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Original Communications.

SURGICAL OPERATIONS WITHOUT PAIN— WHOSE IS THE GLORY OF THE DIS- COVERY?

Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal by CHARLES KIDD, M.D., London, England.

I FEEL that a few words of vindication of the American school of medicine are loudly called for at the present time by the students of anæsthetics.

The lamented illness and death of Professor Simpson, in May, at Edinburgh, has brought up again (as it was sure to do) the claims of America to the discovery of "etherization" or practical anæsthetics: one would say *practical* anæsthetics, with the subsequent improvements in surgery consequent on surgical operations without pain; *e. g.* ovariectomy, excision of joints, reduction of old dislocations, cure of traumatic tetanus, puerperal convulsions, cure of strangulated hernia, &c. The real honor of the application of anæsthetics belongs of course to America. The January number of the *Medical Review* for 1847 had a remarkable postscript signed by Sir John Forbes, announcing the discovery as having taken place in the previous November; but when one finds, of late, in England, in the newspapers, nearly all the facts misrepresented, it is only fair to the cause of scientific truth that some protest be entered, though one does so with a feeling of unpleasantness towards public, literary guides, very alien to one's natural wish.

A somewhat unfair advantage has been taken of America, of late, in England, though the movement has not been shared in by men of larger and more generous minds. The names of Morton and Wells have been carefully ignored, as to anæsthetics, and in the majority of public journals all the glory, or the entire credit, of surgical operations without pain, has been given to Professor Simpson. Six or ten clannish Scotchmen, aided by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh—the well known proprietor of *Chambers's Journal*, who can

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alone, if so willing, wield the entire press of England and Scotland—have written the name of Simpson up to a Robert Burns empyrean of their own, sedulously taking care, especially in medical journals, not to hear the opposite side of the question.

One admires the remarks of your journal that beneath the funeral pall which covers the bier of poor Simpson we must hide all differences, all earthly competition. But will the uncompromising logic of facts agree with the pronouncement of Clymer, Otis, and others, of America, that ether is inferior to chloroform, and all the glory is due to the late Professor Simpson? One would be inclined to go a long way with the writer "*Innominalus*" in your Journal, as to the absolute virtue of ether as superior to chloroform. It is, however, an eminently clinical subject, and not one to be settled by the abstract ideas of a young chemist like Dr. Murray, who writes in the *British Medical Journal*, and never permits chemical fancies or ideas to be corrected by absolute hospital facts. Cases of death from ether have been denied in the Boston Society Report.

We must, however, recall the cases quoted by Sabarth, and also the general admission that death *may* occur from ether, though slowly and by intoxication; not like chloroform, quick as a flash of lightning, without signs of intoxication; but it is nearly impossible that this or any other problem in anæsthetics can now be worked out in English medical journals.

A too credulous public, controlled, or in the hands of those who can only see any true virtue in Simpson's discoveries, or voltaic narcotism, or coagulation of the blood by escape of ammonia, methy-ethylic ether, &c., or in the press of M. Emely, where the facts as to Morton and Simpson are reversed, ignores America as a cardinal point of public probity. The death of poor Lady Simpson last month, our Harveian oration in June, friendly Scotch meetings at the Duke of Sutherland's to get up a gorgeous testimonial to Simpson, all tend to keep up a painful feeling of unnecessary excitement against American claims. But

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surely all this will not satisfy or prevent the relentless finger of history from claiming for the stars and stripes some of the credit due to Morton; we make no sign at the death of poor Syme or the Earl of Clarendon, but popular innocence must be encouraged that as to anæsthetics America can have no claim.

It is not my purpose to enter into the history of anæsthetics; this has been done by Snow, by Lallemand, Perin and Duroy, Sabarth and others, and recently set abroad in a way of his own, taken out of these books, by an ever glowing rhapsodist in the *Lancet* and *Medical Times*, and in London newspapers: the public and professional mind has been unhappily mystified "up to the top of its bent," until, at last, it is a part of English history—like Runymede or Wat Tyler—that to Simpson and Scotland all the glory of anæsthetics is due, let America vaunt as she pleases. "There was a heart in Simpson that was impressed with the great evil of pain," says our rhapsodist in the *Lancet*,* "and gave him a pleasure in relieving it, and it would be difficult to decide to what extent the credit of his discovery of the great anæsthetic (chloroform) was due to the energy of his mere humanity." And again, "the discovery at once wafted him to a height of fame parallel, if not superior, to that of Harvey, of Jenner, of Hunter or of Bell. Those indeed who questioned his right to the honor of discoverer only betrayed their incapacity to take the soundings of his intellect; few men have possessed, in equal measure with himself, the combined strength and nimbleness of faculty by which alone Proteus is to be fettered. Few could so wrestle with the fleeting spirit of science, and refuse to let it go till, like Jacob of old with the angel, he had wrung from it a blessing." "Since the days of Sir Walter Scott, we doubt if there was a Scotchman who commanded so much hearty and loyal affection from all grades of the people. His house was a sort of metropolitan Abbotsford, the daily luncheons, &c." And then he is likened to Prospero, and Ariel and Puck, now on account of his power over the living elements, then in "diplomacy and intrigue of the present." The *Times* newspaper added the rather astounding statement, that all this was short of the truth, for Simpson had used, to their positive knowledge, chloroform in midwifery in 1844, long before some obscure Americans had revived an idea of Sir Humphry Davy as to ether in 1817, or 1846.

* The *Lancet*: May 14, 1870.

The well known writer of most of these glowing adumbrations, showed at one time that in tooth-drawing, if by a severer shock of electricity through the dental nerves, the mind was taken off from the actual pain, the actual pain as a logical sequence disappeared, the attention being so taken off;—in other words, you were relieving the latter pain;—and those who questioned the right of this to be considered as a discovery of great value only betrayed their incapacity to take the soundings of electric science, and this new phase of it, termed voltaic narcotism; this wonderful Proteus, of combined strength and nimbleness, only thus to be fettered! These authorities, who thus see all the originality as to anæsthetics in the simple fact that Flourens had been using chloroform for a twelvemonth before Simpson, and that this fact was known to Simpson, and was directly suggested and recommended in one Protean form or another to him by Dr. Formby, Mr. Waldie, or Jacob Bell—these authorities, who must know that Simpson was not at all the originator of the use of chloroform, trust yet to the great national spirit of Scotland, and rest satisfied with the after-dinner self-adulation speeches of Edinburgh aldermen to assure the world that Simpson alone, like Jacob of old wrestling with the angel, had himself grasped the great secret from nature, wafting him to a height of fame superior to that of Harvey, Jenner, Hunter, &c. Nay, moreover, they state that nitrous oxide, the wild dream of some Americans, was like other American pretensions, vulgar and common-place, and not to be tolerated for a moment when compared to voltaic narcotism, or methyl-ethylic ether! Yet all these general and rather dogmatic formulæ of the chemical laboratory, as it strikes practical men, require the correcting influences of hospital experience. But the English medical journals referred to—as, in the American war or rebellion, and fitting out of Alabama ships, &c., they defended one side—now sanction all this reversal of history, as Simpson's great name is opportunely on the "crest of the wave."

But it is really not a question of popularity at all, or struggle with angels in a Tam O'Shanter empyrean, Proteus or Puck, of after-dinner speeches, carefully preserved in the *Lancet*, or other weekly prints, that climb the "crest of the wave," one day with Alabama invasions, the next with voltaic narcotism, or Simpson equal to Harvey.

It need scarcely be said, that previous to 1846, when Morton and Jackson introduced the administration of ether vapor, to destroy

the pain in surgical operations, the scenes for hundreds of years in operating theatres were, or had been, of the most heart-rending, hideous kind; excisions of the knee, for instance, which analogy led surgeons to approve, were given up on account of the prolonged agony. The chief Dublin surgeon of that day relates that he tried the operation; but having to get four men to hold the poor writhing, shrieking child, in her horrible torture, and prolonged sawing and carving and cutting alive, he gave up the operation in despair; and so of ovariectomy, it was amongst the operations that, even after the discovery of ether inhalation, was interdicted at our Paddington Hospital, and an action for homicide was threatened against the obstetric surgeon, if he dared to undertake it and the patient should have died.

The Greeks say Alexander the Great marched triumphant over the world back to—chaos; so is it in some degree of those few writers, now chiefly the conquering advocates of voltaic narcotism, ether spray, methyl-ethyl ether, &c., who are exploring or marching over the great field of anæsthetics, and reverting to this region of surgical chaos; not in order to recognize or thank Morton and Jackson, but to place Simpson at this "height of fame parallel, if not superior to that of Harvey, Jenner," &c. The Americans, we are told, "are the most childishly sensitive" in making any claim for Morton, and we are treated to a disquisition in the *Lancet* on the anodyne draughts of the ancient Greeks, the supposed virtue of mandragora and to the narcotic or anæsthetic wonders "shown by ourselves in 1854, possessed by the lycoperdon or puff ball" for stupefying bees when exposed to its fumes, though the recognized Hand Book on Bees in England, says the fumes of burning rags, or fustian, is a better narcotic still (containing carbonic oxide).

All ethical propriety or honesty seems lost at present. Morton's name is carefully ignored, the story of the patent in Congress misrepresented and magnified. All sections, the most opposite in the profession, the spinal ice-bag enthusiasts in England, the admirers of the lancet in typhus, and the dogma of *stare super vias antiquas* in hebdomadal literature, the journals of the cheap wine trade and secret chloroform and treacle-nostrooms which pay hundreds of pounds for advertising in legitimate journals, all join Dr. Richardson in these rhapsodies; all agree in denouncing the Americans for claiming any virtue in "Etherization"

and Boston in particular; nay, what is more, will never permit a correction of manifest errors, only in their own way, or in a half way, when the error has had its day; and just as Jenner was denied all honor for vaccination at our London College of Physicians, and Sydenham was denied its fellowship while dukes and lay lords were made fellows, so the name of Morton is derided; this may do for Carmichael Essay adjudications in Dublin, but it scarcely consorts with a judicial inquiry as to what America has really done.

TEMPORARY BLINDNESS, FOLLOWING AN ATTACK OF INTERMITTENT FEVER.

Translated by D. F. LINCOLN, M.D., Boston.

The patient was a robust young man, aged 19. When first seen by the physician, he was lying in violent clonic convulsions, entirely insensible; the body was sweating moderately, the pulse was 110, the pupils reacted slightly. He had been suffering during the previous fortnight with intermittens tertiana postpnea; the attacks, however, had never reached the intensity of the one in question. The bystanders thought the man was dying. The symptoms being apparently referable to the "chill," which had made its regular appearance on that day, and had already passed into the sweating stage, a favorable prognosis was given. Three hours later, the patient was found in the full possession of consciousness, bathed in perspiration, and weeping bitterly at the loss of his eyesight. He said he had seen nothing since coming to his senses. The pupil reacted distinctly to light; but the power of vision was reduced to a feeble perception of the light of a candle. Ophthalmoscopic examination gave a completely negative result; no pathological changes being visible either in the fundus or in the media. In view of the origin of this condition, it was thought best to administer a strong dose of quinia. The patient remained five hours longer in the same condition, then fell asleep (about 6 A.M.), and when he awoke the power of vision was completely restored. How much the quinia had to do with the favorable result, must remain uncertain. Pigmentary embolism of the arteria centralis retinæ, with consequent transitory disturbance of nutrition, is suggested as a possible cause. (Reported by Dr. Dutzmann, in the Wiener Med. Presse, June 26.)