INQUESTS IN MIDDLESEX.

POST-MORTEM APPEARANCES IN POISONING
WITH OXALIC ACID.

[ADDRESSED to Mr. Wakley, before whom the inquest was recently held.]

Sir:—I transmit, at your desire, the case of Elizabeth Cooper. The appearances, in my opinion, cannot be considered to be peculiar to the effects of oxalic acid. I am, Sir, yours very truly,

ALEX. ANDERSON.

17, York-place, Baker-street,
August 9, 1839.

Elizabeth Cooper; æt. 22; light eyes and light hair, but complexion sallow, and under the eyes particularly dingy-coloured, with an expression and appearance of countenance that is often observed in melancholics; lost her child ten days ago, then six weeks old, with *tabes mesenterica*. On being now attended professionally her symptoms were, a gonorrhœal or gleetish discharge (of several months standing), attended with pain in the back, and debility.

Epsom salts, four drachms;

Peppermint-water, six ounces;

Dilute sulphuric acid, two drachms; a fourth part twice a day.

A few days after, and whilst taking the above mixture, she menstruated. She continued to take this medicine until her death, which happened ten days from the time that she came under my care, as a patient of the Western General Dispensary.

She swallowed the poison between half-past three and a quarter to four o'clock, in all probability at a minute before a quarter to four, on Monday afternoon, and almost immediately after she vomited, and became inattentive to everything about her. Her sister says that she felt her breast cold when she applied her hand. This was immediately after she discovered her. She continued incessantly to vomit until she died, constituting a period of about twenty minutes. The matters vomited took out the colour of her own and her sister's gown.

Mr. Lomax, the house-surgeon of the dispensary, saw her immediately after her death. He says that her skin was warm, and without perspiration; the face was swollen, and of a leaden colour; no excoriation of the lips or gums. The ejecta from the stomach, on analysis, gave oxalic acid.

Inspection, about 24 hours after death.—The body was rigid, and not emaciated; the face livid, especially the lips, linings of the nostrils, and eyelids. The lungs full of blood, of healthy appearance; heart healthy, did not contain any remarkable increase of blood. The veins full, but not distended with uncoagulated blood, such as is seen in some sudden deaths, or when death takes place under congestion or collapse. The

mucous surface of the gullet was contracted presenting unusually distinct rugæ; the stomach in the same condition, containing two ounces of liquid matter, which yielded oxalic acid. The rugæ in the stomach continued rigid. On the next day, although it had been immersed during the whole lapse of time in water, there was a spot of ecchymosis, of about the size of a shilling, on the mucous surface of the greater arch of the stomach. Two gentlemen who were present thought that the mucous surface was softened. To myself it did not appear so; in short, had we not been in search of evidence of the presence of oxalic acid, the appearance of the stomach would not have arrested attention: such is my opinion.

The intestines, small and great, were much contracted, containing nothing beyond an unusually large quantity of mucus. I may here remark that the bowels had been very much purged by the sulphate of magnesia which she was taking previously to her having swallowed poison. The mucous glands, or, rather, follicles, from the back of the tongue to the anus, were wonderfully developed, full, or distended with mucus. The kidneys were diseased, presenting the granular appearance. The uterus contained some menstrual fluid, and was lined with deciduous membrane.

The brain presented no unusual appearance.

THE
NEW LONDON PHARMACOPŒIA
UNSUITABLE TO ITS
PROPER PURPOSES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—In the "Medical Gazette" of last Saturday, Mr. Phillips has an article on the Edinburgh Pharmacopœia, in which he imputes the chemical accuracy of several portions of that work.

Without calling in question the truth of his assertions, I shall briefly point out a consideration which is specially overlooked in criticisms on this subject, and which has hitherto escaped his notice, or correction, in the London Pharmacopœia. I allude to the consideration of the work not as a criterion of the progress of chemical discovery, but as a simplified medium of communication between the prescriber and compounder of medicine.

The importance of accuracy in chemical calculations no one would dispute or undervalue, but when the real object of the book is considered (namely, the mitigation of disease and suffering), it must be evident that it is equally important to avoid needless and confusing synonyms, and unnecessary alterations in the terms or strength of the preparations, and to exhibit the various