LIGATURE OF THE SPERMATIC ARTERY
PROPOSED BY HARVEY.TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL
JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—In my work on the Diseases of the Testis, &c., lately published, I have unintentionally committed an act of injustice to the merits of a distinguished individual by an oversight, for which I am anxious to take an early opportunity of making amends. The omission alluded to was detected by Mr. Soden, of Bath, and kindly pointed out to me in the following letter, for which, as well as for the flattering expressions contained in it, I beg to tender him my sincere thanks:—

"SIR,—Although I have not the honor of being personally known to you, I am induced to address you, in consequence of the pleasure I have derived from the perusal of your valuable work on Diseases of the Testis. Few professional works, indeed, have afforded me so much gratification as this production of your pen. Its historical department is extremely interesting, and evinces such a liberal desire on your part to do justice to the merits of all your predecessors, that I trust you will excuse the liberty I take in referring you to an authority that appears to have escaped your vigilant and comprehensive research. You give the credit of originality to Maunoir for the application of a ligature round the spermatic artery, as a substitute for extirpation of the testicle. You are, perhaps, right in considering this operation as of little practical value; but, if you had been acquainted with the following passage in Harvey's work on Generation, I am sure you would have paid a tribute to the claims of our immortal countryman, the discoverer of the circulation, who not only suggested the plan of tying the spermatic artery in certain cases of enlarged testis, but actually and successfully carried it into effect:—

"Having had an eye upon this employment of the arteries, or circulation of the blood, I have sometimes perfectly cured exceeding great herniæ carnosæ, beyond all expectation, providing only that the little artery being tied or cut off, no nutriment or spirit might have accession to the part affected; by which it fell out that the fatal tumor was afterwards easily extirpated either by incision or adustion. A certain man, besides other infirmities (and of this story I can produce many testimonies), had a sarcosis or fleshy tumor in his scrotum or cod, bigger than a man's head, hanging down to his knees; and from it another hernia carnosæ, as thick as one's wrist (or a cable), passed into his abdomen, so that the disease growing to so great a height, no man would undertake the cure by incision or otherwise. Yet I perfectly cured this so vast excrescence, which so much distended the scrotum and encompassed the testicle, by the means aforesaid, and yet left the leading and preparing vessel to the use of the testicle, without any prejudice or touch upon the other vessels descending into the scrotum by the tunica vaginalis, or coat of the testicles so called. But these and other cures accomplished clean, beside the common opinion, I shall, in my Physical Observations (if God grant me life), discover at large.—*English edition, London, 1653, pp. 113, 114.*

"It may not be quite clear what was the precise

nature of the disease which Harvey treated in the foregoing case; but I think he intended to tie the spermatic artery, leaving the vas deferens entire, in the expectation that the morbid part would be absorbed without destroying the function of the testicle. The case is curious; and it appears to me surprising that it should have escaped the observation of the numerous and distinguished authors who have written on the physiology and pathology of arteries since the commencement of the present century, but I am not aware that it has been noticed by any of them. The proposal to tie the thyroid artery in bronchocele, and to promote the absorption and arrest the growth of large tumors, by putting a ligature round the vessels that nourish them, has been generally regarded, I believe, as a modern suggestion; but it is evident that Harvey was acquainted with the principle on which such treatment has been recommended. Harvey's Physical Observations were never published, and it is to be feared they were lost, with his other papers, during the troubles in the time of Charles the First. The work on Generation was edited by Sir George Ent, who, in the preface, gives an interesting account of an interview with the author, during which Harvey pathetically lamented the disastrous state of public affairs; and, at p. 418, he feelingly alludes to the loss of his manuscripts. I will not, however, detain you longer, but beg you will forgive this intrusion on your time; and believe me, dear Sir,

"Very truly yours,

"JOHN S. SODEN.

"Bath, Nov. 18, 1843.

"To T. B. Curling, Esq."

That the application of a ligature to the main artery supplying a particular part morbidly enlarged, should cause that part to waste, if such a notion had never been entertained before, would not, in the present advanced state of physiological knowledge, be regarded as anything extraordinary. But when we consider the ignorance on these subjects which prevailed at the time this idea entered the mind of Harvey—that at that period the circulation and the distinct offices of the arteries and veins had only just been discovered—the suggestion must be viewed as indicative of a mind of no ordinary sagacity, and as showing how ready this great man was to make a practical application of the results of his grand discovery. And although this plan is not likely to be applied with benefit to any of the diseases of the testis, the principle upon which the treatment was founded is a valuable one, and has in other cases—as, for instance, in bronchocele—been successfully acted upon.

I shall be obliged, Gentlemen, by your giving insertion to this communication, which may prove interesting to many of your readers. It will tend to show that the writings of some of our great predecessors, now neglected, may be studied with advantage, and it may prevent others from falling into the error that I have committed—of describing as a novelty in the nineteenth century that which was suggested and practised in the seventeenth.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

T. B. CURLING.

37, New Broad-street, City, Dec. 2, 1843.