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UNQUALIFIED PRACTITIONERS.

THE proceedings at an inquest held on the body of an infant at Castleford, by Dr. Grabham, coroner, are instructive, and suggest some points of great importance to the medical profession. We are glad to see that the coroner took up a decided line respecting unqualified practitioners. The case which elicited from Dr. Grabham the very strong remarks which are credited to him by the newspapers will, we trust, attract the attention of the General Medical Council. Dr. Kemp, a registered medical man, attended an infant for laryngismus stridulus; but the child becoming worse, it was taken by the parents to a Mr. Jackson, who, though practising, is not a legally qualified medical man, and had not his name on his door; the parents of the child were, nevertheless, under the impression that he was a regular doctor. Jackson treated the child for three weeks till its death, and then certified that the child died of pertussis and convulsions, and signed the death certificate "J. T. Jackson, L.M.D." This certificate was objected to by the registrar, and Dr. Kemp, who had not seen the child for three weeks before its death, properly refused to certify—hence the inquest. According to the report in the *Pontefract Telegraph*, the coroner, at the outset, said that he should call Dr. Kemp, but not Jackson, as a witness, as he could not recognise the latter as a medical practitioner, but, if Jackson thought fit, he might volunteer a statement; nor did the coroner order a *post mortem* examination, as it could, he said, throw no light on the cause of death, for, whether it were child-crowling or whooping-cough, the appearances, if any, might be expected to be almost precisely similar. The registrars were instructed not to refuse the certificates of quacks (the coroner, according to the newspaper reports, called Jackson "charlatan"), except the death was sudden, or was occasioned by violence, or occurred under suspicious circumstances. Dr. Grabham added that, beyond the expression of reprobation or censure, it was not the province of the jury to censure Jackson "for his fraud in pretending to be what he was not." We cannot help admiring the outspoken words of the coroner in this case, although we think that his zeal for his profession somewhat exceeded his prudence. Our remarks have reference to two facts connected with the inquest—the intimation that Jackson was not to be called as a witness, since he could not be recognised as a medical practitioner, and the failure to order a *post mortem* examination. In the absence of the latter, the cause of death was merely conjectural, and the verdict returned, of "death from child-crowling," might be subject to cavil. It is probable, too, that had Jackson himself, or the jury, insisted upon his giving evidence, the coroner would have been bound to receive it as to the circumstances preceding death, though not as to the cause of death. It would have been wiser, we think, to have ordered a *post mortem* examination, and also to have invited Jackson to give evidence, at the same time warning him that he would not be allowed to give an opinion as to the cause of death. We do not think any injustice was done in the case, but it is always best not only to be, but to seem, fair. The jury do not appear to have adopted the coroner's very strong hint as to censure, for we observe that they contented themselves with re-

turning a bare verdict as to the cause of death. It remains to be seen whether any steps will be taken as to the certificate given by Mr. Jackson, "L.M.D."

ELECTRICITY V. HANGINGS.

A CONTEMPORARY, in drawing attention to a proposal of Mr. Lane Fox in a recent issue of the *Zoophilist*, to employ a form of apparatus known to electricians as the micro-farad condenser for the destruction of worn-out horses and domestic animals, takes the opportunity of drawing attention to the barbarities attending the present use of the long drop in judicial executions; and also suggests that "far less contrivance and money than were expended on the Peltzer case would suffice to arrange a murder by electricity, "which would in all respects resemble a death by the visitation of God," by which we presume is meant a death from natural causes. Murder is so much a fine art, or at all events an application of science, in the present day, that this suggestion—perhaps not a novel one—might well have been spared, even in the pages of a medical journal, where it is little likely, we hope, to catch the eyes of would-be murderers. We believe that should murder by electricity ever be practised, the resources of medicine and science will prove equal to the detection of the agent employed. The accidents that may be expected to result from the extension of electric lighting, will doubtless soon afford medical men the opportunities of becoming more familiar with the appearances resulting from death from electricity. Mr. Lane Fox's proposal is a humane one, but we question whether it will meet with serious recognition. It is applicable to horses and pet animals only; and is inapplicable to animals the flesh of which is to be used for food. The plan is too complex, and involves, in killing a horse, the following elaborate preparations:—the fitting of an iron plate into the stable-floor, and the connection of this with the negative pole of a condenser formed of alternate layers of tin-foil and tissue paper soaked in paraffin. The condenser is then to be charged from an ordinary coil to its full capacity, so as to be capable of producing a one-inch spark. The animal to be killed is to have its head, feet, and legs sponged with salt water, and is then to be placed on the iron plate, and touched on the head by a brass knob attached to an insulating handle, and connected with the positive pole of the condenser, when it at once falls dead. Death is asserted to be painless. Probably it is so; but of this we know, and can know, nothing. Our readers will perhaps be of opinion that by this method it would be more troublesome and costly to kill a worn-out cab-horse than to hang a criminal; not to speak of the operation being by no means devoid of danger to the operators. The feasibility and advisability of judicial executions being carried out by means of electricity is one, nevertheless, which is well worthy of consideration; and certainly, now that executions take place in private, and the criminal at the moment when the drop falls becomes immediately removed from the view of all but the executioner, there are additional reasons why the existing mode of carrying out the dread capital sentence of the law in Britain should be revised. Not to go back to earlier atrocities, the scenes at the execution of the man Taylor, at Wandsworth, and of Myles Joyce, at Galway, respectively, are reported to have been of the most revolting description. It would appear that the long drop (the length at present used is stated to be 9 feet) does not bring about instantaneous death; and causes, sometimes, perhaps, prolonged and unnecessary suffering. It is, then, well worth consideration whether the use of electricity, or the simpler mode of strangulation recently proposed by Dr. Hammond, of New York, should not be substituted for the present system. Dr. Hammond's method has the advantage over the electrical, that we have the personal voucher of a man of his high reputation that the sensations of the strangled man, up to the moment when unconsciousness supervenes, are rather pleasurable than painful. So long as execution is required by our law, it behoves the authorities to carry out the sentence in a manner as little revolting, and as painlessly, as is possible.