THE BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

VOL. XXXVIII. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 1848.

No. 13.

CASE OF STRICTURE OF THE COLON, EXISTING FOR MANY YEARS.

BY S. WEBBER, M.D., CHARLESTOWN, N. H.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

For many years I had occasionally attended Mrs. N. P., a woman naturally of a slender constitution and nervous temperament, and when I first knew her for several years a subject of confirmed ill health, laboring under a chronic derangement of the digestive organs, which Marshall Hall includes within the group of maladies he has called *Mimoses*. She was thin, and looked worn and haggard for her years, which were not above six or seven and twenty. Her skin was sallow, her appetite irregular, digestion frequently painful or imperfect, and bowels irregular, with a general tendency to constipation; tongue pale, and frequently coated with a thin, dirty-looking mucosity. She had tried many physicians and many remedies, but was wanting in the energy and perseverance necessary to pursue any course effectively. When I was called in any more acute paroxysm of her complaint, I could readily in a few days get the exaggerated symptoms substantially relieved, but when she had regained her usual miserable state, I found it in vain to expect or persuade her to do anything more, and was forced to content myself with then leaving her to her own guidance.

In the latter part of the year 1843, I was called to her in one of these exacerbations, which she had not experienced before for a year previous. The medicines that I gave her to free the bowels, brought away two or three lumbrici. This circumstance made a strong impression upon her hypochondriacal feelings, and she conceived that the whole of her troubles was owing to some great collection of these parasites, and was urgent with me to take effectual and active measures to exterminate them. I represented to her that it was altogether probable that the presence of these was but accidental, and that though they might have increased the difficulties under which she labored, they were by no means the cause of them; and that any very active remedies, frequently used in such cases, were altogether unsuited to the state of her digestive organs, and would be productive of injury.

A course of gentle alterative and tonic medicine was prescribed for her, under which she was gradually recovering her usual state of health,

when she thought it expedient to change her physician for a young man who had lately come into the town, giving himself out to be considerably above the common run of physicians in skill and acquirements; and as, in addition to thus "blowing a long trumpet," he also "rode a sectarian horse," some were found to give full credit to his professions, and it was recommended to my patient, by some officious neighbors, to employ him, with the assurance that "he would give her a good dose or two that would set her up at once." He was accordingly sent for, and I took my leave.

It was soon pronounced that the patient was afflicted with a tape worm, and all the pungent anthelmintics and drastic purgatives, that had been found efficacious in such cases, were put in requisition, to the great distress of the patient, but not to the destruction of the worm, though it was said that from time to time great quantities of it came away. Still no relief ensued, and something was wanted to establish the reputation of the doctor. There happened at that time to be a professor of mesmerism in the neighborhood, and he was asked to give his assistance in the matter. A susceptible female was accordingly magnetized, and being put in communication with the sick person, she said that she saw coiled up, in the person's intestines and stomach, a long reptile, with four red eyes and a large mouth, the head of which was occasionally erected towards the throat, with open mouth, as if seeking for food; but that when anything medicinal or nauseous was swallowed by the patient, the mouth was closed, and the head bent downwards, while if anything sweet or good was swallowed, the reptile imbibed it with eagerness.

This was deemed a fair description of a tape worm, and an undeniable confirmation of the doctor's diagnosis. The mesmerizer, according to the usual formula in such cases, was then required to indicate the proper and necessary means of dislodging this unwelcome inhabitant from the stomach, of which it had so unceremoniously taken possession. The means prescribed were to get the reptile thoroughly intoxicated by a large potation of sweetened spirit, of which it was declared to be very fond, and while sleeping off its festive debauch in happy unconsciousness and incapable of making resistance, to assail it with a powerful dose of physic, by which it would straightway be dislodged from its domicile, and hurried, *nolens volens*, into the outer breathing and lightsome world. Notwithstanding a considerable temperance excitement at that time, it was thought exceedingly proper that a tape worm should get drunk, and accordingly a very large potation of good N. E. rum, well sweetened with molasses, was exhibited, and in due time, when the worm might be supposed to be enjoying its *siesta*, it was followed by an equally liberal portion of spirits of turpentine, subsequently re-inforced by some active cathartic. A very active effect was produced upon the bowels, and a large quantity of something long was discharged, which was declared to be the principal portion of the tape worm, and was triumphantly seized and bottled up in a portion of the same treacherous spirit which had decoyed it to its end.

But notwithstanding the jollification of the tape worm, and his subse-

quent "enticement" from his lodgings, the patient, so far from being better, rather seemed the worse for the proceeding. The bowels were more irregular and troublesome than ever, her general sufferings were much augmented, and from time to time, under the operation of purgatives, large quantities of what were called "cut up" portions of the tape worm were passed, even in increasing quantities, showing how formidable and endless must have been the dimensions of the reptile, a sort of intestinal kraken. This state of things was supposed to require a further exhibition of expulsive remedies, and they were given without any change of symptoms, save from bad to worse, till at last the unfortunate woman believed herself, and was believed by her friends, to be moribund, and further medication was given up as useless, and the doctor desisted, from his well-meant, doubtless, but ineffectual endeavors to rid her of the remains of his unconquered opponent, after the siege had lasted some three or four months.

When relieved of the physician, nature, however, showed herself able in some degree to contend with her other enemies, and Mrs. P. gradually recruited somewhat in strength, and obtained a more endurable degree of suffering. After a few weeks I was sent for to attend another of the family, and my former patient, after some expressions of regret for past occurrences, intimated a wish to have me do something for her, if anything could be done to alleviate her condition, for recovery, or even any long continuance of life, she did not seem to expect. I was then made acquainted with the foregoing particulars amongst others, and the carefully-preserved remains of the supposed tape worm were produced for my examination. These I found to consist of a ragged flocculent rope of dense mucus, about the bigness of my little finger, semi-transparent and apparently in places somewhat tubular in structure, though so much twisted and shrunken that it was difficult to ascertain this. The length of it was about three feet. It bore no resemblance whatever to a tape worm, or to any organized structure. I found, upon inquiry, that large quantities of a similar substance, "in strips," as the woman expressed it, were passed at every movement of the bowels, which usually took place every two or three days, sometimes oftener. Upon the examination of these discharges, I found them to consist of a quantity of thin, watery, feculent matter, with here and there small pellets of greater substance, mixed with a large quantity, half a pint or more, of this same mucus, in long, tenacious shreds, often more or less twisted, ragged and irregular; the length of many of these shreds was ten or twelve inches, and even more. They resembled very exactly in general character the mucous strings that may be found in a basket where a dozen or two of large lively eels have been confined for a few hours. There was no doubt that it was a secretion from the mucous membrane of the bowels, in a state of intense and peculiar irritation, accompanied with great vermicular action. Upon the most minute inquiry and examination, I could not find that anything like the gourd-seed-shaped fragments of the *tænia* were or ever had been observed in the alvine evacuations.

The general state of the patient was bad. She was much emaciated, her

countenance sallow, with a haggard and melancholy expression ; her appetite was very poor, and digestion painful ; she complained much of constant soreness of the mouth, and severe smarting, both in the mouth and throat, upon taking anything, however mild and simple, into the mouth or swallowing it. The tongue, however, was but slightly coated, and with a whitish slimy fur, nor were any ulcers or aphthæ to be seen. The under side of the tongue was complained of particularly, and the surface looked shining and irritable, though not more highly colored than usual. She also complained of a constant nauseous taste in the back part of the mouth and throat, and the breath was fetid. She said that she experienced great distress after taking any food, however simple, or even the mildest drinks, but that her greatest suffering was from an almost constant sensation of burning heat in the abdomen, together with a twisting and rolling sensation, and sharp, pungent, lancinating pains, which two last symptoms she referred to the crawling of the tape worm, and to its biting her "insides." The act of defæcation was attended with much suffering, from tenesmus, and heat and pain in the rectum. There was also dysuria, and the urine was scanty, fetid and turbid. She also complained much of a lump, as she called it, or what felt like it to her, in the intestines, sometimes stationary, sometimes moving about, ascending to the stomach and up the throat partially, with a choking sensation. This she believed to be the tape worm crawling after food, or coiled up to rest himself. The existence of any such inmate I firmly believed to be altogether apocryphal, from the absence of the physical signs, for I did not believe that any worm of that species would have sustained the enormous dosing the poor woman had undergone, without losing at least occasionally some of his "tail," to furnish ocular and tangible proof of his existence. Many of the symptoms, moreover, were clearly hysterical. These things I represented to her in the best way I could, to operate favorably upon her mind, so as if possible to calm it somewhat, and to assist my efforts to benefit her in other ways. But though I partially, in this way, dispelled her belief in the tape worm, it was not to change it for the better. She had unluckily read or heard of some woman who had swallowed a snake in its embryo state, in drinking from a spring, and being confirmedly and wretchedly hypochondriacal, nothing would do but that she must believe that if there was not a tape worm, there must at least be a snake or a newt, which she had swallowed in its very tender infancy, having been accustomed for many years to get water for drinking from an open spring.

After carefully studying the case for some time, and observing closely the effects of the various gentle medicines with which I endeavored to restore the healthy action of the digestive organs, I came to the conclusion that there existed, in the course of the intestines, one or more, probably the latter, places where the passage was considerably narrowed and constricted, with a thickened and unyielding state of its coats, and a highly irritated state of the mucous lining, giving rise to this immense secretion of inspissated and almost membraniform mucus. Superadded to this was the old Mimotic complaint, and a great degree of hysteria,

with some spinal irritation, and from some symptoms I was led to fancy there might be some scirrhus forming—where, I could not determine, so obscure were the symptoms. The peculiar state of the intestines I could not but refer to the action of the severe means used for the expulsion of the supposed tape worm, and such indeed was the opinion of the woman herself; for though, for a long time, I could not persuade her but that there was some live creature in her bowels, yet she always affirmed that there were some feelings that she never experienced before taking some of the doses, and that she should always believe that those doses were the cause of them.

I labored for some months in endeavoring to help her, and for a time with partial success, restoring her to some degree of appetite and greater ease of digestion, obtaining a more easy and natural state of the alvine evacuations, in which the mucous strips only made their appearance occasionally, and then in much less quantity. But the patient's mind, never very strong, was, with her nerves, completely shattered by the sufferings she had undergone, and was still undergoing. She became a confirmed hypochondriacal monomaniac on the subject of her disease; and though, from my repeated asseverations of my disbelief in the supposed existence of any living reptile within her, and my repeated explanations and statements of what I considered the real nature of the case, she finally ceased saying anything to me about it, yet she, I think, never gave up the belief, and made me promise that when she died I would examine her body to ascertain the cause of her sufferings. Finding, too, that from my view of the case a cure could not be expected, and weary of, and disgusted with, taking medicine, she finally refused to take any more, wishing, she said, to die, and would only now and then submit to some external application to relieve any extreme distress. In this wretched state, however, she survived for nearly four years, and among the last things she mentioned, before her death, was the desire to have me examine her body after her decease. This I did the next day.

The corpse was very much emaciated. Upon opening the abdomen, the stomach appeared to be rather contracted in breadth, with its coats generally a little thickened, but flexible and soft, and not otherwise unhealthy. The pyloric orifice was in a natural state. The duodenum, jejunum, ileum and cæcum were in good condition. The colon was firmly united to each flank by old adhesions, which could be overcome only by the knife. The ascending colon had in it two strictures of three or four inches each, where its calibre was so contracted as with difficulty to admit the end of my little finger; the arch of the colon was tolerably healthy, though its coats were somewhat thickened, and it contained a small quantity of thick fecal matter. Almost the whole of the descending colon was very much contracted, as much so as on the right side, and in these places the coats were greatly thickened, and upon opening them the mucous membrane was found covered with the inspissated mucus of which such quantities had been voided. The rectum was also more contracted than natural, and its coats thickened. The uterus seemed natural, as also the bladder. No particular organic change

was observable in the liver, but the gall-bladder was rather larger than usual, and distended with bile of a dark-green color. The kidneys were enveloped with little else than loose cellular membrane, but seemed somewhat harder than natural, and a very small quantity of what seemed pus was found in the pelvis of one of them. The spleen presented no unusual appearance, but the pancreas was somewhat enlarged and much indurated, appearing scirrhus throughout. The whole extent of the intestinal canal, from the œsophagus to the rectum, was carefully examined, but no worm or reptile of any kind made its appearance.

ETHERIZATION—A COMPENDIUM OF ITS HISTORY, SURGICAL USE, DANGERS, AND DISCOVERY.

BY HENRY J. BIGELOW, M.D., ONE OF THE SURGEONS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL.

[Communicated for the Boston Med. and Surg. Journal.—Continued from page 237.]

EQUALLY futile were the objections to the new and patent method upon the ground of quackery and professional etiquette. Such considerations should fall before a question of this magnitude; and as to the fact, professional custom does not sanction such objections.

A few words upon the patent may not be here inappropriate. Discoverers in art tax the world for a pecuniary equivalent. In the higher atmosphere of science, which deals with abstract truth, it is not easy, nor is it usual, thus to extort a value for any application growing out of discovery. It is well that a line should be drawn between discoveries in pure science, which enlarges the sphere of the intellect and the boundaries of permanent knowledge, between such discovery and the transitory and less disinterested labors directed to the amelioration of a narrower circle and a briefer term.

It does not harmonize with our better impulses, that a great invention in the art of relieving human suffering should be in any way conditional. I believe that nations would have emulated each other in meeting any liability generously abandoned to them as a debt of honor. Yet it should be remembered that the question of patent is very insignificant compared with the discovery itself, or the gratitude due to it. Besides which, secrets are common, and perhaps justly so, in the profession with which this discovery had an intimate connection in its early history, and a patent there is not a subject of comment.

Some of the Journals seem to have been indignant at the announcement of this patent by a regular physician. I investigated and published some of the first experiments by the permission of those concerned in making them, and announced the patent with its extenuating circumstances at their stipulation. That the patent was an error of judgment as well as a violation of custom, I had no doubt; I vainly endeavored, as far as my very humble influence might weigh, to prevent the final measures for procuring it. I even urged an appeal to interest; the force of which has been fully verified in this case; viz., that when the burden