

asserted—viz., that he is not accustomed to use the instrument unnecessarily, or in a profligate manner, as the whole tenour of Dr. Simpson's observations would lead the reader to infer.

Finally. Whatever statements the patient may inadvertently have made to Dr. Simpson, either in reply to leading, inquisitorial, unprofessional, and perhaps imperfectly understood inquiries, that did not concern him, I cannot be answerable for. All I can declare, and that most solemnly, is, that no lady was ever treated with more consideration, kindness, delicacy, and decorum, than the party in question.

I have the honour to remain, Sir,

Yours respectfully,

E. W. DUFFIN.

Langham-place, Oct. 6, 1851.

DR. SIMPSON'S UTERINE SUPPORTER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I trust I may, without being considered in the light of a partisan, state the little experience I have in the utility of one of the novelties introduced to the notice of the profession, for the treatment of certain uterine affections, by Dr. Simpson. I allude, in particular, to his "uterine supporter," or the "infernal impaler" of Dr. Isaac Irons. The term "uterine supporter" appears to me an unfortunate one, and evidently has had the effect of misleading many—Dr. Irons amongst the number—who have had no opportunity of getting practically acquainted with its mode of action in appropriate cases. The instrument, in reality, is not a supporter, in the more obvious sense of the term. It is a contrivance to prevent the recurrence of the lateral deflections of which the organ has shown itself susceptible, and not to *support* a prolapsus.

Now as regards my own experience in the matter. Three cases of retroversion have come under my notice in the course of the past year, when the supporter performed its orthomatric duty with great comfort to the patients, who had already submitted to the usual expedients in such cases, without material advantage. It is very seldom, indeed, that we have not at the Hospital for Women several in or out-patients wearing the uterine segment of this orthomatron; and it is but fair to state, that not a single instance has come to my knowledge, where, if any inconvenience was sustained, that inconvenience, never distressing, did not speedily disappear after its removal.

Isaac Irons being, as I mentioned, practically unacquainted with the instrument in question, has been led away under the erroneous impression that the uterus was stuck on a piece of metal, something like the hat on his own head; but the truth is, the instrument will not sustain the organ at all on such a principle; and it only requires a careful consideration of its construction, with due reference to the axis of the womb in situ, soon to satisfy an unprejudiced mind that the term *impaler*, saying nothing about its fearful adjunct, *infernal*, is a very unjustifiable appellation.

If it were not for the spirit so sadly displayed between these two champions respectively of the old and new systems of handling the opposite sex, tending, perhaps not unnaturally, to draw the unfavourable notice of the profession on those appearing to concern themselves in it, I should be tempted to bring forward many other reasons for believing that this invention of Dr. Simpson's, with other inventions, not Dr. Simpson's, which we have frequent opportunities of testing at the hospital, are anything save diabolical contrivances.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

HENRY SAVAGE, M.D.,

Physician to the Hospital for Women,
Orchard-street.

Gloucester-place, Portman-square,
October, 1851.

MEDICAL ASSISTANTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The pages of THE LANCET have always been open to the complaints of medical assistants, and, very much to its credit, your journal has almost always shown a bias in their favour. In your number for October 4th, there are a couple of letters severally written by gentlemen who describe themselves as such, calling in question a communication of mine contained in your impression for the 13th ult.

It is somewhat remarkable that both these letters dwell most pointedly upon that which is the root of all evil—money. Yes, gentlemen, I did say, and more than this, do again repeat, that £30 or £40 per annum is sufficient remuneration for a medical assistant; and I will tell you why: it is because the majority of practices *can not* allow more; and further, I will venture to predict that as long as the practice of medicine

and surgery in this country holds together in its present form, the salaries, as a general rule, will not be more abundant. But there is something besides salary to be considered: I look upon every *bond fide* engagement of this kind worth from £80 to £100 a year to any young surgeon, for most certainly he must be very economical to be enabled to live in equal style and comfort upon such a sum, finding his own table and house room. The advantages in a professional point of view have been dwelt upon; but there are others. He has few trials except those of his own making, he has neither thought nor care for the morrow, no tax of any kind touches him, there is often a pupil to assist in dispensing, and in provincial practice a horse is generally kept for his express use. He certainly practises among the poor, but so do all junior practitioners; and is not disease the same whether in the pauper or the peer? There are many medical men now in practice who can look back with pleasure to bygone days when they were assistants; lasting friendships have been thus formed, and ties of a still closer nature have sometimes been the happy result. Very many in the profession insist on their sons acting in this capacity, well knowing its benefits. One correspondent sees fit to cast a libel upon general practitioners, and distinctly affirms that their treatment of assistants is dishonourable: this I stoutly deny, and there are thousands who will bear me out in asserting that the contrary is most certainly the case. That there are, here and there, some scurvy fellows who treat their assistants, as they treat their patients, very badly, it is impossible to deny, but it is base injustice to condemn the many for the sins of the few; for I would ask, are not the assistants of to-day the practitioners of future years, and is it likely that these same would act a dishonourable part towards their junior brethren? In conclusion I would add, that the letter in question was as duly considered as it was carefully worded, and the advice given is still recommended, notwithstanding the polite insinuations of A. T. C., or the dyspeptic grumbings of Experientia.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Faversham, October, 1851.

W. N. SPONG.

CHEMISTRY AND ITS ERRORS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have irrefutably shown, in my pamphlets,* and in papers which you have done me the favour to publish in THE LANCET, that water alone cannot produce the hydrogen and oxygen gases, and consequently that the alleged decomposition of water is decidedly a groundless assertion, arising from a total misapprehension of Lavoisier's experiment. Having many years since doubted the possibility of decomposing water, I most carefully and anxiously examined and considered the experiments of Cavendish and Priestly (in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society), as well as of Lavoisier, and also the subsequent ones of Dr. Wollaston and Sir H. Davy, bearing upon the subject; and the conclusion I have drawn for this investigation, and which I unequivocally and confidently assert must be ultimately admitted by scientific men, is that water has never been decomposed. I also unhesitatingly and with equal confidence assert, that from the same experiments it is clearly to be deduced that a METAL is an earth, *sui generis*, combined with electric matter—not merely that a metal is a conductor of electricity, but that the latter is chemically united to, and associated with, the earth, and that its metallic lustre, ductility, malleability, &c., is due to the electricity, which endues the earth with a seeming vitality.† It is also to be deduced that a metallic oxide is the union of the earth with oxygen after the exclusion of the electric matter, and which, unlike the oxygen, is, as far as we know, an imponderable substance.

The same experiments will be also found to establish the fact that oxygen and the electric matter are antagonistic elements, and are therefore never both found combined and in union with the same substance or base; but it appears that each element is able to eliminate the other, from any matter with which it may be united, as either happens to preponderate in quantity, and to be applied and directed to the other with that object. It follows, therefore, that when an acid is applied to a metal by which an oxidation of it is effected, that such oxidation goes on, *pari passu*, with the loss which the metal sustains of electric matter. The notion at present entertained that hydrogen and oxygen *unite* to form water, is

* Published by Ridgway, Piccadilly.

† If the definition of the vital principle be its independence of rest, electricity must be it, or its nearest ally.