

MEDICAL CORONERSHIPS.

Of the peculiar fitness of medical men for the office of Coroner, one of the most important constituencies in England, that of Middlesex, has twice recorded its opinion, in the first place by the election of the late Mr. Wakley, and recently by the election of Dr. Lankester as his successor. As a powerful argument in favor of the selection of medical men to such offices we quote the following from a recent number of the *Lancet* :

“The contest and the result have proved beyond dispute the truth of our assertion that the freeholders of Middlesex were deeply convinced that, if the office of coroner were to be maintained in usefulness and authority, it must be held by a medical man. For more than twenty years numerous freeholders had daily witnessed how by the application of medical science the causes of obscure deaths were cleared up, how unjust suspicions were dispelled, and how subtle crime had been detected. The career of Mr. Wakley was one long and continuous demonstration of the truth of the great principle upon which he first challenged the votes of the electors. They first put their trust in the man, swayed by the ardour of his convictions, and by the impetuous eloquence with which he set them forth. They afterwards learned to cherish those convictions as their own, by the daily observation of the admirable efficiency of their medical coroner. It would have been strange indeed, if, with this signal proof of the justness of the selection they had made in the person of Mr. Wakley, the freeholders of Middlesex should not have strenuously supported the medical candidate in the contest to fill up the vacancy he had left. The issue of this contest offers also a most gratifying proof of the legitimate influence which the medical profession had acquired over public opinion. Dr. Lankester fairly acknowledges that his success is greatly to be ascribed to the active and liberal manner in which he has been supported by his brethren. It may be truly said, that almost every medical practitioner has had, and most, we believe, have used, some opportunity of advocating the cause of the medical candidate; by conversation, by discussion, by canvassing, the medical practitioners of the county have largely contributed to the formation of public opinion. There is not one amongst us who could not cite examples of justice miscarrying, of crime being encouraged, of the cause of death being left in obscurity—all for want of medical knowledge on the part of the coroner. A deep conviction exists amongst the public, that in the due administration of the coroner’s court lies the most effectual protection of life against criminal machinations, and the best security for the just and humane government of our asylums, work-houses, and other public institutions.”

In commenting upon this subject the *American Medical Times* makes the following observations :

“We have endeavored to awaken the attention of the profession in this country to the importance of securing the election of a qualified medical man to the office of Coroner. As yet, however, little regard is paid by the profession to the claims which this office has upon it, and in consequence it is generally filled by some political aspirant, totally unqualified to discharge its duties. There is a prevailing impression in the community, that a Coroner must be a doctor, perhaps, because he deals with the dead, and therefore for the time being the incumbent often prefixes to his name the title, M.D. If the profession would take advantage of this fact, and manifest proper interest in the election of competent medical men to this office, they could readily accomplish their object. If, however, we attempt to place medical men in this office we must enter the arena of party strife, and secure our ends by those measures which are legitimate in political contests. Medical candidates should be put forward who will command the respect and