Soden, Mr. Bartrum, Mr. Ormond, Mr. Godfrey, Mr. George, Mr. Hensley, Dr. Daniell, Mr. Norman, and Mr. Church, Bath; Mr. Fewster, Thornbury; Mr. Flower, Chilcompton; Mr. Crang, Timsbury; Mr. Allen, St. George's; Mr. Vicary, Warminster; Dr. Fox, Dr. F. Fox, Mr. Morgan, Mr. Godfrey, Mr. Estlin, Mr. Helling, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Surrage, Dr. Prichard, Mr. James, Mr. Colthurst, Mr. Wilson, Dr. Budd, Mr. Mayor, and Mr. Ruddock, Bristol.

The chair was taken by the President, Mr. George, of Bath, who, after returning thanks for the kindness and attention shown to him during the past year, resigned it to Mr. Estlin, of Bristol, President elect.

The President's address consisted of a passing allusion to the Medical Reform Bill, cursory remarks upon the Health of Towns Commission, the New Lunacy Bill, the *Provincial Journal*, and a few minor subjects; and a long but very interesting exposure of the fallacies and follies of Mesmerism, which will shortly appear in the Journal.

The Secretary read a report of the transactions of the Society during the past year.

Mr. Ormond, of Bath, was appointed President elect.

Some ordinary business having been then transacted, a long conversation ensued upon the question of Medical Reform.

Messrs. Wilson, Godfrey, and Flower, thought the General Council were to blame in not having taken a more prominent attitude upon this subject. The President believed they met with such a diversity and variableness of opinion in the Association, as to be unable to take any decided course, without shewing weakness. Dr. Prichard thought the withdrawal of the bill a happy event; he saw no need of any legislative interference with the profession; they were never better educated than at present, and if they could not render themselves valued and respected, no law would make them so. Dr. Budd supported these views, and thought his brethren were too anxious to connect themselves with Universities, and attached too great consequence to titles; they should now stand on their own merits. Dr. Daniel could not agree with Dr. Budd: he thought university honors a great stimulus. All, however, seemed to agree in considering the course adopted by the College of Surgeons in regard to the fellowship, an unjust and mistaken one.

A long conversation then took place upon the following resolution, proposed by Mr. Colthurst, and seconded by Mr. Allen, which was eventually unanimously carried:—"It being the opinion of this meeting, that it would be advantageous to the character and interest of the Association, for the annual volume to be amalgamated with the Journal, resolved that a suggestion to this effect be made to the general Council."

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MODE OF CONDUCTING CORONER'S INQUESTS.

By JONATHAN TOOGOOD, M.D., Bridgewater.

The duty of Coroner is a vitally important subject. It involves the morals of the community—it concerns the lives of us all, and demands our best attention. In the arbitrary exercise of their office, coroners frequently refuse an investigation into the cause of

death, when absolutely necessary, and record verdicts at variance with the evidence and in direct contradiction to facts, which a patient examination would develop. But this is not at all extraordinary, when it is remembered that this important office is too often held by low ignorant men, who are totally unfitted for it by their education or acquirements, and who seek it to supply the deficiency of income, which the failure of their original occupation, either from want of ability or industry, has occasioned.

If additional proofs were required to establish a fact to which I have repeatedly called the public attention, namely, that inquests held by coroners are often solemn farces and mere mockeries of justice, the case related by Mr. William Trevor, in the last number of the Journal, will be found sufficient for the purpose. The necessity of making *post-mortem* examinations in all doubtful cases is too obvious to be again insisted on, and I hold it to be the imperative duty of a coroner to direct such examination to be instituted, unless there exists sufficient apparent cause of death to satisfy the jury. But the truth is, the fear of the Court of Quarter Sessions is before the eyes of the coroner, and his bill is too often kept down by the rejection of the most important witness; the purse of the public is treated with more respect than their lives. The reason assigned by the coroner for the western division of this county for not ordering a *post-mortem* examination in a case, the result of which proved that it would have been of the greatest consequence, and might in all probability have been the means of preventing the commission of subsequent murders, was, that "the magistrates were particular as to the expenses." The same feeling seems to have influenced the conduct of the coroner for Devon, who is reported to have said that he was acting "according to the instructions of the magistrates." If ever there was a case in which medical testimony was necessary, surely it was in that of Elizabeth Tapp, who is stated to have taken something which is supposed to have been corrosive sublimate on Sunday, and which occasioned her death after lingering for four days, and it is added also that she was pregnant. As no examination was made, neither of these facts were proved, and the only person who could have deposed to them was the surgeon who attended her during the whole time, who informed the coroner that the deceased had communicated to him "what she had taken, and why she took it." The only proof of any poison having been taken is the evidence of Elizabeth Quick, who picked up a bottle the next morning from under the bed, "with something written upon it, like that now produced," which was nearly empty. Tapp said, "That is the bottle the stuff came out of that I took;" and on Elizabeth Quick enquiring what was on it, Tapp said, "I wrote poison upon it."

The Coroner briefly summed up, but did not read over the evidence to the jury, who returned a verdict of *felo-de-se*.

I agree entirely with the Editor of the *Provincial Journal*, "that if the report be correct, it is evident not only that the case was not duly investigated, but that the verdict, whether in accordance with the evidence or otherwise, was not the finding of the jury, and consequently that any ulterior proceedings adopted upon it were illegal."

The conduct of the Coroner appears to have been rash, extraordinary, and very reprehensible. He rudely refuses to take the evidence of the surgeon, which in all probability would have cleared up much of the doubt which surrounded the case, induced the jury to have returned a different verdict, and spared the relatives of this unfortunate young woman an additional painful shock; and assumes that corrosive sublimate was taken, stating to the jury that three grains would destroy any man, and that any one who did not know that, must be a fool and a blockhead.

I do not presume to know what experience this functionary may have had in cases of this kind, but I know that those eminent toxicologists, Christison and Taylor, do not agree in that opinion, and a case has occurred in my own practice in which the exhibition of ten times that quantity was followed by the recovery of the patient. The law of Coroner, as it stands at present, is imperfect, unsuited to the times in which we live, and requires amendment.

JONATHAN TOOGOOD.

Bridgewater, July 12, 1845.

CORONER'S INQUESTS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND
SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

I was strongly induced, on reading a very able letter in the "Times" a few weeks back, emanating from a no less excellent authority,—I mean Dr. Toogood, of Bridgewater,—on the mode of conducting coroner's inquests in this county, and more especially referring to that held on one of the victims of the late Sarah Freeman, to have corroborated a portion of his statement by reciting two cases which occurred to myself, but which I subsequently relinquished the idea of, hoping some abler pen than my own would supply from their own experience some additional facts, starting enough to attract public attention to the subject.

Your insertion of an account copied from an Exeter paper, of an inquiry held at West Anstey, published by Mr. Trevor, of Dulverton, has induced me to request the favour of your admitting a report of them; and though sorry for the treatment that gentleman has experienced, I am very far from regretting the steps he has taken, in so ably vindicating the demand, both of the common feelings of humanity, and public justice. The judicial conduct of our coroner, Mr. Caines, is too well known for it to be supposed I could on any occasion complain of any want of personal courtesy; and I am convinced the allowance of these twenty-one shilling fees to the doctors, with the "pavor oculo imperiosus," has frequently fettered and prevented him from receiving at times the only real evidence which can, with any exactness, guide twelve unprofessional men to a just and satisfactory verdict.

The two cases to which I have before alluded are these:—

The wife of a respectable farmer was taken suddenly ill; on arriving at the house, I found she had died a few minutes before. Of course an inquest was necessary, and concluding my presence would be required, I made a point of attending at the time appointed, when the worthy coroner asked me who

sent for me? I replied, "No one." He then said he was obliged to be so very particular in receiving the doctor's evidence, being often found fault with for allowance of fees; but that he would, if I retired, ask the jury if they wanted me. On being recalled, he informed me the gentlemen could do without my evidence. After expressing my surprise at this announcement, and doubting the possibility of their ascertaining the cause of death, I returned home uncertain. The jury agreed, and the county of Somerset was saved at most two guineas.

The second case was that of an infant, whom the parents, on waking one morning, found dead, and lying in such a position, that it could not have been overlaid by either. From the minutest inquiry I could gain nothing; nevertheless, the jury found a verdict; the doctor was not sent for; and what the poor child died of I never knew.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES KEYS PARKINSON.

Milverton, July 12, 1845.

TREATMENT OF AN ERUPTIVE DISEASE OF THE SCALP BY A DRUGGIST: DEATH OF TWO CHILDREN: TRIAL FOR MAN- SLAUGHTER.

John Welch, aged 35, a chemist and druggist, was charged with the manslaughter of Jane Genever, and on another indictment with the manslaughter of Emma Genever, at Hagley, Worcestershire, in the month of May last. He was also charged with manslaughter on the coroner's inquisition. Prisoner had been admitted to bail.

Mr. Whitmore opened the case for the prosecution, stating the facts. The prisoner is a chemist and druggist at Stourbridge; Jane and Emma Genever were children of a labourer at Hagley, and having caught some disease in their heads, the mother applied to the prisoner for something to put on their heads. The disease was presumed to be ringworm; and the prisoner made up a prescription. The mother followed his directions, the result of which was the death of the two children.

Mrs. Sarah Genever, being sworn, deposed—I am the wife of James Genever, a labourer, at Hagley. I had three little children—Jane, Emma, and Sarah. I had observed a disorder on their heads in April last; it was worst in the two younger ones, the deceased. On the 11th of April I took them to prisoner's shop; he is a druggist and seedsman. He looked at their heads, and gave me a box of ointment and powders; the ointment to be rubbed on night and morning, and the powders to be taken every other night. I followed his directions on two of my children at first, and on the 18th I went to his shop again. There did not appear much difference in the children, although the prisoner said he thought the disease was killed, and that they had better take a little more to make all safe. He then gave me some powders for the third child. He told me to bring a small phial, and the children, next week. I did so, and the children then seemed in good health. He said their heads were perfectly sound. He