

To sum up the grievances which we require redressing:—

1. The right of reporters to be present at the meetings of Council.
2. The removal of the remaining objectionable restrictions, which prevent Fellows being members of the Council.
3. The power for Fellows to summon by requisition a meeting of Fellows and Members at the College, for the purpose of discussing matters of public policy in connexion with the institution.

The College is not the exclusive property of the Council, but belongs to the Fellows and Members.

It is my intention to address a letter to the president relative to this subject, with a request that he will lay it before the next meeting of Council; and in the meantime I shall be glad if Fellows and Members willing to assist me in obtaining the above concessions will at once communicate with me.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
Spalding, Nov. 2, 1868. EDWIN MORRIS, M.D., F.R.C.S.

## LONGEVITY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I am stimulated by the remarks of Dr. Dickinson on Longevity, in your last number, to make a short reply upon the two points of his letter. First, as to the reputed ages of his patriarchs there is much to be questioned. Secondly, as to the way in which Dr. Dickinson handles the matter of longevity I should like to say a good deal more also.

First. My friend Dr. Dickinson, than whom no one has a more accurate sense of the value of evidence, yet in this instance seems to speak unwarily. There is as much evidence for the reputed ages of Jacob and Methuselah as for those of Jenkins, Parr, Agnes Skuner, and the rest. None of these cases will bear any searching investigation; that is, I mean, if disbelieved, as I disbelieve them, on general grounds, there is no sufficient counterproof from the particulars to support any special instance. The mind of old people becomes as generative of myth as the mind of children, and is, moreover, not merely mythopoeitic in itself, but, like Falstaff in his wit, is the cause of myth in others. All centenarian stories are found to coexist in time or place with defective registers; and the memories of old people and their gossips are really of no value as testimony. I think it not only possible, but probable, that a few persons have reached the term of their century; but if Dr. Dickinson tries, as I have done, to prove it in particular instances, he will assuredly fail. I lately examined a man for an Insurance Company who deposed to the ages of several members of his family as being over or about one hundred years, and he stated the fact as a notorious one in his district. I found he was speaking truthfully in a subjective sense, but he has been unable to bring me any sufficient objective facts in support of his belief. It is clear that when a person passes fourscore years he has outlived all the control of witnesses, and may imagine, or have imagined for him, any age he likes; and old people do enjoy being very old.

But I must hasten on to my second point. Dr. Dickinson says, "few men die of old age." Now, setting apart accidents from without, it would seem to me more true to say that all men die of old age. And this I say, not seeking after any paradox or idle ingenuity, but as desirous of opposing the too common notion—the notion encouraged by Flourens—that there is a certain *ideal term* to which man's life ought to attain if not "cut off" by accident within or without. It is very hard for us to cast off our old clothes, and we all have so long swaddled our ignorance in phrases taken from the idealist schools that we find it hard to strip our limbs. Even Dr. Dickinson seems to me here to be walking somewhat slipshod. Life is not an organism alone, nor a medium alone, but it is a certain play between the two; and I need not be careful to admit that the more complex the relation between the two, the greater will be the *average* work done in the given group of organisms. But human germs do not set out like cannon balls, calculated for a certain range. The germ may rather be looked upon as capable of spinning a certain network out of itself, and with the material it finds; and, external chances apart, it spins such a web as it may, and in such and such a time as it may, and there is an end. "Pathology" is a mere word of convenience; and, convenient as it is, I often think we should be better without it; at any rate we might do well to leave it off for one day a week, as Dr. Druitt recommends the artisan to do with his beer. It is *physiology* which fills our museums; there we see how men have ripened

each one in his own way, not how he "has succumbed" to an enemy. In answer, then, to the question, "What are the definite and material changes which occur as the result simply of age?" I reply, while standing with Dr. Dickinson in the beautiful new museum of St. George's, Look around,—"*πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφή μὲν*." Exclude all injuries from without, and the rest are "the results simply of age." Our mistake lies in confounding an *average* with a *generalisation*,—two very different things. The average age of mankind is measured by a certain number of revolutions of the earth, but the age of any particular man, though of course noted on the average system, is, physiologically, the amount and kind of tissue change he has gone through; so that to the physiologist no two men of forty are of the same age. The fountain of life rises, crests, and falls in different degrees for us all, and if, to return to the old metaphor, the web often seems coarsely and rudely unravelled, it is because it has been done in haste; but it is none the less unravelled because it has been done uniformly, secretly, and silently. When Dr. Dickinson, therefore, puts his question in the form of an analogy which I think is misleading,—when he asks, "What stops the machine?" I begin to think that he is too able and too influential a physician not to be contradicted promptly.

I am sure he will hold me excused, and I hope, Sir, that you will also.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
Leeds, Nov. 1, 1868. T. CLIFFORD ALLBUTT.

## THE ELASTIC PESSARY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to a paper, with an engraving, by Dr. Murray, of Newcastle, in last week's LANCET, on an Elastic Pessary, which is identical in principle with one which my friend and colleague, Dr. Protheroe Smith, has had in use with considerable success some twenty years, and which I have myself used with great satisfaction for more than a dozen years. Dr. P. Smith wrote a paper on the subject, which was read at the meeting of the British Medical Association at Oxford this year, where the pessary was exhibited. It has a great advantage also, I think, over the one proposed by Dr. Murray, inasmuch as it is moulded in gutta-percha, without any wire, and derives its spring from the natural elasticity of that substance, and can give rise therefore to no danger from any piece of wire protruding through its covering.

As Dr. Smith is now on the continent, will you kindly insert this note from me.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Harley-street, Cavendish-square, JOHN SCOTT.  
Nov. 4th, 1868.

## MANCHESTER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

THE Medical School inaugurated its session by an introductory address from Dr. Simpson, which has since been published in the form of a pamphlet. It contains, as is usual in addresses of this kind, some excellent advice to students, and it may be said that Dr. Simpson has handled an already hackneyed subject in a very creditable manner.

The death-rate of our city still continues high, and has formed the subject of an excellent report by our officer of health to the City Council. He remarks that diarrhoea has been very prevalent this year, and has been attended by a proportionally greater mortality than during any similar period for the last thirty years. The number of deaths in the district from this cause during the 39 weeks from the 1st of January last was 989, whilst that for the whole of 1866 was 621; for 1865, 757; for 1864, 417; for 1863, 492; for 1862, 310; for 1861, 645. Mr. Leigh also draws attention to the fact that there is a large amount of fever in the city, chiefly supervening on the diarrhoea. "Fever," he remarks, "generally succeeds to it, from the fact of people being much reduced in health and strength by it, and ready to succumb to the deleterious influences around them. Of these influences I must again refer to those resulting from the state of the ash-pits and privies at the backs of the houses, which may at a comparatively trifling cost, when the object to be attained is considered, be materially improved."

The scheme for the erection of new buildings for the Owens College is progressing, nearly £90,000 being already available for the purpose. Some hope is entertained that the medical school will be absorbed in the College, and several medical