

well clad, fed, and lodged. I shall feel much obliged by your giving insertion to this note, and am your obedient servant,

H. MAUNSELL.

Moleworth-street, Dublin,  
Dec. 18, 1838.

### DOSES OF MORPHIA. ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—If you find, on perusal, the following to merit a place in your excellent Journal, your giving insertion to it will confer an obligation on one of your earliest subscribers. Your Number of *THE LANCET* for Nov. 10th contains an account of a supposed death from an overdose of morphia. Having been in the habit of prescribing morphia in large doses, in some cases to the extent of four and six grains, I was naturally much surprised at the statement in the article referred to, and sent that Number of *THE LANCET* to Mr. S. Burgess, of 20, New-street, Dorset-square, who has repeatedly dispensed my prescriptions for the large doses stated above, requesting his opinion on the subject. The following is his reply:—

“Sir:—With a view of ascertaining the accuracy of Messrs. Battley and Heathfield’s statement in *THE LANCET* you were kind enough to forward to me, concerning the duplicate of a draught supposed to have caused the death of a lady at Dorchester, I made three separate portions of camphor mixture with *distilled, river, and fresh spring water*, and in two drachms of each I dissolved half a grain of acetate of morphia, weighed very exactly. I evaporated each separately to dryness, and the following is the result:—That made with distilled water yielded a residue of 0.45 gr.; that with river water 0.5 gr., and that with spring water 1.9 gr., this you will perceive is as much as 2 grains. Each, of course, answered to the test of morphia, and on further examination of the last-named, I discovered the presence of muriate of soda and sulphate of lime in sufficient quantities to account satisfactorily for the surprising difference in the weight. It may be as well to add, that it is a very common practice to prepare the camphor mixture with spring water, on account of its dissolving a larger portion of camphor acid; I am inclined to believe that Mr. Arden had done so, and that had Mr. Battley done as I have, by the draughts submitted to him, his statement would have worn a very a different aspect. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

“ALFRED BURGESS,

“Operative Chemist.

“To Dr. Edward Blundell.”

It is surprising on what trifles the reputation of a medical man often stands, and

I should consider it an injustice to Mr. Arden to let the article in *THE LANCET* on the subject remain unanswered; the impression conveyed in it is, certainly, that a life was sacrificed to his carelessness.\* Why was there not a post-mortem examination? Mr. Arden’s character is, with me, perfectly unimpaired. I feel convinced that had an examination of the body taken place, the death might have been accounted for from other causes, unless, indeed, the half grain of morphia has produced the lamented result in a very singular case of idiosyncrasy, which, of course, no human foresight could have prevented. I remain, Sir, yours faithfully,

EDWARD S. BLUNDELL.

18, Lower Seymour-street,  
Dec. 18, 1838.

### LETTER FROM MR. J. H. CURTIS.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—In reference to a letter signed “J. T.,” which appeared in the last week’s *LANCET*, I beg to say, that I have long since found, by experience, that I am much better occupied in attending to the duties of my profession than in replying to the objections of an anonymous writer. The question between us is, of course, altogether one of fact; and I repeat the substance of my former communication by saying, that in the large majority of cases of deafness which have come under my notice (which in twenty-two years’ experience have not been a few), absence of cerumen has been a marked symptom; and that restoration of the healthy function of the ear has always been accompanied by increased secretion of cerumen. I have found, also, that the use of creosote has succeeded in producing this effect more rapidly, and more certainly, than any other remedy; and on these two facts I founded my communication. That the secretion of wax is a natural function of the healthy ear, will, of course, be admitted by all; and as Nature never made an organ in vain, nor gave it a peculiar function that was useless in the animal economy, it appears to follow, as a necessary consequence, that either as effect or cause, the interruption of the function must be connected with some kind of disease.

The verification of my cases would leave this question resting still upon my assertion, to be confirmed or neutralised by the experience of others; and as, therefore, no good result could follow from a discussion which would occupy much of my time and atten-

\* If Dr. Blundell will re-read the last few lines of the article alluded to, he will arrive, we venture to affirm, at an opposite conclusion.

tion, I must decline the invitation of your correspondent. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. HARRISON CURTIS.

2, Soho-square, Dec. 12, 1838.

### IMPERFECT AND UNNECESSARY INQUEST AT ISLINGTON.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—Your valuable Journal has often taken up the subject of medical coroners, as the most fit persons to preside at inquests. I think the necessity was never more strikingly exemplified than at an inquest held in Islington, at the *Albion Tavern*, on Friday, the 21st inst., on the body of Mrs. Caseltine, who was found dead in her room. I have requested of Mr. Desormeaux, a copy of a letter which he furnished to the Coroner, previous to the opening of the court. He expresses in it his opinion that *a satisfactory verdict could only be obtained by a medico-legal investigation*. In the absence of it, in my humble opinion, the inquest was a mere mockery. It is as follows:—

*"To — Stirling, Esq., Coroner.*

"Sir:—In the case of Mrs. Caseltine, of No. 18, Albion-grove, Thornhill-road, who was found dead in her room, I beg leave to state that on examining her I found a slight bruise on the left hip, with considerable ecchymosis about the left hypochondrium, and a groove round the neck, as if she had made an attempt to strangle herself. The depth of the groove, when I first saw her, was sufficient to lay the little finger in. The body had been moved and laid out before I was called in. The fæces had been discharged, and it appeared as if she had vomited considerably about the room, in various places. I have ascertained that she had been disordered in her mind for some years. The son was *the only person living with her*. Although he is living in the house, he says he has not seen her *for seven weeks* previous to this occurrence, and that by her death he shall come in for £1000. As it is impossible to ascertain the cause of her death without *anatomical examination*, and *analytical investigation* of the contents of the stomach, and the matter thrown off from it, I requested that the corpse and the room might remain untouched until you were acquainted with the particulars, lest the public might be dissatisfied with a mere superficial investigation. If you think it necessary that further medical examination should be attended to will you please to request the gentlemen of the Jury not to trample upon the spots in the room *where she has vomited* or thrown down her liquid food. The aunt informs me that when the mother and son were together they quarrelled incessantly, which is not much to be won-

dered at if what the aunt has stated is correct. Looking at *all the circumstances of the case*, I felt it my duty to request the parish officer to call on you, and also to make this communication. I am, Sir, respectfully yours,

"D. DESORMEAUX.

"3, Brunswick-terrace, Barnsbury-road."

I do not mean to impugn the uprightness of the Jury, who were respectable men, and decided according to *the opinion of the Coroner*, and *such* evidence as came before them, but that worthy officer appeared to me not only to be decrepid from age, but not quick to the points which ought to be attended to.

Had a medico-legal investigation taken place it is most likely that the same verdict would have been returned; but as in the absence of all proof by analysis, nothing could be discovered in what was vomited up, or by examination of the stomach and its contents, or in the many vessels of the room containing fluids, curdled milk, &c. &c., a verdict must ever remain unsatisfactory. I do not for a moment entertain suspicion against any one in this case, or believe that there has anything wrong been done; but if persons are found dead under the circumstances of Mrs. C., without the most prying inquiry into the truth, what a door is open to crime! Some of the Jury inquired if it was not intended to have the body opened, when THE CLERK, who took the notes and put the questions, said, if the Coroner thought it necessary, after examining the witnesses, he would give directions. Mr. Desormeaux stated openly *in the court*, that without inspection of the body, and chemical examination, he could not give an opinion as to the cause of death. The verdict of the Jury was,—*"Died by the visitation of God!"*

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

F. MORRIS.

3, Brunswick-terrace, Islington,  
Dec. 24, 1838.

\* \* A remonstrance should be entered in all such cases (in the manner which we have several times described in this Journal) against the payment of any fee to the Coroner, for presiding at the "inquest." The public have the remedy in their own hands.—ED. L.

### LETTER FROM MR. SIMPSON.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—The readers of your valuable Journal must now be well convinced, as I have been for some time, that Dr. Geo. Gregory is not only one of the most "distinguished," but, also, one of the most "amusing" writers of the day. He certainly excels in evading matters of fact. My first letter was a mere statement of events as they