

venality as any public body well can be; the emoluments which accrue to the individuals administering the Act, are well known to be totally inadequate to afford remuneration for the time and trouble employed in the execution of the various necessary duties confided to them; the members of the Court of Examiners are men who are always before the public as intelligent individuals in extensive practice, and they cannot for a moment be supposed to entertain feelings hostile to the College of Surgeons, since every individual member of the Court is a member either of the College of Surgeons of London or Edinburgh, except one gentleman, and he either was, or is, apothecary to the King.

In addressing these observations to you I am influenced only by the feelings of interest I cherish for the welfare of a large and important part of the community of which I am a member; and though a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, of about eight years standing, I am not a member of the corporation, and have no personal interest, direct or indirect, in their proceedings, save that flowing from the services they render to the members of my grade, and to, Sir, your obedient servant,

APIS.

May 8, 1831.

REMARKS ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF
FEMALE MIDWIVES,
AND ON THE MODE OF EXECUTING THE
DUTIES OF THE
CORONERSHIP AT LIVERPOOL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Notwithstanding the mummery, the sickening and tinselled feelings of Sir Anthony Carlisle, and the more specious, but not less fallacious, reasonings of some others, I have yet to learn that society ever reaped one single advantage, one substantial or practical advantage, by the employment of female accoucheurs, instead of the regularly-educated gentlemen of the profession. If experience and observation are to decide the matter of choice, there is not an honest medical man in the kingdom, whose opportunities enable him to draw a comparison, who will not at once declare, that midwifery is left in improper and dangerous hands when under the direction of women. Who will not avow that their services can, in all cases, without inconvenience or loss, be dispensed with, and that, if retained, the measure is a wanton and criminal sacrifice of life?

The duty of coroners is especially well-suited to check the evil of bad midwifery, but we seldom hear of their interference in that way; and if we do, as in the case very

recently published in *THE LANCET*,* it is rather to screen, than to punish, the delinquent. Medical men too, I am sorry to say it, sometimes look upon the miseries and destruction of life, when caused by the ignorance of midwives in the lying-in room, as though these things were unalterable, or inseparable, under any condition, from the common destiny that awaits and presides over human nature; or, confide in the belief that this evil will, sooner or later, work its own reformation,—that mankind will be convinced as they are seared by its blight, and then will assert the prerogative of justifying their right to maintain, in all its bearings, the law of self-preservation. After all, to put the most lenient construction upon the supineness of medical men in thus omitting to protect their fellow-beings from the consequences of the ignorant, the negligent, the mischievous, and the cruel, operations of midwives, I am ashamed of their conduct, and utterly deny the truth of that philosophy which inculcates the rule of being able to do good by neutralising exertion, and under the cover of which they seek to shelter it.

The coroner's court of Liverpool is an offspring of, and is maintained altogether by, the corporation of Liverpool. Every new mayor has the privilege of choosing two bailiffs, and these he dubs "coroners;" but in their absence any one of the aldermen can be coroner. It is a close court, but open, I suppose, by favour, for the public are admitted, and I never heard of any objection to the rule. By profession the coroner is sometimes a merchant, now-and-then an attorney, and sometimes a tradesman; but never within the memory of man, with the exception I believe of one instance, was he of the profession of medicine. With yourself, I am one of those who think that no man, unless he understands the science of medicine, and more especially that part of it which belongs to anatomy and chemistry, can be a fit person for the office of coroner. This office, one of the most ancient and important in the kingdom, is therefore, in Liverpool as in many other places, inadequately filled. But there are several memorable particulars, abuses I might call them, now in full bloom here, and at present connected with the constitution and economy of this court, which, at least, deserve further inquiry, if not unqualified censure and reprobation, and with which I probably may find another occasion before long to make you and the public better acquainted. *En passant*, a word concerning the common jury of the coroner's court of Liverpool.

Of all juries in the world this jury, in appearance and in truth, beggars descrip-

* Have the jury pronounced their verdict upon this case?—(The verdict has not been sent us.—ED. L.)

tion. It consists of a strange anomaly of individuals. It seems always to be empannelled from the half-deaf, the half-blind, the half-winded, the halt and the lame clubs of Liverpool; the very scum and scourings of superannuation, billeted upon society from the shops of Neptune, Mars, Bacchus, Crispin, and Slop. Now the verdict of a coroner's jury, in many cases, may be of very little consequence to the community at large, and might be as *well* and *truly* given by a set of old women as by the greatest philosophers of the age; but in other cases the subject becomes quite another thing, and their verdict, I need not say, is of the highest importance, being intimately associated with the dearest interests of every member of society.

A jury culled from the dregs of mankind is undoubtedly a very improper one; the minds, the understandings, the very habits and honesty of such men, are at once objects of suspicion. Swayed and overawed by the charge, nay, by the manner and nod, of a judge, they are easily thrown off their guard, become enslaved, time-serving, almost in spite of themselves, and servilely yield to his wishes and opinions as dictated by fear and feelings of courtesy.

Can the conduct of midwives, supposing it of such a nature as to occasion, through ignorance of their avocation, the death of human beings, be legally arraigned by the jury of a coroner? I am of opinion they can. Medical men are amenable to the laws for negligence or want of skill, so that the party complaining be able to prove damages. Yet the coroners of Liverpool do refuse, and have invariably, I understand, refused, to notice the delinquencies of midwives in the lying-in room, upon the plea of having no legal authority to notice them. On the 13th ultimo, a case in point occurred under my own observation in the person of Ann Carson, 15, Gildart's Gardens, Liverpool. This woman died in childbirth through the neglect and ignorance of a midwife; and although I informed the coroner, in a private interview with him, I could prove by evidence that the woman had suffered death from unskilful treatment, and that the husband and friends of the deceased wished an inquest, yet the case, to my great surprise and disappointment, was quashed, because, on inspection, the womb presented no particular marks of violence! The coroner (a merchant) was, perhaps, in this instance, rather led by the opinion of a medical gentleman, than from any thing he knew of his own knowledge concerning the law of his office. This medical gentleman (Mr. Whitley, a respectable surgeon of Liverpool) thought, that as the examination of the uterus proved nothing, in his opinion, to criminate the parties, he should recom-

mend the coroner to discharge them,* observing at the same time, that the midwife well deserved a severe reprimand, for (mark this, reader) had a medical man been called, as he believed, in the first instance, very probably the life of the deceased might have been preserved! Comment upon this is quite unnecessary.

Again, to convince you, if further proof be wanting, that I do not complain of our coroners without sufficient cause, the following case of death, condensed from my notes made at the time, happened early in the month of January last:—Mary Spencer, 4, Meadow Street, Liverpool, had delivered herself of a male child upwards of an hour before any-body became acquainted with her situation. The child, born alive apparently, was found dead, and the mother nearly so from hæmorrhage. Assistance was immediately sought for at the Liverpool North Dispensary, but refused on the grounds of informality. The applicant more urgently pressing her claim, and very properly so, on hearing the nature of the refusal, was told, by one of the “young doctors,” in an insolent manner, “she had received her answer, and that patients could only be visited in their regular turns.” Several medical men were afterwards applied to, but from some cause or other none attended, the patient being an indigent woman, living in a cellar. I saw her at half-past three o'clock P.M.; (this was seven hours after an application had been made at the Dispensary, without attendance); the patient was then in articulo mortis, and in a few minutes the vital spark was extinguished for ever. The bed was one sheet of blood, and under it was a large quantity on the floor. It was quite plain the poor creature had bled to death; the child had died, nobody knew how. The coroner (an attorney) reconciled the matter with the duty of his office in the ordinary way. He could not take cognizance of death in childbirth from such causes; no party could be culpably identified in the transaction, and therefore an inquest could not be maintained. Something was said also about bringing odium upon the Dispensary!

* The midwife having failed to extract the placenta, a doctor at her request was called in. This “doctor,” who styles himself “man-midwife,” whom on inquiry I find to be a most illiterate man, and practising the obstetric art with little else to recommend him save his presumption and ignorance, had no sooner entered the room of the patient, than he forthwith, *succinctus ludo*, introduced his hand into the uterus, and to work he went pell-mell. The woman's strength, from previous exertion, had long been quite exhausted, and at this time the power of speech and all voluntary motion had left her; and although there had been no flooding, nor was then, yet this terrible “doctor,” in the very front of all this, had the audacity to displace the placenta, and that too by piecemeal!!

This case was brought before the sub-committee of the Dispensary, and I attended with witness to prove the fact. After some deliberation and expressions of regret that such a melancholy case should have happened, this body concluded (endeavouring to wipe away the stain upon the charity), that as it belonged to midwifery, this process not coming under the definition of accident, it was not provided for by the by-laws of the institution! That the "Ladies' Charity" attended to such calls! Such was the language of the guardians of a public medical charity. Oh! those by-laws—those villanous by-laws: and yet how convenient!

I am Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant and well-wisher,
J. WEATHERILL, M.D.

THE LANCET.

London, Saturday, May 14, 1831.

WHEN the proposal for founding the University of London was first advertised, we joined the liberal portion of the English public in hailing the announcement with feelings of proud national exultation. The design was instantly fixed upon the mind as one of a most brilliant and comprehensive description. Strong intelligence was not its only prominent feature, and in investigating the long train of noble and generous causes of which it was the high-minded offspring, the impartial and honourable critic awarded not less respect, not less veneration, to those projectors who had exhibited that rare extent of moral courage which emboldened them to attack bigotry in her strongest den, than of admiration for those efforts which were benevolently intended to dispel from the human understanding, numberless unsightly clouds of darkness. So strong were our predilections in favour of the proposed institution, that we expected to find in the London University a temple wherein the sun of genius would shine in undiminished and undisturbed splendour throughout many succeeding ages, and that the light and warmth thus

generated within its walls would communicate their benign and invigorating influence to the remotest parts of the habitable globe. The events of two or three years have shown that our anticipations arose rather from what we desired might happen, than from what might rationally be expected. The difficulties of such an undertaking were not duly estimated, and the blighting force of prejudice was, perchance, entirely forgotten. Are we then altogether disappointed in the results up to the present time? Decidedly not. On the contrary, great are the advantages which have been already presented to the public by this infant establishment, and there are to be seen in the machinery of the institution, the movements of those great elementary principles, which, if properly directed, must soon realise the most florid conceptions of the first enthusiastic supporters of this new monument of human improvement. Delighted beyond expression to see such an institution rise up in the very centre of the dense and half-educated population of this metropolis, we have observed its proceedings with the feverish and expectant eyes of over-zealous friends. The University of London, if disfigured by a few blemishes, possesses many fascinating charms; and, strongly persuaded that she will one day prove the parent of unmixed benefit to society, we have rejoiced at her successes, and mourned over her failures. If, therefore, we have preserved an unbroken silence respecting certain events which have transpired during the present session, it was not because the circumstances fell not within the range of our information, it was not because our anxiety for the interests of the institution had suffered abatement, but because we hoped and expected that a few erroneous steps, almost unavoidable perhaps in an infant institution, would be retraced, or altogether obviated, by the Council, when their minds should have been improved and strengthened by the instructive lessons of