also existed: This was clearly consequent upon the elevation of the right shoulder, made to relieve the tension arising from the peculiar position of the head. The mother stated that no deformity existed two years since, when she left the maternal roof to reside that time with her grandfather, and among strangers. The deformity was noticed immediately on her return.

I can only account for the occurrence of the affection by supposing the natural shyness of the child, which was unusual, induced her "to hang her head," till this became a confirmed habit, and produced permanent muscular contraction, analogous to that met with among the fakirs or wandering mendicants of India. I determined to perform a subcutaneous section of the muscle. I was assisted in the operation by my father and my friend, Mr. Chalk, surgeon to the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary. The division was readily accomplished by an incision through the skin at the anterior edge of the muscle, sufficient to admit a grooved director, which was passed behind the muscle, and the fibres divided by a small knife, carried along the groove, brought forward, and withdrawn, leaving the skin entire. The section was attended by a snapping sound, and the head then regained its natural position; only a drop or two of blood oozed from the orifice. The head was encircled for two or three days by a double-headed roller, the ends of which were carried beneath the left axilla, so as to keep the divided ends of the muscle as far apart as possible. Two weeks have now elapsed since the operation; the spine is perfectly straight; indeed, this was observed the day following. The head can be moved freely in all directions, and the only imperfection is a slight degree of obliquity in the line of the eyes; but this is fast disappearing.

DISPENSARY CASES.

By CHARLES CLAY, Surgeon, Manchester,
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ICTHYOSIS.

MRS. MARLAND, of Ashton, brought her little son to the dispensary, four years old, who had been subject to this very singular affection for three years; he was an entire mass of diseased cuticle from head to foot, with the exception of the hairy scalp and the face; the latter of which was affected, but with a milder form. The ugly appearance of the child when stripped was extreme. I agree with Plumbe, Bateman, Girdlestone, and others, that no analogy exists between its appearance and the skin of the fish tribe, but that the dry, cracked, and horny character of the elephant skin is much nearer in resemblance to it than any other object;

consequently the term ichthyosis is inappropriate, and, perhaps, that of elephantiasis more correct. In this case the skin was dry, horny, and crackled, of a dirty brown cast, from the accumulated dirt upon it, and from which it was very difficult to free it; to the touch the skin was equally rough every way, like a very coarse file, whilst that of the fish tribe is only rough in one direction. It has been remarked by Girdlestone that the constitution in these cases seldom, if ever, appears affected, and that the countenance is unusually florid: in the present case the countenances of the boy and mother were very florid; but the father, grandfather, and grandmother, were sallow, emaciated, and seldom well in health. Various modes of treatment had been resorted to by different practitioners, but the appearance continued without any alteration, save for the worse: almost tired, and despairing of success, they applied at the dispensary in November, 1840. The child was prescribed for. It would be useless to recapitulate all the means tried. Warm-baths, iodine, nitrate of silver, mercurials, tonics, vegetable and mineral, diaphoretics, and a host of remedies, both externally and internally, recommended by various authorities without the least improvement in the case; every attempt appeared only to stamp the case as hopeless, when I ordered the following ointment to be applied over the whole surface night and morning:—

Rx *Subcarbonate of potass*, ʒiij;

Lard, ʒviij. M.

I must confess I had little faith in the application; but in a case so obstinate any reasonable and not decidedly injurious application was justifiable. To my surprise, however, after three days using, I found the whole diseased cuticle peeling off in large masses from all parts of the body, leaving a new but very tender skin beneath; and on rubbing the surface with the hand, the skin had a soft feel, and some remnants of the old cuticle (sufficiently light to fly about) separated on friction. After the application had been continued for about four weeks, the skin became so soft and tender that I stopped the ointment and substituted the following mixture:—

Rx *Infusion of gentian*, ʒviij;

Subcarbonate of potass, ʒj. M. Half an ounce to be taken three times a-day.

It is now nearly three months since the cuticle peeled, and there is no appearance of a return of the disease; the medicine is only taken occasionally, and the child sent to the sea-side. Amidst the acknowledged obscurity both as to cause and treatment of this disease, the plan here proposed is worthy of trial; as such cases are rare, it will be some time before the means can be properly tested: if, however, they should be found as efficacious in other cases, the circumstance is worth recording.

EPILEPSY.

Anne Newton, ætat. 35, applied for relief, being subject to fits of epilepsy since five years of age, which up to the time of menstruation were only occasional, but after that period they became more frequent, and still more so when she married. She had had three children, and at present the attacks became so constant that she frequently endangered her life by falling into the fire and other dangerous places. I ordered the following mixture :—

Rx Gum assafœtida, 3ij;

Aloes, 3j;

Carrigeen moss, ʒss;

Boiling water, ʒj. M. To be infused for two hours; half an ounce to be taken every three hours.

Immediately after taking this the fits abated, and after using it a week she had not a single attack for three months. Fancying herself well, the medicine was neglected, and the fits returned, but not very violent, and on resuming the mixture they again disappeared. It is now ten months since she had any attacks, and though heartily tired of the medicine, she feels reluctant to give it up lest the fits should return.

James Booth, ætat. 21, had been subject to epileptic fits since he was an infant, which, as he grew, became more frequent and severe, until his life was a burthen to him. He commenced the infusion as ordered in Newton's case, and whilst steadily taking it he was entirely free from them, but whenever the medicine was neglected the fits returned; being of unsteady habits this was frequently the case, but the effect was very striking when he could be induced to persevere in taking it.

The formulæ here recommended cannot be considered as entirely new, nor is it recommended as a specific: assafœtida has long been used for cases, and extolled by various authorities. The two cases here given, prove that the formulæ recommended have considerable power over the symptoms; and, perhaps, if persevered in for a considerable time, a permanent cure might be established. The medicine is a very nauseous one; but any remedy is preferable to the misery of constant attacks of epilepsy.

Abram Lees, ætat. 36, had been subject to violent epileptic fits since infancy; this case is an echo of the preceding; as long as he persevered in the medicine the fits were entirely done away with, and returned (though not so violently) when it was neglected.

REMARKABLE CASE OF
DEPRESSION OF THE SKULL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—D. A., ætat. 45, called on me, in the spring of 1819, for some trifling medicines to keep his bowels regular. His hat being off, I observed a surprising depression of the parietal bones of the head: such being the case, it naturally led me to inquire the cause, &c. He stated that, as long ago as fifteen years, he was cutting timber in British North America, and by himself at the time, when a rotten branch of the tree (of a very considerable size) fell across his head, when he was struck down, and insensible for a time; but at length he was able to rise and reach his home. He was more than fifty miles from any medical aid; and in fact he was not able to pay from fifty to one hundred dollars, the usual charge of any surgeon for such a distance; of course, he never had any medical assistance whatever. When I saw him he was in perfect health, and had been so for the greater part of the previous fifteen years.

The above case attracted my attention so much, that I recollect the circumstance as well as if it had happened yesterday. I laid my wrist in the hollow across the parietal bones, and it took very nearly the upper part of my wrist to be equally on a level with the os frontis and the occipital bones of the head. This case has almost done me more good than five years' study at the Edinburgh University; it taught me, in all surgical cases, not to be rash or too ready to interfere with nature's work: in truth, had it not been for this single and truly interesting case, many a man must have been walking with a timber leg; and more than this, many a person would have had the trepan applied to his cranium. I have seen surgeons when abroad, and who were reckoned men of the first talent, apply the trepan when there was no fracture; and what was worse, when there was no indication of danger. The profession in general are by too far naturally fond of operations; and as my old and respected master, John Bell, used to say, that "he, and he only, is the able surgeon who can see the real necessity of performing an operation." I write this case for the younger part of the profession; and I am sorry to say, that I have delayed it too long. I would advise my young friends not to be too rash or forward in performing operations; I have seen so much of it, that I am positively ashamed to acknowledge one-quarter of the miserable operations that I have witnessed performed both in England and America. I allow that a surgeon of first-rate talents is a valuable character in society, and at all times to be admired, but there is a great evil in being too fond of the knife.