ON DISTORTIONS OF THE FEET AND OTHER PARTS.

BY T. SHELDRAKE, ESQ.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I do not know whether you are or are not aware, that I have employed more than forty years of my life in curing malformations, distortions, and other defects in the human form, and am entitled to say, with more success than any other person. In the course of my practice, I have cured more than a thousand patients, including, perhaps, every variety of those defects that is susceptible of being cured, without any person having discovered the means by which these cures were effected. The secret was my own, and I should not have kept it so long, but in consequence of the insignificant persons who, in my time, fancied themselves to be at the head of the surgery of that day, endeavouring to force it from me, and convert it to their own purposes, compelling me to act as their servant, and for their benefit.

The consequence of the line of conduct most steadily practised by them was, that I, like the traveller in *Æsop's* fables, who, when Boreas blew with all his power to force his warm cloak from him, wrapped it more closely about him, and set the storm at defiance; so that my practice still remains unknown; but as I believe that all these intriguers are either passed into another state of existence, or, at least, retired from active life, and the time cannot be very distant when I must follow them; and as I think my discovery has been useful so long, and may be useful much longer, if it be placed in proper hands, I have determined to use the most effectual means that I can devise, to place it in the hands of those gentlemen who are well qualified to practise surgery, and by whom *only* this practice can be adopted with success.

It has occurred to me, that this information may be agreeable to some of your readers, and to ascertain whether it will or will not be so, I send this paper. If you insert it, I shall send others in continuation; if you do not, I have only to apologise for having troubled you with this.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

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Those distortions which have been the subjects of my attention, may be divided into two kinds; first, spinal curvature, and whatever malformations are connected with those parts of the body which are above the

pelvis; and, second, whatever defects are connected with the feet, legs, and thighs. Of the first class no notice will be taken at present.

The second class may, for the purposes of this explanation, be divided into two parts, viz. such as take place before the birth of the child; and, second, of such as take place at uncertain periods during future life, and are produced from a variety of causes.

The most common of this second class, are those in which the feet turn inwards to a greater or less degree; the foot appears to be misshapen, and has acquired, in common language, the name of club foot; it has been very erroneously believed to be occasioned by malformation of bones of the foot, and, therefore, has been held to be incurable. When I come to treat at length on the cure of this defect, I shall state what the real cause is. The limits to which I am confined in the present communication, restrict me to show, that these cases may be most completely and permanently cured.

A lady, who resided in the north of England, had a son born with two distorted feet; she carried him to Edinburgh, and was told by the gentlemen she consulted there, that the defect was quite incurable; she, therefore, made up her mind to bear her misfortune with resignation; but, having accidentally heard that a child in her neighbourhood had been cured of a similar defect by me, she wrote to her brother-in-law, who was at that time a physician in London, to ascertain from me whether I could cure the child, what time it would require to effect the cure, and whether my personal attention was necessary during the whole time that the cure was going on. In consequence of what passed between Dr. — and me, she brought the child to town, and resided for some time in her brother's house, but afterwards removed into a separate lodging of her own. The child was between two and three years old when I first saw him, and it was two years before he was quite well. Upon this subject it will be proper to say at once, that the few who, before me, condescended to suppose that such defects *might* be cured, advanced an opinion that was quite erroneous; they said, that if such things *could* be cured at all, those cures should not be attempted till the child was two, three, or four years old, because then they would have strength enough to bear the treatment that must be necessary to effect the cure. The very reverse of this is the truth: I have invariably found, that when these cases were placed in my hands, within a few days, and in many cases within a few weeks of the birth, they were generally quite well before the time that children usually walk alone, so that at or after that period, no circumstance re-

mained to show that the feet had ever been defective; but if months, or, as in this case, years were allowed to pass before I was allowed to cure them, years were necessarily employed in effecting the cure. As this fact will be made intelligible when I come to explain the treatment, I shall not pursue it further at present.

It was my practice, when these cases came under my care, to have casts taken in plaster of Paris from the feet in their original state, and other casts from time to time, as I found it necessary during the progress of the case; by following this plan, I had proofs of the progress that I made in the cure. From these casts the annexed drawings were made; the feet were equally deformed. The figure No. 1 represents the left foot as it appeared when looking at the outside of the leg; the position of the foot shows how much it was turned.

No. 2 is a view taken when looking directly at the front of the tibia; it shows the position of the foot better than the preceding figure.

No. 3 is a view of the same leg, taken when looking at the inside of the tibia; it shows the position and form of the sole of the foot.

No. 4 is a view taken when looking at the back of the leg, and shows, more intelligibly than any of the others, the state in which he stood upon his legs.

No. 5 is a front view of the same leg after it was restored to its natural shape; by comparing it with No. 2, the extent of the alteration that was produced may be understood.

No. 6 is a profile view of the inside of the leg, taken after it was restored to its natural state; by comparing it with No. 3, the alteration that was produced in the form will be clearly understood.

The great disadvantage that, in these cases, attends procrastination of the period of beginning the cure, is the great occupation of time that is necessary, afterwards, to complete the cure; I had one patient that I first saw when the child was not six weeks old. The family were of that rank whose will they supposed might be made law upon every occasion; they lived in Devonshire, and disliked to live in London; therefore, so soon as *they* thought the patient was well, but, contrary to my opinion, returned home, and after some months the patient's foot relapsed again. They returned to London, as *they believed*, till the child should be permanently restored to the use of his feet; but their patience again failed, and they returned home: this unwise conduct was repeated, so that the boy was twelve years old before he was quite well. He has since completed his education at Cambridge, and is now in the

natural society of his family, a handsome well-made man, without any circumstances remaining that indicate the form in which he was born.

The case was different with respect to the patient who is now under consideration. After he was cured, he was kept in or near London, so that I had frequent opportunities of seeing him: I saw his petticoats laid aside, and replaced by the clothes which are usually worn by boys. I saw him playing in a preparatory school till he was eight years old, and no particular of the original distortion made its appearance; he was then removed into the north, and I have never seen or heard of him since.

I shall add to this another case, which will more strongly confirm the doctrines that have now been advanced upon this subject.

In 1798, a gentleman, who lived in Norwich, came to me about his son who was then between four and five years old; he was born with distorted feet. The parents being told that nothing could be done to remedy the deformity, submitted to their fate; but having seen the child of a gentleman in Yarmouth, whose son I had cured of a similar defect, they were induced to inquire if I could do any thing to assist their son. Both feet were more distorted than any that I had then seen; and as an opinion prevailed from the first that they were irremediable, no attempt had been made to assist him. Half boots were put on, and he was permitted to run about in any way that he could. This case, according to the opinions which prevailed at the time, comprised every circumstance which could render it incurable. The distortion was originally of the worst kind; it had been aggravated by the child walking upon its feet for three or four years, which, according to the same opinions, must have produced malformations in some of the bones of the feet, if they did not exist there originally; and according to another erroneous opinion, the bones were "completely ossified," the deformities therefore irremediable *then*, whatever they might have been at an earlier period of the child's existence.

All these denunciations differed from the opinions which I then entertained: but not having then cured a case so bad as this, I proposed to try what could be done in the limited time of four months, in which so much alteration was made for the better, that it was determined to continue him under my care so much longer, as it was found that he continued to improve; but as a residence in London was irksome to the family, and his mother would not suffer her son to be away from her, they returned to Norwich, and I was engaged to go almost weekly to Norwich, and do whatever was

necessary, or could be useful to the patient. This continued six years, at the end of which time, even by that laborious and disadvantageous mode of attendance, every particle of the original deformity was eradicated, and he became a healthy well-made youth, capable of making every exertion which could be made by any other person of his years. When he was of a proper age, he engaged in a banker's concern in the city, beginning, as it is usual in that business, in the station of out-door collecting clerk: his walk was to the west end of the town, and he went through that very great exertion in the same manner as any other person of his years, and nothing in his form, appearance, and action, indicated that his

feet had ever been defective. I had frequent opportunities of seeing him for many years, without any alteration in his appearance; but at the present time I know not if he is still living.

When I first saw him, the forms of his feet were so like the figures which accompany this paper, that I have not thought it necessary to give any other representation of them; but they were even more rigidly fixed in their unnatural state, and therefore much more difficult to cure.

In my next, I propose to give a specimen of this defect that took place several years after the birth, and was likewise cured.