

information on the subject, I shall be happy to furnish it, and would also give the address of one of the medical gentlemen who advised the lady to have the tumour removed with the knife.

I am, Sir, yours very respectfully,
E. S. BLUNDELL, M.D.

18, Lower Seymour-street,
Portman-Square, August 19th, 1834.

ALLEGED DEATH FROM TAKING

"MORISON'S PILLS."

— Fungar vice cotis, acutum
Reddere quæ ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.
HOR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In consequence of a very wretched statement which appeared in the Worcester papers of last week, purporting to be an account of an inquest held here on the body of a young girl who was killed by taking two of "*Morison's pills*," I consider that it is my duty to give rather a plainer account of the transaction than that which was poked into the corners of those two very respectable prints. If they had given a fair account of the matter, I should not have intruded myself on your notice, and I beg to apologize for so doing.

Rebecca Cross, æt. 15, was quite well on Thursday, July the 10th. Her mother imagined that she required some aperient medicine, sent her to purchase a box of "*Morison's pills*," gave her two at bedtime, and took two herself. The mother suffered great pain all night, but got better in the course of the following day. Her daughter was also in great pain all the night, as well as on the day after, during which time the pills operated with violence three times. The following night was one of great suffering to her. On Saturday morning I was called in, and found her labouring under severe enteritis. The most active treatment was immediately pursued. In consequence of my having formed a very unfavourable opinion of the case in the first instance, I requested my intelligent friend Mr. Woodward to see the patient with me, which he was kind enough to do, as well as to attend her in conjunction with my assistant, Mr. Robertson, while I was at Birmingham, at the annual meeting of the "Provincial Medical and Surgical Association." However, our united efforts proved unavailing; our patient died on the morning of the 30th, and I, in the presence of the before-named gentlemen, examined the body about thirty hours after death.

The deceased was emaciated to the last

degree. The abdomen was enormously swollen, and on opening into the cavity of the peritoneum an immense quantity of gas escaped. The whole of the intestines were glued together, and a great proportion of their contents had escaped into the cavity of the peritoneum, the whole surface of which had been intensely inflamed. Between the stomach and liver there was a large quantity of purulent matter, which was confined by the adhesion of those viscera, and there was a cavity on the under side of the left lobe, large enough to contain an egg. At the head of the cæcum there was a hole, through which I passed my thumb without difficulty. Distant from that about six or eight inches, in the colon, there was one still larger, and the arch of that viscus was of a greenish-black colour, and could be torn with the greatest facility. The whole of the mucous membrane was studded with ulcers of various sizes, and, upon the whole, it presented such a mass of disease as I had never before seen.

Under these circumstances, I did consider it my duty to write to the coroner on the subject, who instantly summoned (through the proper officer) a jury, which met on the 31st. The jury consisted of *eighteen* individuals, who, with the exception of three or four, were highly respectable. Those whom I may perhaps except were individuals who had taken large quantities of the pills, and fancied they had derived great benefit therefrom. One, whom I may mention, was a labourer who was sent on purpose to occupy a place on the jury, and, consequently, was a very unfit person for the office. I may also mention that the leader of the party was the brother-in-law of the person who sells the pills. I gave it decidedly as my opinion that the pills were the cause of death. Mr. Woodward did the same. The majority of the jury did not require any further evidence, but as they could not agree as to their verdict, they were, necessarily, locked up for a considerable time. However, at last twelve agreed that the said Rebecca Cross died in consequence of taking "*Morison's pills*," and this must appear to any unprejudiced person to be an honest verdict. I am, Sir, your very obedient servant,

FRANCIS DAVIES.

Pershore, Aug. 13th, 1834.

P.S.—In reading over my friend Mr. Sheward's letter, I find there an allusion to some conversation that we had at my house at the latter end of June. I certainly then told him that I fully intended bringing the matter at issue before the Provincial Medical Association at Birming-

ham, but that from circumstances which occurred subsequently to our meeting I did not do so. It is my intention, however, to obtain the opinion of the Association next year at Oxford. It would be well if the matter was set at rest, as to whether it is legitimate and consistent that physicians should meet *sow-gelders* in consultation, and form an alliance with * * *, thereby contributing to the utmost of their power to annihilate and destroy the regular practitioner * * * "What advantageth it me" that I have been three years in London at a heavy expense studying my profession, if individuals, who have never attended a single lecture, are to be taken by the hand, sanctioned and *patronised* by our leading physicians?

Pecuniam in loco negligere
Interdum maximum est lucrum.—TER.

SUPPOSED

DECOMPOSITION OF SULPHUR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—About a week ago I had put into my hands, by a friend (a medical gentleman), the three numbers of THE LANCET, containing Mr. Hiley's Essay on the Atomic Theory. That excellent essay I read with delight; but was not a little surprised at Mr. Hiley's remark, that "till very lately sulphur was considered by all chemists as a simple element;" for, like the generality of scientific chemists, I did not know that any satisfactory evidence existed that sulphur had yet been decomposed. He, however, goes on to say, "the experiments of Mr. J. M. Corbett, inserted in the 515th number of the *Mechanic's Magazine*, seem to prove that it ought not to rank among elementary substances any longer; for, according to the statements of that gentleman, he has effected its decomposition by means of lightning." Mr. Hiley then transcribes the following passage from the *Mechanic's Magazine*:—"I (Mr. Corbett) enclosed some sulphur in a glass tube, of two feet long by one inch in diameter. I passed a very fine spiral wire through the sulphur, and then fixed the whole in a metallic lightning conductor, which was insulated above the sulphur apparatus. The glass was so contrived, that any air coming from it would pass into a receiver placed for its reception. I now waited for the lightning to pass down the rod, and on visiting the spot, I found the spiral wire fused, and the lower part of the sulphur changed into a powder as white as snow, and my

receiver full of hydrogen. I have named this new substance thiogen. Its specific gravity is 1.707."

I have referred to the *Mechanic's Magazine*, and found the original passage; by which I find that the apparatus was arranged two months before a shock of lightning passed down the conductor.

Now, by this passage, Mr. Corbett so very imperfectly describes the experiment by which he supposes sulphur to have been decomposed, that it appears to me highly premature to conclude from its result that sulphur is not a simple but a compound body.

Had Mr. Corbett given a very particular statement (which in a case bearing such an important aspect is most essentially requisite) of the manner in which he arranged his apparatus; of the quantity of sulphur put into the tube; of the quantity of sulphur changed into a white powder; of the quantity of hydrogen gas found in the receiver; and, above all, whether he effectually defended the sulphur, and the interior of his apparatus, from the acquisition of water during the two months he had to wait for the electrical discharge; we should have been better able to judge whether the hydrogen was actually disengaged from the sulphur, or it resulted from the decomposition of water which had accidentally got into the way of the electrical discharge.

Until assured that water was effectually shut out of the interior of that part of the apparatus through which the electrical discharge went, I cannot think that Mr. Corbett's statement proves sulphur to be a compound body. If water was not effectually shut out, he would undoubtedly find hydrogen in his receiver, from the decomposition of water: and, if the hydrogen resulted from the decomposition of water, there must have been some oxygen disengaged from that hydrogen. Would it not, therefore, be as fair to presume that the white powder which Mr. Corbett calls "*thiogen*" was a combination of oxygen and sulphur, perhaps the protoxide, as that it was a constituent part of sulphur?

I make these few remarks, in order that the notion of sulphur being a compound body may not rest too heavily on the minds of those who entertain it, until the matter is attested by further and unequivocal experiments. As 14 months have now elapsed since Mr. Corbett announced the matter, we may suppose that from experiments which, in the interim, he has probably been making, he will, ere long, either confirm the reality of the conclusion he drew from his first experiment, or say in what the cause of error laid.