

DEATHS FROM ADMINISTERING
"GODFREY'S CORDIAL."*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—In page 209 of my edition of the new London Pharmacopœia, you will find an exposition of the real cause of so many deaths among infants from the use of spurious preparations of syrup of poppies. In the *News* of last week is an account of an inquest upon the body of an infant destroyed by a preparation sold as "Godfrey's cordial," but which was stated in evidence to consist of sugar, water, and opium. Now, Sir, by reference to either of our coroners within the bills of mortality, you will learn that such cases are of frequent occurrence. I estimate them at at least twelve or fourteen per annum, in London alone. Now, take this as the average for twenty years, and you have upwards of one hundred and fifty children sacrificed within that period. I ask you to subjoin my note on the Syrup of Poppies, and you may rest assured that you will save many lives by giving the matter publicity. Your humble servant,

G. F. COLLIER.

32, Spring Gardens,
June 5, 1837.

"*Remedial Use.*—A soothing anodyne, for the most part producing less subsequent cerebral disturbance than opium; and therefore preferable for children. There is a bad practice in the retail trade (which is well worthy of the serious attention of the profession, and one which ought not to have been disregarded by the College) of selling various substitutes for this syrup. One is prepared with laudanum and treacle; another with extract of poppies in syrup; and both made of inferior narcotic strength to the preceding. Now, let the dispensing chemist mark the consequence. Numerous fatal cases have occurred, in which mothers, who had been in the habit of being supplied with the spurious syrup, have casually applied to houses where the syrup is prepared by the College formula; and, having administered a teaspoonful of this last to their fretful children, or perhaps a second, just as they were wont to do with the weaker remedy, it has induced narcosis, and death has ensued in a few hours. The Editor has himself attended inquests of this nature, and he appeals to the Coroners of London, whether a year elapses without similar occurrences. The intention of the dispensing chemist in making a weaker article is praiseworthy; for, knowing that mothers habitually exhibit it to their children, he is afraid to sell them the stronger syrup. Thus the parent is deceived in her estimation of the dose, and the deception is fatal. These errors, too, are likely to occur among practitioners themselves; for, if they consult the popular works on phar-

macy, they will meet with evidence the most discrepant. By one author an ounce of the syrup is stated to be an equivalent to a grain of opium; by another, half an ounce; by another, three drachms; by another two drachms. Is this a subject unworthy of the Censors' attention? Their best friends will tell them that, go where they will, whenever and wherever their college is spoken of, every well-informed gentleman will express his surprise at their apathetic neglect of the public health. But let a question arise on the diversion of five farthings out of the exchequer of Pall Mall East, and who so active as the Censors' Board?"

IMPERFECT INQUESTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Scarcely a week passes but you have some communication concerning the inefficient manner in which coroner's inquests are conducted, and of verdicts given without the slightest medical evidence. I think it the duty of every medical practitioner who is called upon to state his opinion on any case of sudden death, and whose evidence is not called for at the *inquest*, to send you the particulars, in order to show you the want of consideration for his time, and the paltry evasion of your salutary Bill, which has regulated the certainty of his remuneration. For instance,—I am requested to see an elderly female, who has been living alone, and who I find dead, lying on her back, her head in a pail, her arms folded over her chest, her fingers contracted, her legs drawn towards the trunk: a jury is summoned, and an inquest is held on the body. The important points of the case are not inquired into, how she fell, or how her head got in that situation. Surely these are points for medical investigation, and evidence on them is required. But the coroner now settles these questions. Formerly our attendance was required on all occasions; now the medical evidence is generally anticipated. By adding this instance to the others, at your earliest convenience, you will oblige, Sir, your obedient servant,

WM. HARVEY.

42, Great Queen-street, Lincoln's-inn-fields.
June 7th, 1837.

* * Every beneficial statute will be evaded by persons who are interested in breaking the law, if the public unconcernedly suffer the wrong to be committed. The remedy for the abuse under consideration we have already pointed out. The coroner is, confessedly, the instrument of the mischief. Let him be once mulcted of his fee for presiding at an imperfect inquest, and he will conduct himself differently on future occasions.