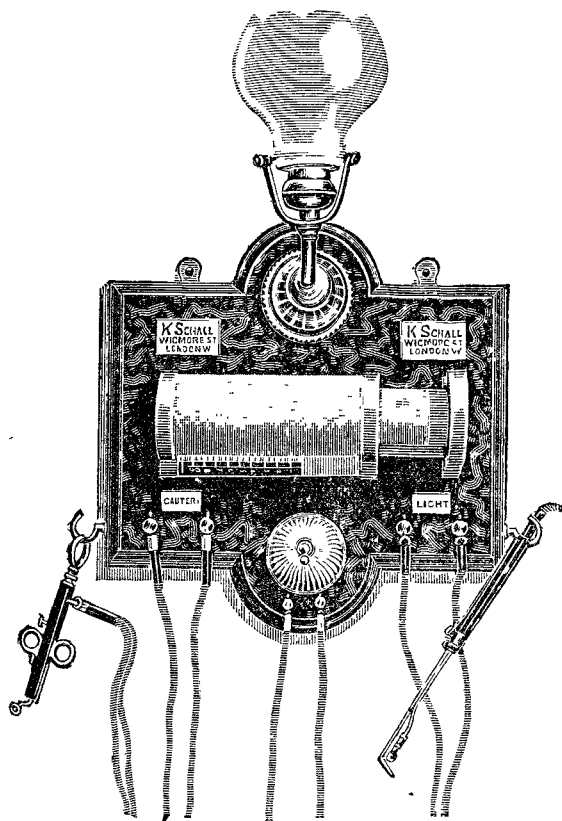


attached, to indicate the relative positions of the coils, as previously ascertained, for any particular purpose. This arrangement for regulating the strength of the current is economical as well as convenient, since the current absorbed by the primary coil is more or less proportional to that taken up by the secondaries. For the purposes of the cautery a maximum current of 20 ampères at an E.M.F. of 6 volts, and a minimum current of 2 ampères at  $\frac{1}{2}$  volt, can be supplied, according to its size and the degree of heat required. In the same way the current for giving shocks varies between a slight sensation and one that can be hardly tolerated; while the current for a surgical lamp, laryngeal or other, can be varied in like manner to suit any of the ordinary lamps in use. With regard to the current for giving "faradaic" shocks, it may be as well to mention that it varies slightly in character from that supplied by the ordinary medical coil; the interruptions are more rapid, the E.M.F. is about the same, while the current is greater in quantity. It will be



of interest to note whether this periodic increase combined with a larger current will in any way alter the therapeutic value of the shocks. To meet the case of the continuous current supply—a system adopted by some companies—an interrupter is introduced into the circuit of the primary coil: it occupies the place of the indicating lamp, which then becomes unnecessary. The interrupter is of specially strong make, and is designed to vibrate very rapidly in order to insure a sufficient number of impulses to produce steady currents in the secondary coils. The converter for dental purposes supplies current for the dental mallet, motor, and surgical lamp; as its appearance is the same and its construction very similar to that given above, it is unnecessary to do more than mention its uses. Mr. Schall of 55, Wigmore-street, W., is the maker of these machines, and my best acknowledgments are due to him for the skilful and energetic part he has taken in their production.

ARNOLD B. WOAKES, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. LOND.,  
Surgeon to the London Throat Hospital.

#### THE HOME FOR SICK CHILDREN, COLD ASH.—

The benefits bestowed, and the success of this Home, which was founded by Miss Bowditch in 1866, have rendered an additional block of buildings necessary, notwithstanding that the institution has been twice already enlarged. Last week Miss Kitty Ricardo, daughter of Major Ricardo, in the presence of a large assembly, performed the ceremony of laying the corner-stone of the new buildings, which will be erected on a most eligible site, and provide accommodation for more patients and also nurses.

#### HOLMES v. THE SCOTTISH LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY.

*To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—The case lately tried at Derby respecting a claim against an insurance office on an accidental death policy clearly shows that there ought to be a medical tribunal before which such cases should come, seeing that the points at issue are purely medical, and cannot be rightly appreciated by the bar or by the jury. The above-named office requires that the insurer should declare that he is not the subject of any disease, and that he should renew his policy year by year on this condition. In the present case the insurer had been treated for two or three years for a stomach complaint, and had consulted several medical men in London and in the country. His case had variously been called dyspepsia, ulcer of the stomach, and malignant disease. Two months before his death he fell on the frozen pavement. He got up and walked to his place of business, stayed there a short time, called on his doctor, who told him to go home and he would visit him on the following day. The doctor then found he had bruised his hip, and that the pulse was quicker than usual. Four days after this he vomited some coffee-ground matter, having had the day before some melæna. The coffee-ground vomiting he had had before, as stated in a letter from an eminent medical man; but this was not received in evidence, as the writer himself was not present. After three weeks all signs of blood had ceased, but the patient continued to grow weaker, took no food, became emaciated, and died exhausted eight weeks after his fall. The friends naturally attributed the coffee-ground vomiting and the subsequent death to the fall; the medical man took the same view, and it was supported by the surgeon who was called in as consultant. These two gentlemen certified that the patient died of exhaustion due to loss of blood occasioned by a fall on the pavement. After the certificate was written, a post-mortem examination was made, no injury to the stomach was found, but a cancerous growth (as suspected by many) at the pylorus. In spite of this discovery, these gentlemen held to their certificate, and in explanation of this declared at the trial that the cancer of the stomach had nothing to do with the patient's symptoms or death, but that this was due to the exhaustion arising from the hæmorrhage, which had ceased five weeks before death, and which hæmorrhage was not due to the cancer, but to the fall. On being asked how the hæmorrhage was produced, seeing that no injury was found, the following remarkable explanation was given—that the fall produced a shock to the nervous system, that this hastened the heart's action and so increased the force of the circulation generally, that this secondarily affected the portal circulation in the liver, and that the blood, not being able to discharge itself, found relief by the rupture of vessels in the stomach. This was the theory on the one side, and on the other side was the statement that the man died from cancer, seeing that he not only had all the usual symptoms, but it was proved to exist by post-mortem examination.

If the two propositions had been brought before a medical assembly, it would no doubt have soon been disposed of. As it was, although the judge was a very careful, painstaking man, and evidently wishing to be fair, he placed the two propositions before the jury as if they were of equal value, and left it to them to choose which they would have, the judge himself adding that the shock theory seemed reasonable, and as for there being no previous experience of such a case, there was no finality in knowledge. Whether they were better pleased with this theory than with plain facts I cannot say, but they soon pronounced in favour of the plaintiff; but in all probability they felt themselves unable to decide between two medical propositions, and so did not worry their brains about them, but gave the plaintiff the benefit of the doubt. I feel myself that they ought never to have been asked to decide that which a medical jury would be alone able to understand. The consequence is a great miscarriage of justice.

I am, Sirs, your obedient servant,  
Grosvenor-street, W., July 27th, 1891.

SAMUEL WILKS,