

no less a position than "the first medical degree of the University of London."

Whilst, Mr. Editor, I am prepared to pay the most profound deference to the intellectual armour of the "Physician who Thinks," and of his confrère, "P. X.," they will perhaps excuse my having the boldness to remind them of a very early expressed opinion, and one which for ages has been usually admitted to be true, "Ingenuas didicisse *fideliter* artes emollit mores." (The *fideliter* may, perchance, have been accidentally omitted from their special curricula.) Nevertheless, if the obtaining of the "highest degree of medicine in the University of London" invariably conferred upon its possessor the power of personally exemplifying the conclusion of the quotation, "nec sinit esse *feros*," infinitely would its value, as exhibited in the "Physician who Thinks," and "P. X.," be enhanced in the eyes of, Sir, your very obedient servant,

November 20, 1848.

X. P.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As every medical man ought, I have for many years taken a strong interest in the subject of "medical reform," but from the apparent impossibility of reconciling so large a number of persons as belong to our profession to any particular plan, or to bring them to think alike, it has long appeared to me hopeless, and the whole question to be reduced *ad absurdum*, with small chance of its ever emerging from chaos.

I cannot, therefore, help expressing to you my gratification at the publication of the letter signed "X. P.," for I am sure every one must see, that by adopting its suggestion, the Gordian knot would be cut, the enigma solved. I think that all persons holding the double qualification, and of ten years' standing, should be admitted to the M.B. degree; and to do away with the semblance of injustice, that all others who have it at the time of the charter becoming a law, should be gradually admitted as they complete the period of ten years. All other persons should of course be subjected to examination.

I believe that if an appeal were made to the profession at once, through the columns of THE LANCET, every individual possessing the double qualification would send in his adhesion, and vote immediately; and by getting it done before parliament assemblies, something like substance may be presented to the committee, on which their recommendation to the House can be based, for after such an examination of the subject as they have had, some recommendation must go forth.

I am, &c.,

Penzance, November, 1848.

MACHAON.

ON THE USE OF ARSENIC IN AGRICULTURE.— POISONING BY ARSENIC, AND SYMPTOMS OF CHOLERA.—THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF THE GAME LAWS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In these days of alarm respecting cholera, any facts suggesting an occasional and hitherto unsuspected source of gastric irritation cannot fail to prove interesting to the medical practitioner; and as the circumstances I am about to communicate have an important bearing, not only upon the sanitary condition of our population, but upon the whole question of poisoning by arsenic, I need make no apology for laying them at once before the profession.

For some months past, in certain parts of Hampshire, partridges have been found dead in the fields, presenting a very remarkable appearance. Instead of lying prostrate on their side, as is usually the case with dead birds, they have been found sitting with their heads erect and their eyes open, presenting all the semblance of life. This peculiarity, which for some time had attracted considerable attention among sportsmen in the neighbourhood, led to no practical result until about ten days ago, when a covey of ten birds having been found nestled together in this condition, two of the birds, together with the seeds taken from the crops of the remaining eight, were sent up to London for examination. I was requested to undertake the investigation, and the result of my experiments I will now briefly detail.

I first examined the seeds taken from the crops of the birds, and detected, as I anticipated, a large quantity of arsenic. I will not take up your valuable space by detailing the various steps of my analysis; suffice it to say, that by Reinsch's process I speedily obtained a very thick incrustation of metallic arsenic; that I then applied the reduction test, and subsequently Marsh's test, and the tests of the ammonio-nitrate of silver and the ammonio-sulphate of copper, each of which gave its characteristic result.

Having thus ascertained the presence of arsenic in the food of the partridges, I proceeded to examine the birds themselves. They were plump and in good condition, but the cesophagus was in both cases highly inflamed throughout. The intestines were not inflamed, and presented no trace of ulceration, but they were remarkably empty and clean, almost as if they had been washed with water. May not this have been the result of diarrhoea?

I now, at the suggestion of my friend, Mr. Stone, proceeded to ascertain whether the flesh of birds so poisoned might not itself prove poisonous when eaten, and with this view I carefully cut the flesh off the breast and legs of one of the birds, and gave it, together with the liver, to a fine healthy cat. She ate it with avidity, but in about half an hour she began to vomit, and vomited almost incessantly for nearly twelve hours, during the whole of which time she evidently suffered excessive pain. After this, nothing would induce her to eat any more partridge. I kept her without food for twenty-four hours, but in vain; she resolutely refused to touch an atom more of the bird. This being the case, I gave her some beef and some milk, which she eagerly swallowed, proving beyond doubt that her instinct, and not her want of appetite, induced her to forego the dainty meal which had just been offered her.

I now felt satisfied, from my observation of the symptoms induced in the cat, borne out as they were by many facts we are acquainted with respecting the action of poisons, that the arsenic which the partridges had swallowed had been absorbed in sufficient quantity into the system to render the flesh of the birds poisonous, and to induce poisonous effects in any one partaking of it. However, I was anxious to leave nothing to hypothesis, and as the cat had so soon rejected by vomiting the greater part of the bird she had eaten, and pertinaciously refused to repeat the experiment by again partaking of the poisoned food, I was obliged to have recourse to chemical analysis, with the view of ascertaining with certainty the existence or non-existence of arsenic in the flesh itself. I therefore cut the flesh off one side of the breast of the other partridge, and after about an hour's boiling, I obtained by Reinsch's process a thin incrustation of metallic arsenic, thus demonstrating beyond question that the previous experiments had left little room for doubting. I was now anxious to ascertain the source of the poison, and a very little inquiry served to satisfy me on this point. I will not stop to go into many details which, though in themselves exceedingly interesting, have no direct bearing upon the question at issue. I will simply mention the leading facts—viz., that in Hampshire, Lincolnshire, and many other parts of the country, the farmers are now in the habit of steeping their wheat in a strong solution of arsenic previous to sowing it, with the view of preventing the ravages of the wire-worm on the seed, and of the smut on the plant when grown; that this process is found to be eminently successful, and is therefore daily becoming more and more generally adopted; that, even now, many hundreds weight of arsenic are yearly sold to agriculturists for this express purpose; that although the seed is poisonous when sown, its fruit is in no degree effected by the poison: that wherever this plan has been extensively carried out,* pheasants and partridges have been poisoned by eating the seed, and the partridges have been almost universally found sitting in the position I have already described; and lastly, that the men employed in sowing the poisonous seed, not unfrequently present the earlier symptoms which occur in the milder cases of poisoning by arsenic. This last fact I give on the authority of Dr. Heale, who up to the last two or three years practised at Staines, and has repeatedly had men under his care, suffering from symptoms due to this cause.

Now the facts just enumerated suggest several most important points for consideration. It is notorious that many of the dealers in game are supplied through the agency of poachers and others who have a direct pecuniary interest in supplying them with the largest possible number of birds. It is certain, moreover, that if men of this sort were to find a covey of partridges in a field, dead, but fresh and in good condition, they would not hesitate to send them with the remainder of their booty to the poulterer, who would as certainly, without suspicion, sell them to his customers. And after the experiments above detailed, there can be no reason-

* In a review on Mr. Taylor's work on Poisons, in the last October volume of the British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review, the reviewer states, that "in the spring of 1846, a great number of pheasants having been found dead in their preserve, their crops were removed and sent to us for analysis, and with them some young wheat, about six inches high, which had been grown from poisoned corn, and on which it was suspected that the birds had fed. The earth about the roots of the plants yielded distinct traces of arsenic, but the leaves were perfectly free from it."

able grounds for doubting that these birds, when eaten, would produce disagreeable and injurious—not to say poisonous—effects on those who partake of them. It is obvious, therefore, that in all cases of supposed cholera, or of suspicious bellyach, occurring at this season of the year, we shall do well to make particular inquiry as to whether our patient has recently partaken of pheasants or partridges purchased at a poulterer's: and it is further manifest, that in all cases of poisoning or suspected poisoning by arsenic, the fact of the persons having lately eaten of partridges and pheasants must form an important element in the inquiry, and must tend to cast a suspicion on the evidence adduced to prove a criminal intent in the administration of the poison. So that, in a medico-legal point of view, the question is one of the gravest import.

Secondly. If it should prove, on further inquiry, that the practice of steeping seed wheat in arsenic is, even indirectly, productive of injurious effects on our population, it may become, in these days of sanitary reform, a matter for the anxious consideration of the legislature, whether they should not adopt some measures to prevent the continuance of such a custom.

Thirdly. As in the event of a practice so destructive of game becoming universal, pheasants and partridges, in their wild state at least, must, at no distant day, become extinct in this country, it is a question whether landlords may not henceforth be induced to insert a clause in their leases, prohibiting the use of arsenic on their farms; while, on the other hand, it may be a question with those who are already weary of the protracted debates on the game laws, whether they should not allow them to die a natural death, by the gradual but inevitable destruction of the game it is the object of these laws to preserve.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

HENRY WILLIAM FULLER,
Half Moon-street, Assistant-Physician to, and Lecturer on Medical
Piccadilly, Dec. 1848. Jurisprudence at, St. George's Hospital.

* * Having received the above communication only a short time previously to going to press, we have, at some inconvenience, published it this week, as, in a medico-legal point of view, it refers to a subject of very great importance. The facts which Dr. Fuller has elicited with so much scientific tact and sagacity, will form very important additions to our works on state-medicine.—ED. L.

EXPULSION OF A QUACK FROM NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I trust that you will consider the following account of a recent anti-quackery onslaught at Newcastle of sufficient professional interest to obtain insertion in your columns; and beg to remain,

Your obedient servant,

Mosley-street, Newcastle,
Oct. 4, 1848.

C. R. LARKIN.

* * We must content ourselves with presenting to our readers an abridged history of the affair in question. A quack (named Lewis, it is said) lately endeavoured to impose upon the inhabitants of Newcastle by personating Mr. Yearsley, of London, and announcing, by means of posting-bills, (such as are, to the disgrace of our civic jurisdiction, allowed to be circulated by the pestiferous portion of society, of which the quacks form a part,) that he might be consulted every day "on all diseases of the ear." Mr. Yearsley, having been informed of this imposture, by Mr. Larkin, a respectable surgeon of Newcastle, forthwith wrote to the mayor of that town to acquaint him of the fraud, and to ask if he had any local means of redress. The Mayor of Newcastle, in his reply to Mr. Yearsley, states, "We have no by-law to punish the party, and the only remedy you have is to indict him, and bring an action for damages." The quack, however, had, at the time the mayor wrote, already abandoned the town, fairly beaten out of it by the praiseworthy and vigorous exertions of Mr. Larkin, who had fully exposed the fraud, by means of circulating public placards, from one of which we extract the following passage:—

"During the last week, a low, ignorant, illiterate impostor, whose alias and real name is Lewis, sporting a moustache on the upper, and an imperial on the nether lip, (and having no other pretensions to the notice of the public than this cherished

crop and carefully-nourished tuft of hair,) came to the town, advertised and placarded himself as 'Mr. Yearsley,' assumed the authorship of Mr. Yearsley's books, impudently pointed to the favourable criticisms upon them, and announced himself as a curer of deafness."

The success of the measures put in force will be best described in Mr. Larkin's own words, addressed to Mr. Yearsley:—

"DEAR SIR,—The quack and impudent impostor has absconded. We have driven him, covered with disgrace, amid sneers and derision, out of the town, to which, I undertake to say, he will never return.

"I have in every respect punctually complied with your directions. Upon the receipt of your letter, I lost no time in having 300 large bills printed, (one of which I inclose,) and conspicuously placarded wherever he had had his bills posted. I have similarly placarded North and South Shields; and was on the point of sending a man off to Sunderland, when I received notice of the impostor's departure. I also engaged a man, with placard in front and behind, to parade before the villain's door; and the result has been his ignominious flight.

"The fellow's real name, I understand, is Lewis. He came here from London, whither, I believe, he has returned.

"I am, my dear Sir, with sentiments of the highest respect, your faithful friend and obedient servant,

"Mosley-street, Newcastle,
Oct. 4, 1848."

"CHARLES ROBERT LARKIN.

We cannot dismiss the subject without alluding to the want of public spirit displayed by the local press on this occasion, as indicated in the postscript of a letter addressed to the Editor of THE LANCET by Mr. Larkin:—

"In this affair nothing could exceed the injustice of the newspapers. They refused to notice Mr. Yearsley's letter of remonstrance; would insert nothing but as a *charged advertisement*; and though the imposture had been made notorious to the whole neighbourhood, yet, out of mingled mercenary motives, and mean submission to the quacks, they have not made the slightest allusion to the affair. Nay, they positively refused to insert either Mr. Yearsley's caution, or my notice to the public, without such a mitigation of the language as would have taken away all the point and emphasis of both productions, and without a deposit of £40 as a security against any legal expenses that they might be exposed to, should at any time this miserable quack and impostor institute an action against them. The letter of Mr. Hernaman's clerk speaks for itself. The papers which refused my application were the *Newcastle Courant* and the *Newcastle Chronicle*. More on the baseness of their character I need not say.—C. R. L."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Should it be your pleasure to insert Mr. Larkin's communication, I hope you will kindly afford me the opportunity of publicly expressing to that gentleman my gratitude for his thoughtful and generous conduct in giving me, an entire stranger, timely intimation of what was going on, by which I was enabled, with his kind co-operation, to take such steps as led to the immediate discomfiture of the quack who had so impudently assumed my name. Permit me to hold up Mr. Larkin's conduct as a bright example of professional *esprit de corps* worthy of general imitation; and I feel sure every member of the profession will join you in the well-merited encomium you have yourself been pleased to pass upon that gentleman.

I am, Sir, your very faithful servant,

Savile-row, Oct. 1848.

JAMES YEARSLEY.

A BULLET SWALLOWED.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The publication of my communication in last week's LANCET has brought, by post, several letters from various parts of the country, and I take leave to thank my professional brethren for their kind attention and suggestions. Two alone, however, mention bullets; others speak of extraneous substances, but which have long been familiar to me, as having safely passed the alimentary canal. One gentleman mentions that his colleague was sent for to a child who had swallowed a bullet; he had her held by the heels, smacked her back smartly, and the bullet fell into a washing-basin placed beneath. The treatment I adopted appears to have been the one most generally recommended; and it was a farinaceous diet, without vegetables, and small doses of castor oil and sulphate of magnesia on alternate mornings.