ACCOUNT
OF
A CASE
OF
SPONTANEOUS EXTRAVASATION
WITHIN THE
THECA VERTEBRALIS,
WHICH SOON
TERMINATED FATALLY,

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MISS D——, aged 14, for several days felt pain in the head and back, which induced her, on the 26th of February, to apply for medical assistance. Blisters were applied behind the ears, and opening medicines were ordered, which operated the following day, and relieved the pain in the head; but the pain in the back grew much worse, and was aggravated and accompanied with a tendency to sickness, on sitting up. On the 3d of March the pain in the back increased much, and on the following day her mother thought she discovered

a little projection of the spinous processes of the lumbar vertebræ, in consequence of which I was desired to see her. I could not discover any thing in the appearance of the back that was not natural, nor was any particular pain excited by pressure. The effort to sit up distressed her much; but her countenance was clear and healthy. The tongue was rather white: she had a moderate, regular pulse at 120. Under these circumstances the pain did not excite any particular alarm in my mind: I directed some leeches to be applied as nearly as possible to the seat of the pain, and afterwards an opiate lotion: she was also ordered to take three grains of antimonial powder, with a saline draught every six hours, and I left her in full expectation of finding her relieved on the morrow, especially as, on strict enquiry, she could recollect no exertion or other violence by which the symptoms could have been produced.

On the following morning, to my great surprise, I was informed that, on the evening after I had seen her, she complained of a sudden and violent increase of the pain, and immediately went into convulsions, in which she continued between five and six hours and then expired. On the 6th of March I examined the body in the presence of Mr. Johnston of Mortimer Street, who had attended her from nearly the commencement. There was not the least appearance of disease in the brain or in any of the thoracic or abdominal viscera. The appear-

ance of the spine was also perfectly natural. I therefore proceeded to cut away the bodies of the lumbar vertebræ in order to expose the cavity of the spinal canal, close to the seat of the pain. I found it filled with extravasated blood, which from its florid colour must certainly have been arterial, and which covered the whole of the cauda equina. The cavity appeared to be filled much higher up ; but I did not prosecute the dissection as it did not appear to me of much consequence to ascertain the exact limits of the extravasation, and the violence that must have been committed in opening the cavity farther, would have rendered it difficult, if not impossible, to tell precisely from what vessel the blood had issued. The original seat of the pain would naturally lead me to suppose that the rupture must have taken place near the commencement of the cauda equina, and it is probable the effusion of blood stopped within that part of the cavity inclosed by the dorsal vertebræ, as there was no appearance of it at the foramen magnum occipitale when the brain was examined.

The blood, though florid, was not all of an equal tint, it was very imperfectly coagulated; it is therefore probable that the vessel first gave way at the commencement of the illness, and again to a much greater extent at the time the convulsions came on.

I apprehend cases exactly of this description have not been very commonly seen ; but that similar mischief should frequently occur, in consequence of

Violent strains, is naturally to be expected: and I believe the foundation of carious spine, which is often laid by such accidents, is not unfrequently attended by some such mischief, which, as it may take place in various degrees, would account for the great disproportion one sees in examining a multitude of cases of this sort, between the degree of curvature in the spine, and diminution of power in the lower extremities.

A child of 12 months old, who had just recovered from the operation for hair lip, was carried out by the nurse. On its return home, it seemed in much pain, and appeared to have lost the use of its lower extremities: it died in three days. On opening the body I found the spinal canal full of a bloody serum, which, I have no doubt, was occasioned by slight extravasation from a strain and subsequent inflammatory effusion. And how destructive such extravasation, and inflammation combined may be to the structure and office of the nerves, was illustrated by the case of a miller, who suddenly lost the use of his lower extremities, by lifting a heavy sack of flour. He died on the 15th day after the accident. On examining the vertebral canal, some extravasated blood was found mixed with a sanious matter, the theca vertebralis was evidently inflamed, and the nerves of the cauda equina more completely rotten, than I have found them after many weeks' maceration in putrid water, after removal from the dead body.

These cases seem to have a very close resemblance to apoplexy, and point out the propriety of bleeding as early as possible after their occurrence, in order to prevent an increase of extravasation before constitutional debility takes place, and shew also the importance of distinguishing betwixt that primary weakness of the lower extremities, which is the direct result of the local injury, and that subsequent weakness in which indeed they will participate, but which is the effect of the shock the constitution has received, and which probably does not fully predominate till several days after; the intermediate time being occupied by more or less of symptomatic fever, which requires a moderate antiphlogistic plan of treatment.