city I shall be happy to receive all the information which my medical brethren in the country can afford me; and I take this opportunity of *gladly* thanking you for the zeal with which you have, both in your editorial and parliamentary capacity, advocated the cause of the country practitioners, in their opposition to the disgraceful proceedings of the Poor-Law Commissioners. I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

H. W. RUMSEY.

Chesham, Bucks, Oct. 5, 1835.

REFUSAL TO OPEN A BODY AT AN INQUEST,
WITHOUT REMUNERATION. — VERDICT
WITHOUT EVIDENCE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I beg to transmit to you some particulars of a coroner's inquest which lately took place in this neighbourhood, and to which I was summoned as the medical witness. I do so for the purpose of enabling you to decide whether my conduct was *legal* or not in refusing to open the body without possession of a written order from the coroner. If I had opened the body without such order, could I have successfully supported a demand for remuneration in a court of law; and against whom? You would greatly oblige me by answering these questions, as I have to make my appearance at the Old Bailey on the trial of the husband of the deceased. The subject of remuneration to medical men at inquests, being now of peculiar interest to the profession, you are at liberty to insert the following in the next number of your valuable Journal.

A woman named Sarah Goodlad came to the *Western General Dispensary* on the 11th ult. with an injury which she said she had received from falling on a pail. I examined her side (the part affected), and believed there was a fracture of one or two ribs. I treated her accordingly. Inflammation of the lungs came on in two or three days afterwards, and in spite of the most active treatment she died on the 19th ult. An inquest was held on the body, as it had been reported that her husband had beaten her (indeed she stated to a neighbour that her husband had been the cause of the injury). This came out in evidence before the jury, and it was stated that he had thrown a loaf of bread at her. It seemed to me from this that there was sufficient evidence of injury inflicted by the husband to account for the fracture, but most of the jury did not think so. They had heard evidence respecting some slight accident which happened about a month before I saw her, and it would seem from their verdict, that they partly believed

the previous injury to have been the cause of the fracture. Three of the jurymen, however, were not quite convinced on this point, and I was asked if a post-mortem examination would make the matter any clearer. I said most undoubtedly it would. The coroner (Mr. Stirling) therefore asked me to open the body, which I told him I would immediately do if he would give me a written order by means of which I should obtain remuneration for the trouble. This he refused to do, saying that he never had done such a thing. His clerk (who really was the chief man on this occasion) then told the jury that there would be no difficulty about the matter, though I had refused to open the body, for he would write to a vestryman of the parish who would send one of the house-surgeons from the parish infirmary to do it.

The inquest was accordingly adjourned to the next day at three o'clock, when the jury met, and waited for some time for the evidence of the medical man who was to have opened the body; but it appeared on inquiry that the body had not even then been opened; neither did either of the infirmary medical officers attend the inquest. The patience of the jury being now exhausted, they made up their minds to deliver the following singular verdict, *the body not having been opened*: "Died of inflammation of the lungs, brought on by fractured ribs, *but by what means the fracture was occasioned there is not sufficient evidence to prove!*"

Now, Sir, if the public will allow verdicts to be passed in such a manner as this, they deserve to suffer from the consequences. It certainly was not a just request to require a professional man, whose time and knowledge were his property, and whose reputation as a witness was at stake, to make a post-mortem examination, without the least remuneration, and perhaps with insult. My motive for refusing on this occasion to open the body, arose chiefly from the feeling, that by complying with the direction of the coroner, I should be doing injury to the profession through an injury done to myself. Besides, I object to be even a partial means of continuing the present unjust system. Whether I acted according to *law* I beg to be informed, and remain, Sir, your most obedient,

WILLIAM ROBINS, House Surg.

Western General Dispensary, New Road,
October 1, 1835.

* * The only question of Mr. Robins to which we need reply may be thus answered:—He was not liable to the institution of any proceeding at law, or the infliction of any penalty, for refusing to open the body without remuneration.—Ed. L.