"*Plantæ Asiaticæ Rariores.*" It grows in elevated situations in the Himalayan chain, and in the provinces of Sirmore, Kumaon, and Nepal. Richard has never met with it much lower than those places where the barometer was at nineteen inches. It is employed by the Nagas and other Indian tribes to poison the water in the wells and tanks, to impede the progress of an invading army, and also to poison the weapons used in warfare. The effects it produces are those of a narcotic-acrid poison, inducing inflammation of the alimentary canal, and acting remotely on the brain and spinal cord. It is used medicinally for the relief of neuralgic and rheumatic affections.

WHOLESALE POISONING BY BREWERS.

Dr. COOKE drew the attention of the society to the subject of *cocculus Indicus*. This article, which is scarcely ever used in medicine, and of no importance in the arts, is extensively imported into this country for the purpose of adulterating beer. To such an extent is this the case that writers on brewing openly acknowledge the fact, and give regular formulæ for its employment. One author states that it is impossible to brew strong-bodied porter from malt and hops alone; and almost all concur in deliberately recommending it on the ground that it increases the apparent strength of the beer, and improves its intoxicating properties. About the year 1818, numerous prosecutions were instituted by the Excise against parties for selling or using this substance. In many instances convictions were obtained by the parties pleading guilty to having sold or employed the *cocculus*, in order to escape investigation into the more serious charge of having dealt in the *nux vomica* for the same purpose. There can be no doubt that the latter is still employed to a certain extent, but it is beyond dispute that the former is used to an extent totally unsuspected by the Government. Unfortunately, no separate account of the quantity on which duty is paid is kept at the Custom-house; but it is believed to be extremely small, the greater part of what is used being smuggled over. In many years nothing at all has been received. In 1832 duty was paid on 12,000 bags; and in 1834 Dr. Pereira states that one druggist alone sold 2500 bags. In doses of two or three grains *cocculus Indicus* produces nausea, vomiting, and alarming prostration; in doses of ten grains or more it will kill strong dogs by tetanic spasms and convulsions; in still larger doses death, both in man and animals, is very speedily produced. The drug also kills plants. In very small doses it causes symptoms nearly resembling intoxication, and is believed to be the substance used in cases of what is called hoccussing. Opium, which was thought to have been the agent, will not produce the effect experienced by persons who have been

hoccussed. Taking into consideration the known deleterious powers of the substance, and the proved fact of it being very extensively used by brewers, it will be evident that the public health must be seriously injured by the practice of drugging beer. Indeed, it is probable that the disease and death, often sudden, said to result from drinking, ought in many cases to be ascribed to the drugs with which it is adulterated. Dr. Cooke hoped some fellow present would be able to throw more light upon the subject than he had been able to do after much research and trouble. It was unfortunate that so much difficulty existed in the detection of vegetable poison, especially when mixed with organic matter.

Mr. MOWBRAY stated that the *cocculus Indicus* was principally used by the small brewers, who were supplied by a class of druggists called brewers' druggists. One of these told him he sold half a ton a week. It was sent to the brewers packed in casks, and covered over with soda, part of the latter being used in brewing to assist the solution of the *cocculus*; a very small portion of this drug paid duty at the Custom-house; it was passed as merchandise, and very frequently introduced in powder under the name of linseed-meal. With regard to its discovery in liquids which had been adulterated with it, its active principle, picrotoxine, might be readily detected, the chief difficulty arising from the small quantity present. If the fluid be evaporated in the open air, the active principle is decomposed and lost, but if in vacuo and over sulphuric acid, it can be discovered by means of iodide of potassium. Mr. Mowbray stated that on a future occasion he would furnish a process for its discovery.

THE TESTIMONIAL PRESENTED TO MR. SARGEANT

BY THE
SURGEONS OF THE BATH
HOSPITAL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Whilst the advertisement published by the surgeons to this hospital was confined to a local journal, where every one knew all the parties concerned, it was not worth my while to notice it, especially as the impression it made on the public mind was by no means flattering to the consistency and wisdom of its authors. Now, however, that the advertisement has been transferred into the pages of *THE LANCET* (p. 173), evidently with the same intention of damaging my case, I feel myself compelled to remark upon it, and this I do, I assure you, with reluctance, for, unhandsomely as the surgeons have acted towards me, it is painful for me to arraign them before the profession.

Any one who will read the certificate given to me by the surgeons on the 8th of March, two days after the committee had "expelled" me, must be fully convinced of the view that the surgeons then took of that harsh and unjustifiable measure. That certificate was worded and written by the surgeons themselves, and by its style it was clearly intended to defeat the attempt of my enemies on the committee to blast my reputation and prospects. No one can read it without being satisfied that it was worded specially to meet the exigencies of the occasion, and that it contained the full and unqualified opinion of the surgeons as to my moral and professional character, and my general deportment in the discharge of my duties. On entering upon my office as house-surgeon I signed a paper consenting to forfeit my money in case of dismissal; the surgeons, therefore, as I was expelled, were entitled to keep the money, and I had no claim on them for a testimonial further than that which arose out of their own moral conviction of my merits. Under all the circumstances, seeing that I was persecuted, they found themselves in justice bound not merely to give me the certificate which I never asked, as a favour, but also to refund me my money, which I never applied for, but which they repeatedly pressed me to accept. In the conduct of the committee towards me the profession was insulted. The surgeons knew that, and when I called upon them for protection (having been appointed by them), they told me they could do nothing, being *powerless* without the committee.

After all this the surgeons complain of my having published their testimonial, and actually say that they did not give it me to be used in that way, the only way in which it could be of any use to me. On this point I refer your readers to the internal evidence of the certificate itself. The committee expelled me for alleged "disrespectful conduct at the board" on the 27th of February. The surgeons in their testimonial of the 8th of March gave me unqualified credit for "skilful and kind attention to the patients, and of respectful and gentlemanly demeanour" towards themselves. How, then, is the conduct of the surgeons in publishing their self-stultifying advertisement in the Bath paper, on the Wednesday following, to be accounted for? I will tell you, Sir. The hospital committee met on the Monday following my publication in the *Bath Journal*. The testimonial of the surgeons spoke for itself. There was no misinterpreting it, and the effect produced on the fullest board that had for years assembled, consisting of the surgeons' private patients as well as their public patrons, was such, that to appease the board and to live in peace with the committee, the surgeons were obliged to eat their own words, of which I wish them a satisfactory digestion.

That the surgeons were driven into this step against their will by a tyrannical board, is a fact I can prove, if questioned. I am now glad that the subject is before the profession, the only tribunal that is fit to judge in such matters, and I willingly and confidently submit to its verdict. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ARTHUR SARGEANT.

Bath, May 3, 1843.

LETTER FROM A BULLY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have been so used to dishonesty on the part of *medical* men that I almost blush to write myself a member of the profession. In your number of the 23rd March, which I have just seen, is a paper by Dr. Laycock on Vital Periodicity. If that physician be not conscious he is attempting to *defraud* me of that doctrine, why has he omitted to name me in connection with it? The *unity* of disease! Dr. Laycock is fond of units. You have had in your possession for years "The Fallacies of the Faculty," two editions, and a French translation were also sent you. A third edition of that work I now send you, and as an honest man I ask you to *judge betwixt Dr. Laycock and me*, whether or not his essay be not a *mean attempt to purloin my doctrine*. If you do not print this letter, I have no doubt, from the rapidity of sale of the new edition of "Fallacies of the Faculty," that I shall have an early opportunity of doing myself justice in a fourth edition. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

S. DICKSON.

Clarges-street, April 8, 1843.

* * We have complied with the request contained in the above creditable communication, and compared the contents of "Fallacies of the Faculty" with Dr. Laycock's papers on "Vital Periodicity," but without perceiving that the physician has in any way plagiarised from the quack, or been indebted to the "Fallacies" for any observations or facts whatever. Dr. Laycock (to quote his own words) "lays no claim to the discovery of the idea of periodicity in vital function, nor of priority in the application of that idea." (*LANCET*, vol. i., 1842-43, page 929). "Both these," as he truly says, "have long been common property." They are as old as the days of Hippocrates. But Dr. Laycock, while he has not pretended to found a system of medicine, reared upon principles that are neither new nor wholly satisfactory, has unravelled the phenomena of vital periodicity far beyond the point at which the dreams of his coarse and ill-bred accuser terminate, and has presented the subject in circumstantial details with a clearness which the brain of no such muddler as Dr. Dickson can imitate. In