

the obloquy, and perhaps the fate, of a murderer.

It is now thirty years ago that, accidentally passing the Pack-Horse, Turnham-green, my attention was attracted by a mob of persons of the lowest order, assembled around the door of that inn, who were very loud in their execrations against some person who was suspected of having murdered his brother; in corroboration of which, I was told that his bones were found near the premises where he formerly resided, upon view of which a jury was then sitting, after an adjournment from the day preceding. I found that two surgeons had been subpoenaed to inspect the remains, and I had no doubt but that every information as to their character had been obtained; curiosity alone, therefore, induced me to make way into the room, where I found that the Coroner and, I believe, a *double jury* were sitting for the second day, and were engaged in an investigation which tended to show that a farmer and market-gardener, at Sutton-court Farm, had, a few years before, a brother living with him, who was engaged in the farm, but whose conduct was dissolute and irregular, to a degree that often provoked the anger of his elder brother, and sometimes begat strife and violence between them; that the temper of the elder brother was as little under control as the conduct of the younger, and, in fine, that they lived very uncomfortably together.

One winter's night, when the ground was covered with snow, the younger brother absconded from the house (for they both lived together) by letting himself down from his chamber window; and when he was missing the ensuing morning, his footsteps were clearly tracked in the snow to a considerable distance, nor were there any other footsteps *but his own*: time passed on, and after a lapse of some few years no tidings were heard of his retreat, nor, perhaps, have there ever been since. Some alterations in the grounds surrounding the house having been undertaken by a subsequent tenant (for the elder brother had then left the farm), a skeleton was dug up, and the circumstance appeared so conclusive that one brother had murdered the other, that the popular clamour was raised to the utmost, and a jury empanelled to investigate the case.

After listening attentively to these details I ventured to request of the Coroner to be allowed to examine the bones, which I found were contained in a hamper basket, at the farther end of the room, and I felt much flattered by his immediate compliance, for he desired the parish beadle, who was in attendance, to place them upon the table, and having myself disposed them in their natural order, I found that they represented a person of short stature, and from the obliteration of the sutures of the skull, and the worn down state of the teeth, must have

belonged to an aged person; but what was my surprise when I reconstructed the bones of the pelvis! which was as fine a specimen of *female* development as an obstetric professor could have exhibited to his class. I immediately communicated the fact to the jury, and requested that the two medical men who had before given their opinions might be sent for, one of whom attended, and without a moment's hesitation corroborated my report.

I need not add that the proceedings were instantly at an end, and an innocent man received the *amende honorable*, in the shape of an apology, from all present, in which the Coroner heartily joined.

I must not omit to notice a circumstance that at that time excited a good deal of speculation among the jurors, most of whom were market-gardeners.

Mr. Carpue was on a visit at Chiswick a few days afterwards, and was asked by one of them if there *really was any difference* between a male and female skeleton; when that gentleman replied in his usual pithy way, "Yes, there is just as much difference between a male and female skeleton as there is between an *apple* and a *pear*." I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

T. W. C. PERFECT, Surgeon.
Hammersmith, Jan. 27, 1839.

P.S. It has since been proved, beyond all doubt, that the spot where the bones were found was formerly the site of a large gravel-pit, in which hordes of gipsies not only assembled, but occasionally buried their dead, and, perhaps, more skeletons are yet to be found in that vicinity.

IMPERFECT INQUEST

HELD BY A

NON-MEDICAL CORONER AT BECCLES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—In the present day officers receiving public money are expected to fulfil the duties attached to their office efficiently, otherwise there are many persons of ability, desirous to obtain office, who would do so. The office of Coroner, ancient in itself, and instituted by our ancestors for the good and benefit of the subject, in the lapse of time has lost much of its utility, and Coroners seem to have become irresponsible and careless as to public opinion, and think little of the public good when called on to perform the duties of their office in a country town; the proceedings at an inquest resemble a farce, and persons summoned as jurymen are generally of the lowest order.

The following is an instance of neglect of duty in a Coroner, and of the dishonourable

manner in which medical men are treated by coroners. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

WM. TAYLOR TYSON, M.R.C.S.L.

Beccles, Suffolk, Jan. 19, 1829.

On Sunday, January 6th, 9 A.M., my instant attendance was requested by Wm. Almond, to visit a young woman (his daughter), whom he said was pregnant, and soon after coming down stairs had fainted. I attended immediately, and found her supported by her mother, the jaws expanded, lips bloodless, countenance deadly pale; the artery could be felt at the wrist, though scarcely three minutes had elapsed ere it ceased to pulsate; no hæmorrhage had taken place externally. She had fainted on the previous day, when urine and fæces passed from her involuntarily; she was not married; said to be a close kind of girl, and had been in a low way for some time past. The mother could not say how far her daughter was advanced in pregnancy, though she appeared of a considerable size. The women present were unwilling to believe her dead, and, in consequence, the means likely to be of service were had recourse to; they proved useless. The friends still thinking that life had not departed, I judged it proper, under the circumstances, to send for an older and more experienced practitioner than myself. Mr. Crowfoot came, and confirmed the opinion as to life being extinct.

From inquiries made of the mother and others, nothing could be elicited that would in any way lead to a knowledge of the cause of death; its sudden occurrence without any assignable cause,—the young person being single and pregnant,—her having been in ill-health without any medical advice, with other circumstances, induced Mr. Crowfoot to suggest that an inquiry, as to the cause of death, should take place under the direction of the Coroner.

On Tuesday, January the 8th, I was requested by the constable to be at the King's Head Inn, to give evidence, as a jury was summoned, and told that the Coroner would be there by eight o'clock, P.M. About nine o'clock I was sent for by the Coroner, and I stated, that, without an examination of the body, the cause of death would probably for ever remain unknown; nevertheless the jury, after viewing the body, did, by the direction of the Coroner, return the verdict,—“Died by the visitation of God.”

On Friday, January 11th, (three hours only before the corpse was to have been buried) I obtained permission to open the body; Mr. Wm. Crowfoot kindly assisted me during the examination.

Over the upper part of the chest, neck, and shoulders the skin was of a dark greenish appearance.

Thorax.—Lungs healthy; about half a pint of red-coloured fluid in the right pleural cavity; the heart rather large and flaccid; about three drachms of red-coloured fluid in the pericardium.

Abdomen.—The uterus and its contents healthy, and she appeared to be between seven and eight months gone with child; the serous membrane covering the intestines not at all inflamed; the stomach contained about three ounces of a thick fluid; the mucous membrane was inflamed and thrown into large rugous folds; there were numerous and large deep red patches of extravasated blood, apparently beneath the mucous membrane; the pyloric extremities, with a portion of duodenum, not at all inflamed. Time would not allow us to proceed further with the examination. The stomach and its contents we were allowed to take away, and it is intended that they should be sent to a practical chemist to analyse. Mr. Crowfoot and Mr. Davey having examined the bodies of several who have died from the effects of metallic poison, are of *decided opinion* that the appearances presented by the stomach were produced by some acrid substance.

The Coroner (Mr. Grosse, of Ipswich) did not arrive at Beccles till after eight o'clock, and about ten o'clock (when most people in the country think of going to bed) the jury viewed the body, some of whom appeared extremely anxious to get home; the Coroner, evidently desirous to leave Beccles by the coach early the next morning, did not think it necessary that the body should be opened, as he would have been detained here the next day; but insinuated to the jury, that debility and dropsy (from the ankles and legs being swollen) might account for the sudden death; he refused also to pay me the usual fee, as he stated that he could not, on his own responsibility, give one; but that he would recommend the magistrates to allow him to send me one.

DR. RYAN'S REPLY

TO THE

NOTICE OF MR. HOUSTON'S MANUAL OF DISEASES OF THE EYE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I was a good deal surprised on observing in a late number of THE LANCET, December 22nd ult., a most unfair and scurrilous notice of my friend Mr. Houston's "Manual of Diseases of the Eye," published in June last, which was not written by Mr. Wakley, as it is not his style, and is totally unworthy of his character. I write advisedly when I make this statement; for it cannot be expected that medical editors are ubiquitous, and that every