foreign substance having passed into the air passages, although there may be no symptoms present.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Uxbridge, Nov. 1847.

WILLIAM HENRY CANE.

Medical News.

MORTALITY IN THE METROPOLIS.—Since writing our leading article, on the mortality of the metropolis, we have received the Registrar's Report for last week, ending Saturday, Dec. 18th. From this paper it appears that the decrease in the number of deaths, compared with that of Dec. 4th, noticed in the week ending the 11th, still goes on, and that the total mortality of last week is reduced to 1946—i. e., 470 below that of the previous week, but, nevertheless, still 900 above the weekly average. There is a decrease of 104 deaths attributable to influenza, 270 occurring from this cause; but the number of deaths from typhus remains nearly the same—viz., 131. Diseases of the chest are also on the decline, 234 having died from bronchitis, 189 from pneumonia, and 8 from pleurisy, during the week. We would here, moreover, notice the large number of deaths coming under the comprehensive head of "old age," which is no less than 110, the average being but 65. During the great mortality which has been present in London, it is worthy of note that the number of deaths has far outnumbered that of births, and one week actually more than doubled it.

One point in the present returns is of especial importance to the accoucheur—namely, the presence of puerperal fever in the metropolis. In the week ending December 4th, the deaths from childbirth were twelve. Of these, four were from puerperal fever, and two others are returned, one as dying from "fever," nine days after delivery, and one as dying of "typhus," induced by poor living, three weeks after delivery. In the week ending December 11th, the number of deaths from childbirth were fifteen. Of these, eleven are recorded as dying from puerperal fever, inflammation of bowels and womb, metro-peritonitis, childbed fever, and peritonitis. In the week ending December 18th, the deaths from childbirth