

THE LANCET.

VOL. I.—No. 2.] LONDON, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1823. [Price 6d.

SURGICAL LECTURES

DELIVERED BY
SIR ASTLEY COOPER, BART.

—
Theatre, St. Thomas's Hospital,
MONDAY EVENING,
Oct. 6th, 1823.

LECTURE FIRST.

THE subject of this lecture is Irritation; and it is one of so much importance, that gentlemen cannot successfully practise in the surgical profession without well understanding it. Irritation is either local or general, and its effects are communicated from one part to another, through the medium of the nerves, so that the heart, brain, and stomach, almost immediately after an injury has been sustained, even in the remotest parts of the body, will have their functions more or less disturbed, in proportion to the extent of the injury, and importance of the part injured. There exist,

among all parts of the body, intimate relations, all corresponding with each other, and carrying on a reciprocal intercourse of action. The wonderful and beautiful harmony produced by these concurrent phenomena, is called Sympathy; its real nature is yet unknown, but we are acquainted with many of its effects; thus the common and natural sympathy of the uterus and breasts. Sneezing is also a sympathetic action. In inflammation, or disease of the hip joints, pain is felt through the whole course of the sciatic nerve, from the knee to the foot; and this often proves a source of mistake to the surgeon, when consulted by a person who complains of a pain in the knee. A stone in the bladder causes pain in the extremity of the penis. A disease of the prostate gland causes pain at the basis of the sacrum, and on the inside of one or both thighs. A disease of the liver, pain in the shoulder; a diseased testicle, pain in the loins, irritation of the

E

intestines, an itching of the nose. Diseases in the urethra frequently produce inflammation of the testicles. The glands in the groin are often affected with sympathetic bubo from gonorrhœal inflammation. Hiccough, a convulsive motion of the diaphragm, is a symptom of mortification. There is no organ, however, so much affected by irritation or sympathetic influence, as the stomach. For instance, if a blow is received on the head, causing injury to the brain, vomiting is the first and almost constant symptom; and by this we are led to detect such injury. Vomiting is produced when the testes are injured, or intestines hurt, wounded, or strangulated; it will often arise from the mere introduction of a bougie, when it is attended with faintness; or from a gall-stone passing the biliary duct; or calculi passing through the ureters into the urinary bladder. An obtuse pain in any part will occasion vomiting; but an injury to the stomach itself will be attended with fatal effects. A man, walking through Fleet-street, quarrelled with a woman; another female came up, and gave him a blow on the region of the stomach, which caused almost instantaneous death. Upon dissection, to discover the cause of his expiring so

suddenly, no disease could be perceived. A man, belonging to the India House, was attempting to lift a weight, when another came up, and jocosely said, "Here, stand on one side; let an abler man attempt it;" and at the same instant gave him a slight blow on the stomach, when the poor fellow dropped down and expired. His body, upon being opened, shewed no marks of violence. It is not yet ascertained how blows on this part act; whether more immediately on the stomach, the diaphragm, or on the semi-lunar ganglion of nerves behind the stomach.

Irritation is either local, or constitutional; sometimes affecting only particular parts, at others being diffused throughout the entire system. Thus, a pain in a tooth will produce abscess of the jaw; and if the matter cannot escape by its sides, a fungus may be the consequence; yet if the affected tooth be drawn, the matter will be discharged and all do well. Many cases of this kind have fallen under the observation of the learned Professor, and he would relate a few of them by way of illustration.

Some years since two persons came to him from Wisbeach, (their coming from the same town to

him, and with the same disease, was quite accidental, not knowing each other's situation or intention,) each having an abscess in the jaw,—and upon examination he found them pretty extensive—they were of long standing—there was pain in some of the teeth; these teeth Sir Astley directed should be removed—they were so, and the persons completely recovered in a few days. A lady from Essex was for a long period afflicted by a fungus in the cheek; every possible exertion was used to destroy it, but in vain; upon stating that she had a pain in one of her teeth, opposite the disease, she was recommended to go to a dentist and get it drawn; this was done, and the complaint soon disappeared. A gentleman of Sir Astley's acquaintance, had for many years been exceedingly annoyed by an ulcer on the chin, every attempt to heal which had proved ineffectual; in fact, it was considered incurable. At length one of the teeth opposite the wound became painful; this tooth was extracted, and to the astonishment and delight of the patient, his malady was no longer discernible. These cases are mentioned to show the importance of attending with all possible earnestness to the effects of sympathetic diseased actions. Sometimes the most trivial local causes will produce very great constitutional derangement: a young man, apparently in good health, applied to Sir Astley respecting some disorder in the urethra; upon introducing a bougie he became pale, and fainted; and this is not an uncommon occurrence when the operation is for the first time performed on persons having an irritable habit. Strictures of the urethra, even very slight ones, occasionally produce the most painful constitutional affections. And whenever an important organ is injured, the constitution appears to suffer exceedingly; or when an organ not possessing in itself much restorative power is damaged, then the constitution becomes very much disturbed.

In compound fractures, constitutional irritation usually runs very high: the heart, brain, and stomach, are much affected; the tongue is parched; if the attack be but slight, it is covered with a whitish fur; if pretty severe, a yellow fur; and if very severe, with a dark brown one: the stomach now becomes irritable; vomiting ensues; intellect deranged; difficulty of breathing; great prostration of strength; and scarcely any secretion of bile.

Sir Astley once took from the gall-bladder of a boy (who had died from an injury received in his brain,) a fluid that had not the slightest resemblance to bile.—Thus in constitutional irritation, whether from external or internal disease, every part of the system is affected by it; and it appears to be brought about in the following manner:—when any part of the body receives an injury, the nerves convey to the important organs, as the heart &c., a sense of that injury; nature immediately commences the reparative process, which she does by stopping all the customary secretions; the various outlets being thus closed, the blood collects in large quantities in the great vessels near the heart; this powerful organ then throws with all its force the blood to the wounded part; this gives rise to inflammation, adhesion, suppuration, or whatever process nature deems the best to accomplish the desired effect. Here is a lucid illustration of the manner in which nature contends for cure; during the battle, she occasionally requires to have her ardour checked, or supported in proportion to her powers; we must watch her proceedings with “Eagles’ eyes,” and be exceedingly cautious in all our proceedings; for,

if we should open the various sluices of the body too soon, and restore the numerous secretions, it will necessarily happen that the blood will be abstracted from the wounded part and that the work of reparation can no longer continue.

Constitutional irritation will be very different; that is, much greater in some persons than in others, so that a wound, which in one man would be attended by the most dangerous consequences, would not probably in another augment or diminish a single ordinary function: this entirely depends on the state of the system at the time of the injury; thus, many of the gentlemen present would probably *now* conquer a disease without difficulty, that *in the spring* would inevitably *conquer* them; that is, if they pay attention to their professional duties as they ought, by devoting a consistent portion of time to dissecting-room instructions. The following cases are important, and impressive, and show in a powerful light the dreadful constitutional results that occasionally happen from very slight local causes.

A man who had lived intemperately, was bled by the late Mr. Saunders; two days after, he was taken ill; on the 5th the arm was inflamed above and below

the elbow, and pus was discharged from the wound, his pulse was 120, with delirium. Opium was used both internally and externally, combined with other medicines. On the 6th day his pulse was 110. On the 7th he was purged, and his delirium became less violent; a poultice of bread and water was applied to the arm with opium; the 8th day the pulse was 120, the edges of the wound covered with a brown substance, and having a fleshy feel, the arm discharged a bloody serum; and on the 9th, notwithstanding every assistance that art could devise, he died. On dissection, the skin was found mortified round the arm, the cellular membrane inflamed and suppurated, but the vein which had been opened was uninjured.

The late Dr. Ludlow when out shooting, in getting through a hedge, received in his thumb the prick of a thorn; the part soon became inflamed, and though he procured the best surgical assistance, yet died of tetanus within a week after the accident.

Another remarkable case was that of a brewer's servant, who in removing some casks (on a Saturday,) got forced under his thumb nail a small splinter of wood; at the moment he did not

regard it, but the same night awoke in considerable pain, and requested his wife to get up and make a poultice; this he applied, but it did not afford him any relief. On Sunday he became worse; Tuesday the pain had extended up the arm; his hand swelled; a surgeon visited him, and found what we have just described; Thursday Sir Astley was consulted; upon inspecting the hand, he remarked that matter existed; a lancet was applied near the part where the splinter had entered, and a considerable quantity of matter was immediately discharged; the man appeared greatly relieved, and Sir Astley thought he would do well; but upon hearing a noise as he was about to leave the room, he looked round; the man, by a convulsive effort, had raised himself, when he instantly fell back and expired. An instance opposite to those just mentioned, showing how great a degree of injury may be incurred and yet the person do well, is likewise furnished us by another brewer's man, who was run over by a dray. His elbow joint was opened, and the bones fractured. He would not submit to an operation, although strongly advised to do so. The wound was dressed by a surgeon; it soon healed; no unfavourable symp-

toms followed, and he speedily recovered.

Irritation is greatest in children, and least in aged persons; the former are very much affected by operations, whilst the latter are very slightly so. Children under two years of age, upon having stones removed from their bladders will frequently be carried off by convulsions; therefore do not, if you can possibly avoid it, ever perform the operation on a very young child, at all events, not under three years of age. The most secure age for the stone operation is sixty.

One of the worst kinds of irritation, is that occasioned by the absorption of morbid matter during dissection; it is therefore impossible that you can be too careful of your instruments when inspecting dead bodies: carelessness in this respect has ended in the loss of many a valuable life.

The learned Professor concluded this Lecture, by recommending the Students to take copious notes of all particular cases; as data for reference they will be found invaluable.

St. Thomas's Hospital.

WEDNESDAY EVENING,
Oct. 8, 1823.

LECTURE SECOND.

THE Theatre to-night is crowded to excess; not a single seat unoccupied; indeed many gentlemen are at the doors, peeping over each other's shoulders, unable to gain what is termed "a footing within the walls:" notwithstanding, however, the numerous audience, there is no noise, no rioting, no idlers,—all seem to be fully impressed with the important nature of their profession, and the profound, undivided attention that it requires.

SIR ASTLEY COOPER began by observing, that he should now describe the treatment requisite for Irritation, but not at any great length, as he should have to allude to it when he spoke of the treatment of Inflammation, both being nearly the same

Where constitutional irritation arises from a local disease, to it must your remedies be applied; but on the contrary, where local disease is either promoted or aggravated by a course diffused throughout the system, then your remedies must be directed to the