

other instance a lady took a fancy to a black man, and although she had no connection with him, her children were half black and half white.

Mr. VERRALL thought that as frights produced abortion of the contents of the uterus, it was reasonable to expect that the same cause might also induce other effects on the foetus. Because some cases were related in which monsters were born and no fright had been experienced, that was no argument against its influence in other cases.

Dr. ADDISON would offer no opinion on the subject; but he thought that as we were ignorant of the effects of mental impression upon the physical frame, he thought we should receive all facts connected with the subject, and not attempt to put it down by ridicule. We had laughed at many things which we eventually had acknowledged to be true. He could not comprehend how the foetus could be affected by mental impressions made on the mother, yet he would admit facts which bore upon the point. He had seen the case of the malformed kitten alluded to by Dr. Wilks; the likeness to a parrot was complete. He had, however, known more remarkable instances than that. He recollected well the case of a poor, but respectable woman, who was frightened, in the earlier months of pregnancy, by a man with a scrag hand; she believed that her offspring would have the same deformity, and this really did occur. There was at present in the museum at Guy's a foetus exactly resembling a clown in full-dress, and in this case the mother had been much impressed with seeing a clown upon the stage, and fancied that her offspring would resemble him. He had no doubt that the mind of the mother affected the foetus in utero, but as to how far this effect might extend he would offer no opinion. Foetuses were well known to be liable to almost all the diseases which affected independent beings.

Dr. THOMSON should call the cases last related two singular coincidences, and doubted much if the resemblance to the clown in one of the instances, would strike others so forcibly as it had done Dr. Addison. Hundreds of children were born with scrag hands when their mothers had not been frightened. He considered we had no well-authenticated facts in support of the opinion of the mother influencing the formation of her offspring.

Dr. FIELD thought the father had as much influence as the mother in the peculiar formation of the offspring, but he did not remember any facts in point except that of Tristram Shandy.

MEDICAL WITNESSES AT INQUESTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—If you deem the following worthy of a place in *THE LANCET*, you will probably publish it. It is copied from the "*Carlisle Journal*" of January 5th, 1839, under the head of "*COUNTY ACCOUNTS—CORONERS.*"

"In presenting the accounts of Mr. Carrick, the Coroner, for the last quarter, Mr. Wybergh remarked that he found many cases in which payments had been made to *medical witnesses*, where the cause of death was so *apparent* that he did not see any necessity for such an expense to have been incurred. Mr. W. then instanced several cases in which he thought that medical evidence might have been dispensed with.

"Mr. Carrick, after explaining the circumstances, and showing the necessity for such evidence, in each instance, added that he had experienced much difficulty on the point, and would be very glad if *the Bench would lay down some rules for his guidance*. Mr. C. observed that in many instances the medical man was in attendance on his arrival, and when the jury expressed a wish to have that evidence taken, he did not see that he could with propriety refuse to *take the deposition or withhold the fee*; that he had not, in any case, acted *without a precedent*, as the magistrates would see, by the reports in the London papers, that medical evidence was called in *in almost every instance*, although the cause of death was proved beyond a possibility of doubt by other testimony.

"Several magistrates made some suggestions, which were by others held to be impracticable, and, ultimately, Mr. Carrick was desired to exercise his own discretion in all cases, but recommended to dispense with the assistance of the *medical profession* whenever he considered their evidence unnecessary."

The magistrate displays more acuteness of vision than intellect in the business before us. He seems to be as totally ignorant of the science of medical jurisprudence as he was of magisterial justice when he committed the pauper to a lunatic asylum. He sets but little value on medical evidence, although it is frequently the only means of eliciting the true cause of death in numerous instances; nay, more, the cause of death would frequently be overlooked, were it not for the scientific and searching investigations of medical men. Mr. Carrick, poor man, reflects but little on the degradation with which he is about to encumber our profession, when he condescends to solicit a bench of magistrates to lay down rules for his guidance as judge of a Coroner's Court. He also intimates that he does not act without a "*precedent*" in such cases, as the "*magistrates would see*, by the reports in

the London papers, that medical evidence was called in in almost every instance," &c. Would the worthy Coroner but read the London medical journals as well as the newspapers, the former would disclose to him facts sufficient to subvert this assertion. Were the magistrates at full liberty to regulate the administration of justice in the Coroner's Court, it is evident that medical witnesses would never be called in at all. This is just what they want. However, there is one thing self-evident, namely, that a tribunal of Cumberland magistrates is perfectly incapable of regulating the duties of a Coroner, since we learn, by public confession, that several of these civil dignitaries made suggestions, which others of their clan "held impracticable, and, ultimately, Mr. Carrick was requested to exercise his own discretion in all cases," &c. Where is the degradation of our profession to end, I would ask? Will it ever have a *terminus*? Is it not a prime dilemma we have got into now, that our medical opinions are never to be sought in evidence in a Coroner's Court, in this county, but at the discretion of the Coroner? Although we know that this functionary is frequently perfectly ignorant of knowledge the most useful to a Coroner—medical jurisprudence—yet a bench of Cumberland magistrates would have us to submit our professional privileges to the exercise and discretionary power of such a man as this. In conclusion, I wish to observe, that so long as the office of Coroner continues to be filled by members of the legal profession, no reform in it, calculated to benefit medical men, will ever take place. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

E. WILKINSON.

Aspatria, Cumberland,
February, 1839.

CORONERS' INQUESTS.

LETTER FROM MR. HUTCHINSON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—At the present crisis, that of establishing the important principle of the superiority of a medically-educated Coroner, above every other attribute appertaining to the duties of the office, I can readily conceive you might be induced to admit within the pages of your Journal the communication of your correspondent of Saturday last, signed "An Elector of Middlesex;" however, as that communication has been given publicity to, I trust your sense of justice will afford to an old subscriber to your Journal an opportunity of reply.

That the writer of the article in question is a member of the medical profession I doubt not, from the style and terms in which his language is couched; and he certainly

exhibits a good share of self-complacency and boldness of inference in setting down this case as one of fatal pneumonia, with coexistent hysteria, his opinion being drawn from the meagre evidence of an incorrect newspaper report, when a full medical detail might have been had (*vide LANCET*, Dec. 8. 1838, given by your own reporter from the London Medical Society); and asserts his absurd opinion, too, in contradistinction to the testimony of two medical practitioners who saw and attended the patient, and the concurring opinion of the Coroner and jury impanelled on the inquest, who came to the unanimous conclusion that the case was one of hydrophobia.

If the "Elector of Middlesex" will take the trouble to peruse attentively the report published in the Number of *THE LANCET* above referred to, I think it might act as an antidote to his incredulity, and serve to show the propriety of the verdict given by the jury, upon whom fell the duty of investigating the cause of the poor woman's death.

The covert and malicious design to undermine the reputation of a brother practitioner by the dastardly subterfuge of an anonymous communication, and by distorting the facts and circumstances of the case, must be too palpable to need comment from me, farther than I must enter my protest against such an unfair and uncharitable mode of procedure to any member of a liberal and enlightened profession.

In conclusion, allow me to observe, if your correspondent requires further proof for the correction of his incredulity than that given in the Number of *THE LANCET* already mentioned, in the formation of an opinion as to the nosological position of the disease presented in this distressing case, and to enable him to draw some pathological distinction between mere *pulmonary engorgement* and organic alterations of *pneumonia*, and the difference of the other features of this case from those of the protean affection, hysteria, I shall feel happy at any future period to afford him, upon a proper and gentlemanly application, all the aid in my power in furtherance of so desirable an object. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

FRANCIS HUTCHINSON.

Farringdon-street, Feb. 12, 1839.

MEDICAL CORONERS' ELECTION FUND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I beg to inform you that I have forwarded ten guineas to the bank of Messrs. Coutts and Co., in furtherance of Mr. Wakley's election for Coroner; and that I am empowered to add five guineas on the part of the students at Sydenham College.

I send you this information thinking that you may publish a list of subscribers in the