

## **Medical combinations against life insurance companies.**

### **Contributors**

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

### **Publication/Creation**

London : Orr, 1851.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/r597dvdq>

### **Provider**

Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh

### **License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The original may be consulted at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

# MEDICAL COMBINATIONS

## LIFE INSURANCE.

AGAINST

### LIFE INSURANCE COMPANIES.

"That our strike must be a wrong to the persons we strike against, call them Company or Public, seems pretty plain."—*Household Words*.

LONDON:

ORR AND COMPANY, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1851.

[PRICE SIXPENCE.]

MEDICAL COMBINATIONS

ADVERT

LIFE INSURANCE COMPANIES.

"That our attachment to a wrong to the persons we strike against, will then Company or  
Public, seems fairly plain."—Household Words.

LONDON:

LONDON:

RICHARD KINDER, PRINTER,  
GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

1851.

[PRICE SIXPENCE]

R35285



# MEDICAL COMBINATIONS

## AGAINST

# LIFE INSURANCE.

---

A DISPUTE has arisen between some Members of the Medical Profession, who have combined together to attain their object, and Life Insurance Companies, as to the payment of fees to Medical Men, whose Patients, in applying for Insurances, refer to them for information as to their health; and as the Public are interested in a pecuniary point of view in the proper settlement of the matter, and their opinion, if unequivocally expressed, may lead to the termination of a discussion, which has been carried on for some time with more warmth than candour, we propose to examine the nature and merits of the quarrel.

The utility of Life Insurance has become so generally known and appreciated since the commencement of this century, and its practice so much extended, that there are very few persons whose present interests or expectations are not affected by any question which involves its stability, or diminishes its powers of usefulness. Considering it, also, in the magnitude of its operations, as controlling and managing many millions of money accumulated for the welfare of our fellow-countrymen, or regarding it as one of the noblest emblems and proofs of British forethought and industry, and family attachment, everything connected with its progress must be matter of general interest.

The procedure taken to procure a Life Assurance is this: The applicant lodges at the office of the Company, from whom he wishes to obtain the Assurance, a Proposal containing a statement of his age, and of his past and present state of health; with a reference to a Friend, and to his Medical Attendant, to confirm these statements. The Referees having returned answers to the questions sent to them from the Company, and the applicant having been examined by their appointed Medical Officer, his Proposal is accepted or declined. The Examiner receives his remuneration from the Company who employ him, and the question in dispute is, whether they shall also pay a guinea to the Medical Referee of the party, when they ask him for information as to his Patient.

The associating Medical Men object to answer any question unless on receipt of a guinea from the Company. They contend that trouble and responsibility are incurred in giving the information required from them, that it is of great value to the Company, and that the Company therefore, as the parties deriving benefit, ought to remunerate them liberally for it. The Companies, on the other hand, maintain that the persons on whose behalf the service is rendered are the Patients who apply for the Insurances; to whom, from the relation subsisting between them, the Medical Men are bound by every consideration of fairness and courtesy, to render it without asking for any special remuneration; that



the trouble is so slight as to be scarcely appreciable, and not more than the parties applying for it have a right to expect; that there is no responsibility except what every man incurs in answering a question,—and avoids, by speaking what he believes to be the truth; that the information afforded neither is nor is expected to be of the kind for which, as a professional act, a Medical Man is entitled to a fee; and that, besides, it is rarely of any consequence; and that the amount of remuneration demanded is, in most cases, extravagant, and such as materially to retard the progress of Life Assurance.

Now, as to the trouble and time necessary to reply to the questions of the Company, much depends upon the nature of the questions, and the mode of replying to them. If the Medical Man were asked for a professional report upon the state of his Patient's health, involving the necessity of an examination, it would no doubt be reasonable that he should be paid for the visit which he must make, and for the time occupied in answering the several questions in detail; and the amount of that remuneration we shall afterwards consider. But the examination of the Proposer is the duty of the Medical Examiner, appointed and paid by the Company, and it is not expected that the Proposer should submit himself to another examination by his own Medical Referee, nor that the Referee should put himself to the trouble of obtaining any more information regarding the Proposer's health than he already possesses when the question reaches him. All that is wanted from him is an expression of his opinion, founded upon his past experience, as to the Applicant's state of health; and although it is not unusual to seek that information by sundry interrogatories, which can generally be answered by adding Yes or No to each, the Company are perfectly satisfied with one sentence, to the effect,—“I have no reason to suppose the life objectionable,” or the reverse; and the most eminent Medical Men generally make their responses in that way. It is, therefore, not requisite that the Medical Attendant should see his Patient on the subject. He receives a letter by post, which he answers by one sentence, communicating an opinion which he must have previously formed, or by annexing the words “Yes” or “No” to the printed questions submitted to him. There is no expenditure of time, or more than a passing thought required, and no need for inquiry; for if he has not had opportunities to enable him to judge whether the party is a good or a bad life, he is not in possession of that information which the Interrogators were led to believe that he had, and he has only to state so; he refolds the letter, and his work is completed. Persons desirous of employment, or of a better excuse for demanding a fee than the writing of a few words, may endeavour, as is not uncommon, to change the nature of the inquiry, and assume the office of Medical Examiner for the Company; but the real amount of trouble they are expected to take is very much less than that demanded from the *Friend* who has been referred to, and who, in answering questions as to habits, employment, health of relatives and other matters, undertakes, and always gratuitously, a task that requires consideration and time, and frequently inquiry; while the Medical Attendant has already been paid by his Patient for visits which have enabled him to arrive at



the conclusion which the Patient, by referring to him, asks him to communicate.

In their pleadings for remuneration, Medical Attendants constantly mistake their position and duties. They are not Officers of, nor selected by, the Companies. A Proposer for Assurance makes a statement as to his health, and refers to a Medical Gentleman in confirmation of it, and the Company has a right to expect that the Referee is already acquainted with the state of health as to which he is asked; but if he is not, his duty is to say so,—and not to assume the position of the Company's Medical Examiner, who in every case performs his own appropriate duties.

It is important to keep this distinction, between a Referee and a Medical Examiner, steadily in view; for it is by assuming that the former is called upon to perform all that is required of the latter, that a plausible case is presented on behalf of the Medical Associations. It is surely not difficult to perceive that the two kinds of services are totally different, although both are called into requisition, to ascertain the truth or falsehood of the same statement.

The fact that professional men are paid, not for any palpable commodity which can at once be distinguished and identified, but for services rendered in a form not always easily distinguishable from the ordinary intercourse of society, has tended to throw a haze around the principle on which their right to remuneration rests, which it is difficult either for themselves or for those who are to pay them, to clear away. Being accustomed to be paid for written or spoken advice, there is always a tendency, natural enough perhaps, to put a money price upon every word they speak and every paper they sign. Because they have a right to charge for *professional* trouble, they are apt to think themselves entitled to charge for every act, in which any trouble is involved. But the distinction between the cases in which payment ought to be made, and in which it ought not to be asked, though less obvious perhaps, is as real with professional men as with the most mechanical tradesmen. To illustrate this, and to apply it to the present case; let it be supposed that an Insurance Company to whom an application for an Insurance was made, considered it important to ascertain what quantity of wine and spirits the Applicant consumed in his family in the course of a year, and required a reference on that subject to his Wine Merchant. Would any Wine Merchant, if satisfied that he was at liberty to give the information asked, ever dream of charging a fee for it, on the ground that it involved some trouble and was valuable to the Company? He would consider his taking the trifling trouble involved as an act of courtesy due from him to his customer; his giving his testimony to a fact lying within his knowledge, as an act of justice to a man to whom the verification of the fact was important. What real difference is there between this case and that of a Medical Man asked to state what sort of health a Patient has enjoyed during the time that he attended him? In either case the thing asked for is essentially distinct from the article in which the party deals, and for which he receives payment, although in the one it bears a greater external resemblance to it than in the other. Or suppose a Merchant



desirous of entering into commercial transactions, requiring confidence in his means of payment, refers to his Banker ; a person offering a House for sale refers to the Builder of it—a testimony to moral character is necessary,—a proof of having acquired information in some particular profession or trade is demanded : in none of these cases do the Referees stipulate for remuneration for their services in giving the information needed. The Banker, the Builder, the Clergyman, the Lecturer, and the Artist, in communicating the information required of them, give a portion of their time, and incur some responsibility ; without grudging or endeavouring to make gain of the lighter and reciprocal duties of life. Their conscientious scruples sometimes oblige them to baulk the wishes or endanger the interests of customers, friends and pupils, or break up valued friendships, but they never bargain to receive money for their information.

Cases sometimes occur which are not decidedly good, nor so bad as to justify the conclusion that the life is unassurable ; and when, in such cases, the attendant is asked for detailed information, his duty to the Company and his Patient is very clear. He may follow either of two courses,—he may describe the nature of the disease from which his Patient has suffered, and the reasons for his hesitation in recommending the life to be accepted or rejected, trusting to the Company for remuneration for the trouble he has had in re-considering and recording the circumstances ; or he may state, in answer to the queries, that there are matters connected with the past or present state of the health of the Proposer, of importance to them to know, and which on their employment and remuneration he will communicate. This would be acting, if not liberally, at least fairly to the Company, who on their part may be expected to believe that such an answer would not be given for the mere purpose of obtaining a fee, when there was nothing important to communicate. A proper amount of remuneration would be the result, and that suggests the inquiry, what is the proper amount of remuneration ?

This is a question that interests the Public, those who receive Assurances, much more than the Companies who grant them ; for Medical fees, although paid in the first instance by the latter, truly come out of the pockets of the former. In Mutual Offices, where the Assurers and Assured are the same parties, the truth of this is self-evident ; but it is not less true when applied to Proprietary Companies who sell Life Policies to their Customers, and retain the profits ; for there is competition in the business of Life Assurance as in all other trades and employments carried on for the purpose of making money ; and the premiums charged, like the price of articles of manufacture or commerce, are computed so as to realise a profit after payment of all necessary drawbacks and expenses ; consequently if two, and sometimes three Medical fees are to be paid, one to the Country Medical Examiner, another to the Medical Attendant, and another to the Medical Adviser at the Head Office, and to form charges on the business ; the Assured must pay them, in one shape or other, by a diminution of Bonus, or an increase of Premium. It is important that this obvious truth should be kept in mind ; for in most of the pleadings for the



Medical Associates, complaints are made against the Proprietors of Life Companies, for attempting to benefit themselves at the expense of the Medical Profession, by withholding adequate remuneration, as if they were the parties, both primarily and ultimately affected by the proposed increase of fees. They are described as amassing money for themselves, by defrauding others, and as alone interested in the amount of charges and expenses attending the business they conduct; as if it were possible, in these days of pressing competition, for any set of men to carry on a business independently of, and not regulated by, the amount of the expenses attending it; as if Life Assurance was different from all other concerns, and exempted from the influence of competition. Were Assurance to be confined to the higher classes of society, and employed only for securing large sums of money, some useless or extravagant payments might be overlooked; but its principles and its usefulness are becoming daily more widely known, and its operations are extending amongst the industrious classes, who resort to it for the investment of small sums of money,—the savings set apart to provide for old age, or defend Widows and Children against penury. It is only by provident and economical management, and periodical accumulations, that those advantages can be realised, and there can be no excuse for saddling the funds devoted to, and necessary for, the accomplishment of such objects, with unnecessary expenses. Nor is it proper for a Company, with the view of procuring an accession of business, to hold out, that the legitimate and full benefits of Life Assurance can be secured to small Policy holders, if any considerable portion of the first payments is given to Medical Men.

As an illustration of the incubus which the Associates would place upon Life Assurance, the following figures are taken from a Report of the business of an Office established a little more than a year ago. The number of Policies issued were 1,218; the sum assured £103,717; and the premiums received £3,475. 2s. 11d. Now, supposing these Assurances to have come from the country, as most of them did, and that fees had been paid to the extent required by the combinations, the account would stand thus:—

	£	s.	d.
Fees to Medical Examiners . .	1,278	18	0
Fees to Medical Attendants . .	1,278	18	0
	<hr/>		
	£2,557	16	0

And to this must be added remuneration to the Medical Adviser of the Company for examining the Medical returns, and reporting to the Board; and supposing that to be rated at one fourth of the claim of the Associates, we have thus £3,397. 5s.

But we have not yet arrived at the total Medical expenses of the Office, for the preceding calculation is on the supposition that every person who was examined was accepted, and that every Proposal for Assurance resulted in one of the 1,218 Policies paid for and completed by the Company. But that is not the case; for the rejected cases, and the accepted but not completed, cannot be estimated at under 150,



which by the same rate of payment, would have cost £375. We have hitherto supposed that there was only one person examined for each Policy, but as at least 50 of the 1,218 Assurances may be assumed to be on joint lives, we have to add the Medical expenses attending these additional fifty lives; and the result is,—Company's expenses for Medical assistance alone £3,884. 15s., while the whole annual receipts amount to £3,475. 2s. 11d.

If therefore, as it is contended, the business of Life Assurance cannot be fairly conducted, except by the payment of such expenses, it must be relinquished. The public will certainly not be disposed to acquiesce in that result, without ascertaining whether these charges are proper or necessary; and we are thus led to inquire, under what circumstances, and in what cases, Medical Men can, with propriety, insist on being paid, and the proper amount of their remuneration.

It will be conceded by every impartial inquirer, that in cases of decidedly good or decidedly bad health, where the Medical Attendant has nothing to communicate except the simple fact, and supposing the inquiry to be limited to the question, whether the state of health be good or bad, there is no ground for insisting on payment of a fee. In order, however, to bring the practice to this state, Life Companies ought to confine their inquiry in words as well as meaning, so as to be embraced by that general question. Then again, when professional assistance is required, either in personally examining a party, or in giving a detailed history of a disease, it is not denied that Medical Men are entitled to be paid for time and trouble; but we are not aware of any reason for fixing upon a guinea as the proper measure of remuneration. There are grades of the Profession, and different rates of payment, as well understood as if they were scheduled by Act of Parliament; and it is neither proper nor fair for a man of a lower status to endeavour to usurp the remuneration belonging to a superior rank of the Profession. By far the greater number of Medical Men, and all those who have combined against Life Offices, with scarcely an exception, are what are termed General Practitioners; whose known and accredited charge is a few shillings for a visit and a phial of Physic. As an excuse for endeavouring to raise their charges, it is often said by Medical Men, as by persons of other callings, that their's is a poor Profession—they are badly paid. But, were it so, that would form no valid reason for attempting to procure more than the understood charges in any insulated case, or for a system of combination to concuss a particular class of employers into the payment of higher than the common rates. These medical combinations, like all other strikes against employers, have, as their effect, if not their object, to place the most inefficient and ignorant upon a level with those of the greatest merit and ability; to place the whole upon one sterile level; the man of learning and ability with the most ignorant; the rawest assistant of a Colliery Surgeon, who could call himself an Apothecary, on an equality, as to fees, with a Queen's Physician; for the combinations have ruled that their charges shall be one guinea for every report, irrespective of the status or acquirement of the Reporter, or the amount of the sum to be assured.



There are others, not Members of any Association, who endeavour, single handed, to make the most of their position when they are so fortunate as to find that a Patient has applied for a Life Assurance. They remind us of the boatman of a ferry, who insisted upon being paid his regular charges by ordinary travellers, and yet contrived to get more from strangers by dilating upon the risk of the passage, his responsibility, anxiety and trouble, when persons of a higher grade happened to cross. His proper remuneration, though well known to his ordinary customers, he tries to conceal from the casual employer; and either takes what is offered, provided that it be more than the proper charge,—or contrives to elicit, as a perquisite or gratuity, what would be paid for better and different accommodation.

We have the consulting Physician, the consulting and the operating Surgeon, and a host of Apothecaries or General Practitioners, living by the sale of Drugs—and all attempts by this last class, by means of combinations, to force the Public, or any part of it, to pay more than ordinary charges, or to raise the acknowledged standard of Apothecaries' fees to those of the higher grades of the profession, will be found to be impolitic, as it is improper. Conceive the case of an Assurance Office, extending its operations into the dense masses of some of the manufacturing towns; and superseding to some extent the ill-regulated schemes of the Odd Fellows, and other Friendly Societies, and observe the class of Medical Men to whom constant reference would be made as Medical Attendants,—it would surely be iniquitous were the small premiums of the Assured to be lavished in guinea fees on the Apothecaries to be found in such places;—and yet these are the people who are chiefly active in forming and arranging schemes against Life Offices, to enforce the payment of fees which they long for the more, that they have not been accustomed to receive them.

Professor Christison, in a temperate article in the *Monthly Journal of Medicine* for October last, written with the avowed purpose of reconciling Assurance Companies and the Medical Profession, makes the following suggestions for that purpose. He proposes that an Applicant should see his Medical Attendant before lodging a Proposal of Assurance, so as to ascertain the nature of the report he will make to the Company when applied to; that the Medical Attendant should receive a fee direct from the Company, but that no fee shall be paid unless the sum assured exceeds a certain amount,—which however he does not specify. Although there is a complete intention of fairness on the part of the Professor, a natural leaning in favour of his Profession runs throughout the article: for instance, in referring to an Edinburgh Company, whose business he states would be materially restricted in its range were fees to be paid to Medical Attendants, he limits the observation by making the restriction apply only, if the fee were at the Patient's expense; as if the business would not be equally restricted in its range, if the Company were chargeable with the fee. His notions of the value to be attached to Medical reports are very large, and the possibility of their being positively hurtful to Companies by inducing the acceptance of bad lives, has not occurred to him; or at least he has not noticed that subject, although most important, in



considering the relation subsisting between Life Offices and his Profession, and the aggregate value of the information to be obtained. Whatever may be thought of Mr. Christison's plan, there is no chance of its being adopted by the combinations, for they have already passed resolutions condemnatory of one of the most important of his suggestions,—and one in which the Public, and especially persons desirous of promoting provident habits amongst the industrious classes, are most interested,—that which refers to small Assurances. The combinations resolve, that as there is the same trouble with small as large Assurances, fees must be paid in all cases.

Another reason alleged as a justification for insisting upon a fee is,—that if the proposal be rejected there is a chance of the loss of a Patient. But for such a misfortune it cannot surely be argued that the Life Company is responsible, or that they should pay for the effects of the deficient judgment or ill-regulated temper of the Patient. The risk of such an occurrence is one of the incidents of the Profession, which the receipt of a fee would do little to remove, or alleviate; and we would ask whether there is not a greater likelihood of the loss of practice from declining to assist a party in a laudable object, than by honestly replying to a question which the Attendant has been requested by his own Patient to answer. This argument of pecuniary loss in business, in consequence of an honourable discharge of duty, is scarcely compatible with the high position the combinations take, in arguing for liberal remuneration to a learned and liberal Profession; nor is it tenable in a merely money-making point of view; for observe how the case stands. The Medical Attendant resolves that he will answer no question as to a Patient, unless on receipt of a guinea,—the guineas forming a stock purse as an indemnity for the loss of the business of such Patients as shall leave him in consequence of rejections by Assurance Offices. But he forgets that his Patients may be guided by correct and liberal notions, rather than caprice and injustice. There are few persons illiberal enough to discard a Medical Man, because in acting according to the dictates of his conscience, in a matter placed before him on their account, he had given an opinion different from what they anticipated. In that case there can be no suspicion of sinister design on his part, and no reasonable pretext for visiting upon him the inconvenience or disappointment arising from the rejection of a Proposal for an Assurance,—and such cases will rarely happen. But if a Patient should be denied the advantage of an Assurance from a Company selected by him, solely in consequence of his Medical Attendant refusing to certify as to the state of his health, he would have some reason, and most persons would be disposed under such circumstances, to make a change of Medical Attendant. The relation subsisting between a Patient and his Doctor is always of an amicable, generally of a friendly description, and nothing can tend more effectually to sever the connexion, than a want of willingness on the part of the latter, to promote the temporal welfare of his Patient, when that can be done without much trouble, and at no expense. Medical Practitioners ought to be aware that it would be a difficult task to persuade a person, who for half a crown can command the



willing services of an Apothecary at any hour of the day or night, that the same Apothecary is justified in demanding a guinea for merely stating whether his state of health is good or bad. Yet the combining Medical Men lay much stress upon their *influence*, as being sufficient to enable them to persuade their Patients to patronise one Life Office rather than another; and they thus endeavour to concuss Companies into their terms. They avow their determination to use that influence in favour of fee-paying Companies, and against those who refuse to comply with their demands; although, in thus seeking to work out their own interest, they totally disregard the welfare of their Patients. In this they commit a double mistake. In the first place they entirely overrate their power to injure Insurance Companies. Their chief influence is over valetudinarians, whom an Insurance Company will only thank them for persuading not to apply to their Office. Over those whom the Companies desire to gain as customers, the vigorous and healthy, Medical Men have no peculiar influence—not half so much as Clergymen and Attornies, who are frequently the parties referred to as Friends, but are never understood to make a charge for their information. In the next place, they are strangely blind to the means which Offices have of interrupting the connexion between them and their Patients;—and this power is the greater, that it is neither sought for nor vaunted, but arises naturally from the position of the parties. Every Life Office has a Medical Examiner, attached to each of their Agencies, to whom the Proposer is introduced; and who is not unlikely, seeing that he is generally the most accomplished practitioner in the locality, to become acceptable to the Proposer as a Medical Attendant, without any intention on his part, of trenching upon the business of another; his more refined manners, and the very nature of the confidential communications that are made by the Proposer, will, in many cases, lead to a preference of him as a future confidential attendant;—and if in any of their communications with the Proposer, the Company should choose to inform him, either that the Proposal had been rejected in consequence of his Medical Referee refusing to report on his health,—or that it had been accepted notwithstanding the want of such report, the loss of the Patient would be almost certain. In a warfare of this kind, Medical Men would find that even in a pecuniary point of view, their crooked policy would not aid them. The influence and patronage with which, for their own selfish purposes, they are attempting to frighten Companies into the payment of unreasonable charges, are too weak for that purpose; and the boast of such weapons of offence will only damage those pecuniary interests, for which they are so unscrupulously contending. We happen to know of several instances where Patients have changed their Medical Men in consequence of their refusing to give reports, although the Assurances were obtained; and it cannot be doubted that in many cases of refusal of Proposals, in which the Medical Attendants have declined to give reports, their future services have been dispensed with, although the Offices' rejections of the Proposals have arisen from totally different reasons. As Applicants for Assurance are seldom or ever informed of the grounds of their rejection, they will naturally attribute



their disappointment to the person who declined to assist them by a certificate, when they know that it has been applied for, and refused.

Amongst other mistaken reasons, alleged for payment of fees in all cases, a false and exaggerated estimate of the value of Medical Services is brought forward. There are comparatively few Medical Men capable of properly examining and reporting on a person, so as to meet the inquiries of an Office; and when persons inexperienced in that kind of business, enter into details in answering special questions, they generally show by their own statements, that their information cannot be relied upon; while it is undoubted that the wish of medical attendants to make their Patients' health and constitution appear as good as possible, greatly detracts from the value of their services. So much is this the case, that many persons of experience in Assurance practice, consider Medical Attendants' reports, taken in the aggregate, as fraught with more mischief than utility,—improving the favourable points of a case, and removing or plausibly accounting for circumstances that have excited suspicion; and certainly if that confidence were placed in them, that Medical Men contend they deserve, most disastrous results would follow. This has been proved in the course of the legal investigations that have occurred in several of the disputed cases of Life Assurance; and the fact is, that the oldest Managers of Companies place the least reliance upon Medical Attendants' reports; or rather they treat them as waste paper, except when they contain some fact unfavourable to the Patient's chance of longevity. There are, no doubt, many highly honourable men in the profession, whom neither a fee, nor apprehension of the loss of a Patient, could induce to practise a deception either by statement or suppression; but these are not the persons who unblushingly boast of employing their influence in favour of either one or other Office, as may best promote their own mercenary ends. The latter belong to the class of Medical Practitioners, whose fame is chronicled in the annals of the English and Irish Courts of Justice, as either influencing or influenced by their Patients, to deceive Life Offices. Besides, we find from recorded statistics that Medical advice has not enabled Life Companies to keep out of their lists of Assured, a larger proportion of bad lives than are to be found in the population taken as a whole; that Medical Aid does not enable Assurance Offices to get better lives than the average of the population; and we have the important fact, that the only Life Company who have taken no assistance from Medical Men, have on their books a class of lives much superior to the average of other Offices. That is proved by the experience of fifteen different Offices, who take the assistance of Medical Men, compared with that of the Equitable, who do not. Of those who were insured at the age of 20, in the fifteen Offices, 1 in 58 died within the first year; and of those in the Equitable, of the same age, 1 in 242 died: of the age of 40, the fifteen Offices lost 1 in 162, the Equitable 1 in 256, within one year after they were assured; and at the age of 60, the fifteen Offices show a mortality of 1 in 35, and the Equitable 1 in 84, within the first year of Assurance. Other reasons, or rather conjectures, have been advanced to endeavour to account for these remarkable differences; but at all events, these



observations are sufficient to show that the combinations overrate the importance of Medical Attendants' reports, when they describe them as being absolutely necessary to Life Offices, as being their best and only safety and protection. These statements are made from interested motives,—and are not correct.

On the supposition of the preceding remarks being well founded, it may appear strange that within the last few months, several Companies have advertised that they pay Medical Attendants for their reports,—and some explanation appears to be required to account for that change in practice. In the competition for business which is now enriching all vehicles of advertisement, and no doubt to some extent benefitting the Public, the ingenuity of Directors and Managers is exerted to place in the best light, the various advantages which may be found exclusively, or more strongly developed, in their respective Establishments; and whether it is owing to this or to other causes, the practice of Life Assurance, in its facilities of attainment and its adaptation to a much larger range of beneficent purposes, has become more generally useful than it used to be. But unless with the view of purchasing, at a cost quite disproportionate to its value, the active influence of the lowest portion of the Medical Profession, it is difficult to see any propriety or advantage in putting forward such advertisements. One of the latest in the field has out-stripped all others, in its advertised munificence, by offering to pay the Medical Attendant of a Proposer, two guineas for every report, together with five per cent. upon all the Premiums on Policies obtained through his recommendation, so long as the Policies subsist.

Now the explanation of all this is very simple. These Offices advertise that they practice, what they do not, and never intended to perform; just as some Proprietary Offices head their Prospectuses with a Capital of "One Million," although they have not the hundredth part of that sum, and never expect to have it, except from the contributions of the Assured. In the latter case the deception is played off against the Public; in the former the lower grades of the Medical Profession are deceived. In the one, the notice should be, "A part of One Million is subscribed for," and in the other, "The Medical Attendant will receive a fee,—when he is consulted," and as that is likely to occur only in cases of strong suspicion which are generally declined, without a report from a Medical Attendant,—or where it is necessary to learn the nature of some past occult disease, under circumstances when all other Offices would consult and pay the Medical Attendant, it would appear that the combinations will not gain much by this supposed change of practice. As to the Company that has started upon the peculiar and golden idea of double fees, and perpetual commission; it was originated in a laudable, though we think mistaken feeling, for the supposed injuries of less affluent Medical brethren; and it may be, that in the partial junction of the interests of a Life Office and a Weekly periodical, the latter advocating the benevolence and generosity of the former, the loss of the Capital of the one may be expected to be compensated by the proceeds arising from the increased circulation of the other. A want of acquaintance with the business and prac-



tical working of Life Assurance,—the failure to procure from other Offices the use of their reports, which, if obtained, might lessen their Medical expenses without detracting from their renown, as the Champions of the Profession,—and the total inability of a Company to struggle against expenses exceeding receipts, may come to be considered suitable reasons for abandoning a more generous practice than the constitution can bear;—and were that wholesome resolution speedily adopted, without first attempting to evade obligations voluntarily undertaken, by endeavouring to procure second-hand reports from other Offices;—pleading the unreasonableness of two guinea fees in individual cases of small amount, when the fee exceeds the Premium; and above all, by the withdrawal of the temptation of commission offered to the Medical Adviser,—(a proffered boon, which a well-regulated mind will repudiate as incompatible with the disinterested position he ought to hold; which, if accepted, must impair the influence for the use of which it is paid; which, under any circumstances, must raise a suspicion as to the grounds of the Assurance, and impair the value of the Policy, as a marketable security,)—then the character of the Office, good in other respects, will not be materially damaged,—except in the eyes of those Members of the Medical Profession, whose influence is in the inverse ratio of their boasting.

But the Medical Men who concocted, and are carrying on the combinations, would have it believed, that not only they, but the Medical Profession in general, are inadequately compensated for their services, and have reason to complain of the treatment they receive from Assurance Companies. In order to test this, it may be well to consider and estimate, as correctly as the limited information on the subject will permit, the amount of money annually awarded to the Medical Profession for their share of work in Life Assurance business.

As there is no public record of Policies, or any means of ascertaining the exact number annually issued, or the sums assured, we can only approximate to the truth in these matters; but we shall endeavour in our estimate, rather to underrate than exaggerate the amount of business done. From the "Post Magazine Almanack," of this year, we learn that, at the termination of 1850, there were in operation upwards of 150 Societies or Companies for granting Assurances on lives. To each of these there is attached a Medical Officer, acting as an Assessor or Adviser of the Board, in reference to the health and constitution of the persons proposed for Assurance; and one half or more of these Institutions have two Medical Gentlemen acting in that capacity. There are thus 225 Medical Gentlemen employed. There are instances of one acting for more than one Company, but in these cases there are a corresponding number of salaries paid. The average amount of the honorarium may be taken at £105 to each Officer, or for the whole £23,625. Very few Companies are without Agencies, but most of them have several hundred, and supposing them to average 150, there is thus a staff of 7,000 Medical Men for the different Agencies; and including the Medical Advisers at the Chief Institution, 7,225 of the Profession, who must be understood to be satisfied with the terms of their remuneration, as no complaints come from that quarter. The



total amount of their receipts may be approximated by taking as our guide, an ordinary rule of practice amongst Companies to pay one guinea for an examination and report in cases of Assurance for £500 and upwards, and half a guinea when the amount is under £500; and supposing that 300 lives are proposed for Assurance annually to each Office, and that one-half of these are for sums under £500, the total Medical Fees amount to £35,437,—to which add the Medical Advisers' Salaries, £22,500,—and the result of this proximate calculation is, that the Medical Profession in Great Britain receives from Assurance Offices the annual sum of £57,937. Now, giving the utmost weight to the quantity of time employed, the nominal responsibility, and the value of the work performed; impartial persons will, we think, conclude, that these circumstances will not justify a complaint at the instance of, or on behalf of, the Profession.

It is quite true, that the persons with whom we are arguing have little interest in these matters, for those who receive that large sum of money are the *élite* of the Profession, chosen by the Offices for their Chief Establishments and Agencies, on account of their abilities and trustworthiness. The combiners are those whom accident alone throws within the sphere of Life Assurance, a Patient occasionally happening to be an applicant for a Life Policy. But viewing the question as interesting to those parties, as merely involving money, it may be well to consider how far it is prudent for the combinations to endeavour to make head against the Companies and their own Patients; and impede the progress of economical habits and independence amongst the industrious classes, for the sake of a very trifling number of guineas. Opposed to them there are the ablest and most popular members of the Profession, selected by the Companies, and by whom their Patients are examined, who are not unlikely to displace them from attendance upon those Patients, if their conduct at an important crisis of acceptance or rejection by an Assurance Office is such as to give umbrage or to weaken confidence. But further, considering the pecuniary and honorary value of the offices of Medical Adviser, and of Medical Examiner of a Life Company, as proved by the personal and sought-out influence exerted to procure every vacant appointment, and that the Managers of Companies are now engaged, with the aid of the Medical Directory, in marking the names of those who refuse every little assistance asked of them, as ineligible for such appointments; is it wise to shut themselves out from this valuable field of professional employment? Would it not be more prudent in a Medical Man to sacrifice the few fees which any one individual can obtain, and by faithful reports show himself qualified to fulfil the duties of one of the 7,000 Medical Officers? A single report expressive of an opinion, and the reasons of that opinion, is generally sufficient to prove whether the Reporter can be trusted as a Medical Examiner; but so little attention have Medical Men hitherto bestowed upon Life Assurance, or statistics in connexion with that subject, that even the most conscientious and carefully-prepared reports are frequently of little real use, if not dangerous; whereas the perusal of a few Authors on the theory and practice of Assurance, and a due consideration of the points upon which information



is required for enabling a Board to decide upon the eligibility of a life for Assurance, added to a desire to improve the temporal comforts, and promote habits of economy and forethought among our fellow-men by embracing Life Assurance, would enable many men, now struggling in low practice, to become Medical Examiners; and as no feeling of exclusiveness, or jealousy, prevents Companies from appointing as Examiners, qualified persons attached to other Offices, there is a lucrative field open to Medical Men, competent and willing to occupy it.

The continuance of these Associations, and the extent of annoyance they may occasion, will much depend upon the opinion of the Public and Life Offices; and it is thought that viewed in their proper light, they must be looked upon and treated, as other strikes or combinations, as public nuisances, got up to serve mercenary purposes. We appeal with some confidence to the higher classes of the Medical Profession; to those of the higher grades and reputation; to assist in defeating all selfish and mercenary schemes, tending to damage a Profession whose character should be based upon a high standard of education, a desire to extend amongst all and particularly the industrious classes, every means for improving their social condition,—and upon the absence of a mercenary spirit. In that light the Public are disposed to treat Medical Men: they allow them, with a small share of learning, to take the title of a learned Profession. At their instigation, and without scanning minutely their motives, they build and endow Hospitals and Dispensaries, by means of which Medical Men may acquire distinction and wealth. There are undoubtedly, however, many of its members individually entitled to the utmost admiration and esteem, and whose characters should not be permitted to be compromised by disreputable combinations, formed by the more numerous and less respectable portion, upon principles and for objects which no liberal or enlightened Medical Man can approve.

In conclusion, while we dispute the right of Medical combinations to claim for their members the remuneration which has been the subject of this discussion, and have shown how such attempts can be defeated, we would suggest, that if Medical Men would be satisfied in every case of a reference to them, *involving a personal examination*, with a reasonable fee regulated in its amount by the extent of the transaction about to be entered into, Assurance Companies should submit to the charge;—which they might do without serious injury to the Assured. But if the extravagant and undistinguishing fee of a guinea is still to be demanded in every case, then the Companies must just fall back upon the remedy which they hold in their own hands—that of deciding on cases without the Medical Attendants' reports. Experience has proved their value to be almost infinitesimally small, and Companies would incur but a trifling additional risk by accepting and rejecting Proposals without them. The Associates would thereby suffer the loss of many Patients, and the usual penalty of extortion too long persevered in—that of losing the moderate gain which they might otherwise have secured.