POST-MORTEM APPEARANCES

IN A

CASE OF FRACTURE OF THE HEAD

OF THE FEMUR WITHIN THE CAPSULAR
LIGAMENT.

By STEPHEN W. WILLIAMS, M.D.

MRS. M. N. of South Deerfield, the subject of the following case, was not seen by me until after her death. Dr. Allen, her professional attendant, informed me that he had been called to her two or three days before, and found her labouring under excruciating pain in the stomach and bowels, succeeded by retching and vomiting, which continued with almost unabated violence to the time of her decease, notwithstanding the judicious application of remedies.

Autopsy.—The subject was extremely fat; the adipose tissue upon the sternum was more than three inches thick, and upon her abdomen more than four. In the cavity of the thorax we found the lungs not diseased, but the heart and lungs were pressed upwards by the diaphragm, so that breathing must have been rendered extremely laborious upon any exercise. Indeed, we understood this was the fact before her decease. The heart was healthy, except that it was so much covered with fat as to obstruct it in the regular performance of its functions. The stomach was about the ordinary size, and healthy; the intestines were unusually filled with offensive gas. The liver was little larger than natural: the upper part of it was mottled with yellow and green, and the substance of it was in a state of softening, and our fingers easily passed through the rotten mass in all directions. The gall-bladder was unusually distended with bile, as black and as thick as tar. One of the kidneys was also softer than natural.

During the dissection, it was mentioned that nine years before she had had a fall, and fractured what was supposed to have been the neck of the thigh bone. Her surgeon supposed that they had reduced it at the time of the accident, but she ever afterwards continued to be lame, and she never subsequently walked a step without the assistance of friends or crutches. On examining the limb, before cutting into it, we found it shortened, the foot turned inwards, so that if she ever bore the weight of her body on that side, it must have been upon the outside of the heel. The ham-strings were contracted, but the limb itself had not shrunk. There was an old cicatrix upon the upper and inner part of the gastrocnemii muscle of considerable size, which was from an issue which had formerly been opened there, but for what purpose I do not know. The limb affected was the *right* one. Upon cutting into it over the trochanter, the same mass of fat presented itself in the cellular membrane as in the abdomen, but the muscles were small. When the knife reached the trochanter, and the dissection was made a little more towards the joint, it was discovered that there was a fracture directly through the head of the bone within the capsular ligament, and that the fracture had never been united. The ends of the fracture had been worn smooth by attrition, and they were covered by a kind of cartilaginous matter, and an artificial joint was thus formed. The divided or split head

of the bone was left in the socket, but it had never been dislocated. The dissector removed it with a great deal of difficulty. The other end of the bone was then laid bare to a considerable extent, and sawed off six inches from the trochanter, for the purpose of saving the specimen. Upon applying the saw to the femur, it was so soft that three strokes of the saw completely severed it. The earthy portions of the bone appeared to be nearly absorbed, but the gelatinous and animal portions of it were so abundant that there was no shrinking of it as to size. This dissection seemed to verify the assertion of Sir Astley Cooper, that, "when the head of the thigh bone is broken in the socket within the capsular ligament, the bone never afterwards unites."* It strikes me now that I have seen a specimen in a dead preparation at the Albany Medical College, where I was politely invited to attend a lecture upon injuries of the hip joint, by Dr. March, in the fall of 1839, where the head of the bone was broken within the ligament, and afterwards united. I may, however, be mistaken in relation to the fact. At any rate, I feel pretty confident I saw some specimens where union had been effected, where the fracture was partly within and partly without the capsular ligament.

This case was extremely interesting to me, as I have very frequently been called to cases of injuries of the hip joint in persons over 60 years of age, where I have been satisfied there has been no dislocation, but where the patient has remained permanently lame for life. In some cases I have been persuaded that the injury has been in the ligament itself, and in some I think there must have been a fracture of the head of the bone within the ligament. In some, perhaps, there may have been a fracture of the neck of the bone itself.

It was also very interesting in another point of view, as illustrating the credulity of the public at large in relation to *natural bonesetters*. In the year 1827, a man by the name of ———, styling himself a natural bonesetter, was invited into this town by the friends of an old lady, who, several years before, had fallen, and, as she supposed, had dislocated her hip, though all the physicians whom she consulted, and they were pretty numerous, assured her that such was not the fact. From the time of the accident to the time when she saw ———, she never walked without crutches. The long expected day at length arrived when he appeared, and was to perform the miracle of reducing the dislocated bone. Public expectation was on the tiptoe, and people gathered from all parts of this and the neighbouring towns to witness his mighty feats of wonder. He examined the patient, pronounced the bone dislocated, declared it could be easily reduced, and set apart the evening for the operation. In the mean time patients flocked to him from various parts of this section of the country, inquiring of him whether their bones were not dislocated, and soliciting his advice and assistance. Hundreds consulted him, some from curiosity and some from faith. He declared every one of them to have dislocated bones, some shoulders, some hips, some knees, ankles, toes, elbows, wrists, fingers, &c., &c.; many had nearly all their joints completely out of place, and they had been so for a great number of years, and for from two or

* This rule is now known not to be without exceptions.—Ed.

ten dollars each he could easily reduce the whole of them, and enable the individuals to walk and otherwise resume their functions with pristine energy. The principal theatre of his operations was a bar-room, and it was said he often had recourse to the jolly god at the bar-room between his manipulations. He generally began by setting every toe and finger in the body before he arrived at the principal joint to be reduced, so that it was no uncommon thing for him to say that he had reduced twenty or thirty bones in one individual, who never before knew that he had a single dislocated bone. And still the gaping multitude looked on and actually believed that he performed all these miracles, and really found every bone dislocated which he pulled upon. Even the evidence of the senses was disregarded, and some who had actual dislocations for years, which could never be reduced, were declared to be restored, although they walked as lame after the operation as before. At this very time there are some who continue to believe that he performed all that he professed to do, although they now, at the distance of almost three years, walk as lame as ever. But the great body of the people are now fully convinced of his charlatanic imposture; and, were he to visit us again to-morrow, he probably would not find half a dozen dupes to operate upon, although it is believed he carried away more than one hundred dollars from this village for his services for a little more than half a day. It is said he never visits the same place a second time on account of his impostures.

He visited Mrs. M. N., the patient whose limb we dissected, at Bloody-brook, and told her that her hip was dislocated, and that he could easily reduce it. He accordingly attempted it, and put her to excessive torture, and declared that he had set the bone, for which he was paid ten dollars; and, as he said this was a very bad case, he must have ten dollars more, which her husband promised to pay when the patient entirely recovered. The above dissection abundantly proved the accuracy of his prognostications and the success of his operations, and how completely he reduced the dislocated thigh!—*American Journal of Medical Science*.

PAROCHIAL MEDICAL RELIEF.

MR. HARVEY of Castle Hedingham has forwarded to us a letter on this subject, in which he advocates the following measures:—

1. In order to remedy the inconveniences caused by the present extent of the districts, persons who are unable to pay for medical attendance should be entitled to apply to one of the nearest legally authorised medical practitioners, the latter to be remunerated by the board of guardians; if the case be serious, or likely to prove so, the patient to be immediately sent to the union-house, and in no instance is the surgeon, first called, to keep the patient in his own hands for more than seven days.

2. There should be several wards in every union-house, appropriated solely to the use of the sick.

3. Each union-house should have a surgeon and

assistant-surgeon, who should be restricted from private practice.

4. The present assistant poor-law commissioners to be replaced by a number of medical inspectors, (say twelve.)

We have not thought it necessary to print Mr. Harvey's letter in full, because the points referred to by him have been completely discussed in the "Poor-law report of the Provincial Association," the concluding part of which was published in No. 45 of this Journal. We cannot recommend too strongly to the attention of our medical brethren this able and important document.

LITERARY INTELLIGENCE.

WE are glad to perceive that Dr. Carpenter of Bristol is about to publish a Second Edition of his Principles of General and Comparative Physiology. We believe that a work on human physiology will shortly appear from the pen of the same deservedly popular writer.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THE Secretaries of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association inform the members that the *PROVINCIAL JOURNAL* will in future be forwarded, free of expense, to all members of the Association whose subscriptions are not in arrear. To enable the secretaries to meet the expense of this arrangement, it is absolutely necessary that the subscriptions be punctually paid; the *JOURNAL* cannot be supplied to those members who neglect to forward their subscriptions.

The publisher of the *PROVINCIAL JOURNAL* begs to inform gentlemen desirous of completing their sets, that a new and improved series, containing Sir A. Cooper's papers, &c., commenced with the present volume, April 3, 1841. The back numbers from this period may be obtained through the medium of any bookseller or newsman in town or country.

Provincial Medical Schools. As we propose giving an account of the different provincial schools in an early number, we shall feel obliged for prospectuses, &c.

Letters and communications should be addressed to Dr. Hennis Green, 58, Margaret Street, Cavendish Square. Letters connected with the Provincial Association may be addressed to Dr. Streeten, Foregate Street, Worcester.

Printed by THOMAS INOTSON, of 105, St. Martin's Lane, in the Parish of St. Martin in the Fields, and GEORGE JOSIAH PALMER, of 20, Regent Square, in the Parish of St. Pancras, at their Office, No. 3, Savoy-street, Strand, in the Precinct of the Savoy; and published by JOHN WILLIAMS RUMSEY, at his Residence, No. 6, Wellington-street, Strand, in the Precinct of the Savoy.—Friday, September 17, 1841.